

Research on Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT. *Su Shi is recognized as a great master of literary and artistic attainments in thousands of years of history in China. He has made great achievements in poetry, calligraphy, painting and other fields. As the first of the “Four Masters of the Song Dynasty” in the field of calligraphy, Su Shi carried out extraordinary calligraphy art practice. He formed his own distinctive and unique calligraphy theory after Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, and became the representative of traditional literati calligraphers with superb literary accomplishment and unique calligraphy art, which constantly promoted the development of new calligraphy style of advocating imagery in the Song Dynasty. Meanwhile, it has a particularly far-reaching impact on the later generations. Based on this, this paper will explore Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics.*

KEYWORDS: *Su shi, Calligraphy, Aesthetic thought*

1. Introduction

Su Shi is a great literary giant in the Northern Song Dynasty. He is a great master with many talents and achievements in the field of literature and art. For example, in poetry creation, Su Shi pursued innovation, and his poems were one of the “Eight Great Poets in the Tang and Song Dynasties” because of his broad content and diverse styles. In the history of poetry, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu and Cai Xiang were collectively called “Four Masters of Song Dynasty”. Lin Yutang once commented on Su Shi in this way: “Su Shi is an incurable optimist, a great humanist, a friend of the people, a literary giant, a calligrapher, and an innovative painter”.^[1] As far as Su Shi's artistic style is concerned, no matter what kind of art form it is, it has been transformed into a tool for Su Shi to express his own thoughts and feelings. Su Shi did not stick to the tradition. He absorbed the strong points of Wang Xizhi, Wang Xianzhi, Yan Zhenqing, and Liu Gongquan and so on. He created a new style, and highlighted the distinct aesthetic thought of calligraphy in his calligraphy works.

2. Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics

2.1 Advocating Nature

From the aesthetic point of view, Su Shi advocated the natural and simple aesthetic interest, but despised the deliberate decoration and affectation, and raised all these to a philosophical height of thorough understanding. In other words, the art pursued by Su Shi is the natural expression of thoughts and emotions without any carving, which is also the highest level of “self satisfaction” in artistic creation. As the core content of Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetic thought of advocating meaning, “nature” is also reflected incisively and vividly in Su Shi's many literary and painting works. Relevant survey statistics show that Su Shi directly mentioned the word “nature” in nearly 100 of his literary, calligraphy and painting works.^[2] Just as Su Shi mentioned in his book of *Thanks to MinShi*, “it is as simple as flowing clouds and flowing water. At the beginning, it has no definite quality, but it often goes on what it should do and often stops at what it should do. The arts and science are natural, and the posture is flourishing. “ Through this expression, Su Shi discussed his own views on literary and artistic issues, that is, writing should focus on flowing clouds and flowing water instead of being bound by fixed forms. When expressing thoughts and feelings, it is usually described when it should be described and stopped. The composition thinking is natural and the language tends to be changeable. Su Shi's calligraphy creation embodies the word “nature” all the time. At the beginning of his creation, he established a close relationship between people and things, paid more attention to “implied meaning” than “attention”, and then realized the “no idea” and “nature” in his creation, and finally achieved the “fresh and refined” of his works. Simple and open-minded is the pursuit of Sushi's calligraphy aesthetics from the beginning to the end, and is also the criterion of Sushi's life.

2.2 Organic Integration of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

Su Shi's aesthetic taste was greatly influenced by Chinese traditional Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. On the one hand, the philosophy of dealing with the world from Taoism has a great influence on Su Shi's literary theory. The thought of “harmony of heaven and man” and “Tao following nature” has opened people's constant exploration of “Tao”. Chuang Tzu's view of “following the nature” advocates that we should be indifferent to the changes of everything in the world, and stress that we should be happy with the situation and let it be. Su Shi used this idea to comment on Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy as “believing in nature, moving with posture”, and compared Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy works as natural as lotus. In addition, Taoism's pursuit of plain thinking also had a great impact on Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics. As Su Shi mentioned in his letter “To My Nephew,” the color is gorgeous, and it grows old and ripe, but it makes plain. It's not plain; it's gorgeous.” In this paper, Su Shi discussed the relationship between gorgeous and plain. In his opinion, gorgeous can be attributed to plain. On the other hand, based on the dialectics of Taoism, Su Shi, who was well versed in Confucian orthodoxy, had an indissoluble bond with Buddhist philosophy. Zen pursues the state of mind of “emptiness and quietness”. That is, in order to understand the essence of things, we must eliminate the miscellaneous thoughts in our hearts. From this state of mind, we should pursue the realm of “selflessness” in calligraphy creation. Su Shi mentioned

that “the heart forgets the hand; the hand forgets the pen, and the pen falls on the paper, not by myself.” He believes that only when you have no distractions and focus on thinking, can you enter the realm of unimpeded and create the ideal works that perfectly fit the spirit of the subject.

