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Discussion on the Influence of Gu Kaizhi's Form-Spirit Painting Theory on Photographic Art Creation

Li Jihong*
College of Art, Guilin University of Technology, Guilin, China
*Corresponding author, e-mail: lijihong@glut.edu.cn

***Abstract**: Form-spirit theory is an important theoretical basis and aesthetic core proposition of traditional Chinese painting. Gu Kaizhi's "depicting spirit by form" is the symbol theory of Chinese painting's metaphysics, which can also play a practical guiding role in the creation of photography art.*

***Key words**: Gu Kaizhi; Form-spirit theory; Photography art*

Form-spirit painting theory appeared in the awakening era of literature and art in the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. The theory of "depicting spirit by form" proposed by Gu Kaizhi in the Eastern Jin Dynasty marked the formal emergence of form-spirit theory in Chinese painting. Form-spirit theory is continuously recognized, refuted and deepened, and provides a solid theoretical basis for the creation of various subjects such as Chinese figure painting, landscape painting, flower and bird painting, etc., and has influenced the formation of Chinese painting style and aesthetic consciousness. The inherent laws of different art categories are interlinked, especially those with similar forms of expression, such as painting and photography. At the beginning of the invention of photography, many famous painters, such as Angel, Delacroix, and others used photography as the basis for painting [1]. Therefore, the discussion on the application of art theory in the field of painting to guide photography, a relatively new art category, is both feasible and necessary. In the era of picture reading, if the traditional Chinese art theory can play a theoretical guiding role in the category of modern photography art, it can make the photographic art works show more Chinese style.

Origin and Content of Gu Kaizhi's Painting Theology

The discussion of " 形 " and " 神 " in painting originates from the field of philosophy. " 形 " refers to the form and " 神 " refers to the spirit. Controversy has emerged in the history of ancient Chinese thought around the concept, relationship, and role of both form and spirit. From *Lao Tzu* to *Guan Tzu* to *Chuang Tzu*, new ideas are constantly appearing, which has directly led to the birth of corresponding theories in the art field such as painting. Among them, Zhuang Zhou made a comprehensive and systematic discussion of form and god, which became the conscious source of Chinese literature and art.

In the early days of metamorphism, " 神 " refers to the gods and ghosts, and painting seeks concrete form similarity. Early Chinese petroglyphs, pottery, bronzes, lacquer ware and pre-Qin murals and sculptural paintings, these paintings outline the shapes of figures and animals with lines. The book *Han Fei-tzu* records the painting exposition of "form": "Prince of Qi asked the painter: 'What is the hardest and easiest to draw?'

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The artist answered: ‘Ghosts are the hardest to draw, and dogs and horses are the hardest to draw.’ Dogs and horses are familiar animals. They are displayed in front of our eyes every day. It's hard to draw a similar picture. Ghosts have no invisible shapes, so it's easy to draw (Han, 1954). It indicates that the evaluation standard of painting at that time was only to pursue similar shapes. This aesthetic standard that pursues the authenticity of "form" has directly created the realistic painting style of ancient Chinese brushwork, such as the brushwork flower and bird paintings of the Northern Song Academy. The discussion on painting in the Han Dynasty includes *Huainanzi*: "When depicting the face of the beautiful woman Xi Shi although the form is good but not pleasing to the eye; when depicting the eyes of the brave general, although it is quite large, it cannot be feared." This is because the character and spirit of the character image is not shown (Huai, 1954). This shows the significance of spirit in painting. After that, Gu Kaizhi of the Eastern Jin Dynasty clearly proposed "depicting spirit by form", which marks the formal emergence of the form-spirit painting theory.

Gu Kaizhi (344-405), a famous painter and poet in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, is good at painting portraits, Buddhist statues and landscape paintings, and is called "Painting Saint" by later generations. His *Admonitions of the Instructress to Court Ladies* and *Picture of The Ode of the River Goddess* are all excellent paintings of ancient China. Zhang Yanyuan praised his painting: Before painting, he had considered the theme, image and brush of the painting clearly, so as to achieve the effect of "both spirit and form". To explore from the existing materials, Gu Kaizhi's painting theory is mainly embodied in his three articles on painting: *On Painting*, *Ode to Famous Painters of Wei and Jin Dynasties*, *Painting Yuntai Mountain*. The main contents are as follows:

First, the key to painting is to convey the spirit. Gu Kaizhi thinks that in figure painting, the beauty and ugliness of the four limbs are not the most important, but whether the charm of the figure can be conveyed through the eyes (Ouyang et al., 1965). The story of Gu Kaizhi's "finishing touch" is recorded in the book—*Travel to the Capital Temple*: When Gu Kaizhi drew the image of Vimalakirti, the final finishing touch attracted people to watch the charity temple (Zhang, 1985).

Second, painters should constantly associate and conceive. *Painting Theory* records that compared with mountains and rivers, animals, architecture and other themes, figures are the most difficult to draw, because painting figures need to go through numerous associative ideas, in order to draw works that meet the characteristics of the characters (Zhang, 1985). According to Gu Kaizhi, in order to highlight the verve of painting objects, artistic processing should be carried out on the basis of the original figures. For example, when he painted Pei Kai's portrait, he drew three hairs on his face, because he wanted to improve his recognition (Ouyang et al., 1965). When he painted Ji Kang's portrait, he set the background as bamboo forest, which can reflect his spiritual characteristics of seclusion and nature.

The third is to depict spirit by form. The way to convey the spirit lies in the form. The layout of the form must be rigorous and true, otherwise it cannot achieve the effect. Gu Kaizhi emphasized in *Painting Theory* that the size, position and direction of the portrait should be set accurately when arranging the picture structure, and there should be a correct corresponding relationship between the portrait. Furthermore, the transmission of spirit must be based on form, which can't be lost. Even if there is a little mistake, it will also affect the transmission and expression of spirit (Zhang, 1985).

It can be seen from the above that Gu Kaizhi's creation of painting theology requires the depiction of spirit in form (Guo, 1982).

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The Application of Gu Kaizhi's Painting Metaphysics in Photographic Art Creation

Photography is an art that uses camera as a tool to express theme or create artistic image by means of light, composition, color or tone. It is produced with the development of science and technology and industrial technology, and depends on the material means such as camera, photosensitive material or electronic photosensitive element, printing equipment, etc. It was not until 1839 that Daguerre published the art of copperplate photography at the French Academy that it marked the official invention of photography (Gu, 2018). Compared with the ancient arts such as literature and painting, photography is relatively modern and constantly changing. With the continuous efforts of people, photography has successfully developed into an independent art category from the original painting auxiliary technology. Photography, from early painting photography to experimental photography, surrealism photography, documentary photography, concept photography, post-modern photography, gradually presents the characteristics of the integration of photography and art (Gu, 2018). From the perspective of artistic creation, before using the camera, photographers need to first carry out artistic conception, collect information, find creative objects and carry out artistic processing. The works created are used to reflect the social outlook and natural scenery, express thoughts and feelings or artistic ideas, which is very similar to painting. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the role of Gu Kaizhi's painting metaphysics in photographic art creation.