2.3 On the Integration of Literature and Calligraphy

For thousands of years, although literature and calligraphy belong to two different art categories and have different forms of expression, they also share certain commonalities. As far as the word “Wen Ren Mo Ke” (men of literature and writing) is concerned, “Wen” and “Mo” are an indispensable part of Chinese traditional culture. On the one hand, in his many poems on calligraphy. On the basis of commenting on calligraphy works in the form of poetry, Su Shi expressed his own calligraphy aesthetic thought based on poetry. For example, in Su Shi's *On Books by Using the Rhyme Sequence of a Poem*, the author fully dialectics the relationship between calligraphy form and spirit, and establishes his overall program of advocating the style of calligraphy. In Su Shi's opinion, calligraphers should grasp the internal essence and law of calligraphy effectively, and then fully describe the inner world in the form of stippling, so as to realize the unity of form and spirit and internal and external. Therefore, Su Shi especially advocated the unity of internal law and external style of calligraphy, and also pursued the organic integration of law and impossibility, law and nature. As an important form of expression of Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics, poetry theory not only provides Su Shi with rich creative themes, but also endows his poems with more profound connotation and artistic conception. On the other hand, in calligraphy aesthetics, Su Shi also advocated the integration of literature and calligraphy, and applied this view to his calligraphy creation practice. In his calligraphy creation practice, the text part of most of his exquisite calligraphy works is also a rare literary masterpiece, which proves that excellent works of art can often achieve the high unity of text content and artistic form.

3. The Influence of Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics

3.1 The Influence of Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics on the Calligraphy of the Northern Song Dynasty

The Northern Song Dynasty was in the period of political and economic transformation in feudal society. Calligraphy gradually replaced the advocating “law” of the Tang Dynasty by advocating “meaning”, that is, by breaking the old rules and writing and draw freely as one wishes replaced sticking in the mud and following the prescribed order. Su Shi, Huang Tingjian and Mi Fu are the representatives of the Northern Song Dynasty in advocating imagery calligraphy. Many scholars under Su Shi also made great achievements in calligraphy, which shows that Su Shi had a great influence on the field of calligraphy in the Northern Song Dynasty.^[3] For example, in his autobiography, Mi Fu mentioned that “it was

not easy to enter the Wei and Jin Dynasties” in his autobiography, which was a change made by Mi Fu after receiving Su Shi's advice, and made a great change in Mi Fu's learning career. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that on the basis of inheriting Su Shi's calligraphy thoughts and viewpoints, the calligraphers of the Northern Song Dynasty also formed their own unique style, not a complete reproduction of Su Shi. It was also under the influence of Su Shi that the calligraphers at that time formed a variety of styles, which was very important to explore the influence of Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetic thoughts on the calligraphy of the Northern Song Dynasty. At the same time, it fully reflected the great influence of Su Shi on the calligraphy circle of the Northern Song Dynasty. On the one hand, it reflected that Su Shi's calligraphy had been copied by the majority of calligraphers; on the other hand, it had a strong appeal to his calligraphy aesthetics. It had a far-reaching influence on the calligraphers at that time.

3.2 The Influence of Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics on Later Calligraphy

Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics not only had a great influence on the calligraphy of the Northern Song Dynasty, but also had a far-reaching influence on later generations. Zhao Mengfu, one of the “four masters of regular script”, not only talked about Wang Xizhi, but also made a lot of comments on Su Shi's calligraphy in his limited works of calligraphy theory. For example, in his book *On the Eleven Calligraphers of Song Dynasty*, he mentioned that “Dongpo calligraphy is like an old bear blocking the way, and all beasts are afraid of it”. The Ming Dynasty calligrapher Dong Qichang's understanding of calligraphy is also greatly influenced by Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics. His views on calligraphy art are very similar to Su Shi's, for example, “calligraphy in the Jin and Song Dynasties is popular, so it is not impossible, and the beauty is not in the method. In the Tang Dynasty, people began to take the law as a path, and it was extremely beautiful. “ Zhao Mengfu and Dong Qichang's calligraphy was not only a representative of his calligraphy in the early Qing Dynasty, but also had a great influence on his calligraphy in the late Qing Dynasty to understand the important influence of Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics on Qing Dynasty calligraphy.^[4]

4. Conclusion

In a word, Su Shi's calligraphy creation advocates a kind of plain and natural taste, which is also an important embodiment of Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics. Su Shi's calligraphy aesthetics has a far-reaching influence. On the theoretical level, his concept of advocating meaning is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, which provides ideological guidance for many calligraphers; at the social level, with its unique appeal, his calligraphy thought and calligraphy art characteristics have fully affected a large number of people and influenced a generation of calligraphy style.

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