The first is the application of the theory of transmission. Gu Kaizhi emphasized that the spirit of the characters should be conveyed in the painting, and the key to convey the spirit lies in the eyes. Compared with painting, photography can present the shape of the characters more real and time solidified. However, the copied portraits are often lack of artistic charm. The focus of the picture is clear, the exposure is accurate, and the composition is regular, but the emotions of the characters in the picture are not real, which can not be vivid. This kind of commercial portrait photography can meet the needs of the public, but it can't attract the audience's interest and thinking, so it can't be called a real portrait photography work of art. Gu Kaizhi's emphasis on metaphysics and theism should also be the artistic goal of portrait photography. Throughout the history of photography, the outstanding portraits of photography masters are all artistic models of vivid portrayal. For example, the French photographer Nadal (1820-1890) left precious portraits for the cultural giants of his time, such as painters Delacroix, Manet, Miller, writers Balzac, George Sang, Dumas, Baudelaire, musicians Liszt, Berlioz, etc. "His celebrity portrait proves that the photographer has enough ability to capture the personality of the object. His portrait photography vividly depicts the elite figures with pure lighting and dignified posture, witnessing the faces and sounds of cultural celebrities of an era" (Gu, 2018).

As for how to convey the spirit, Zhang Daqian, a master of traditional Chinese painting, said, "we must have the pleasure of conveying the spirit between the image and the image" (Qian, 2015). Compared with the artistic debate of "image" and "unlike", figure photography also needs to tap the inner spirit of the work, because each photographer wants to express a different theme. The photographer should learn from Gu Kaizhi's metaphysics, first observe the face characteristics of the characters, and then make close-up of the characters' eyes through composition and light and shadow. Through the window of the soul—eyes to show the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters is the best photography. *The Big Eyes*, the outstanding representative work of the famous photographer Xie Hailong, shows the poor children's desire for learning

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and a better life through a pair of eyes, and reflects the positive role of photography art in reflecting social problems.

The second is the application of association theory. The so-called "association" refers to the extension of the artist around the object and the combination of his creation concept and the object. If the object is a character, you need to create a deep and vivid portrait photography; if the object is a scenery, you need to create a landscape photography that blends scenes; if it is a documentary photography, you need to to create a dynamic realistic work...Therefore, in the creation of photography art, we must think about the scene, model and light, so as to make a unique personal work. As Henry Cartier Bresson, the father of modern photography, said, the wonderful pictures of the moment are not captured casually (Bresson, 2013). Photographers need to have a certain aesthetic accomplishment, focus on thinking and pay attention to the composition scene in advance, so that they can seize the decisive moment. For portrait photographers, they must observe their subjects carefully and communicate skillfully, so that they can get a successful work of art. According to Nadal, a famous portrait photographer, to grasp the subject spiritually, that instant understanding will make you and the model heart to heart (Jeffrey, 2018). In the era of national photography, there are some popular scenic spots and model photography works, which have also won international awards, such as old cow, old man with a cigarette rod, old fisherman with a net, etc. Although these photography works have strong humanistic color, but the art pays attention to originality. The single color block paintings created by modern abstract painter Newman can be displayed as works of art in the New York Museum of modern art, but if the later generations repeat this painting method, there is a suspicion of plagiarism. Therefore, in order to make a real photographic work of art, photographers should create their own personal style, which is the only way to artistic creation.

The third is the application of the theory of writing God in form. Gu Kaizhi's form-spirit theory shows his pursuit of works of art. This kind of painting theory can also be used for reference in photography. For example, when photographing a single person, the photographer needs to carefully consider the deformation brought by the lens, and pay attention to the composition of the picture, the proportion of the human image and the overall aesthetic feeling. When photographing multiple characters, the photographer should not only pay attention to the action and expression between the characters, but also pay attention to the clarity and prominence of each character. According to the traditional Chinese painting theory, pen and ink are also very important. In the process of painting, Gu Kaizhi has strict requirements on the length, hardness, thickness of the brush and ink. Analogy photography art, photographers also need to carefully adjust the aperture, shutter, sensitivity parameters of the camera during the shooting process. Different methods of measuring light, focusing light, distributing light, different cameras and lenses with different focal lengths will result in different shooting effects, which are equivalent to the requirements of the painter for "shape". Therefore, as a photographer, only by mastering and using shooting equipment reasonably, and constantly improving his shooting skills and aesthetic cultivation, can he create excellent photography works with both body and spirit.

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