

On Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics of “Wuwei”

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Abstract:

Su Shi is a monument in the history of Chinese cultural development. In the art of calligraphy and painting, Su Shi's calligraphy is highly accomplished, and his calligraphy style is unique and highly praised by later generations. From the perspective of book theory, his philosophy of learning from Laozi and Zhuangzi, centered on self centeredness and “inaction,” has had a profound impact on future generations. His calligraphy works are skilled in brushwork, vivid in charm, and freely flowing, with considerable aesthetic value. The aesthetic thought of “wuwei” in calligraphy is manifested as: firstly, to innovate and have a self style; Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen the learning of calligraphy from both internal cultivation and external techniques; The third is to achieve the state of “unity of heaven and man”; The fourth is to learn from the past and focus on accumulation. Only in this way can calligraphy art reach a new height.

Keywords:

Su Shi, Calligraphy of “Wuwei”, Aesthetic Point of View

1. Introduction

Su Shi is knowledgeable and knowledgeable, and holds an important position among the “Four Schools of Song”. His “Ci studies” broke through the mold of “glamour and vulgarity” and became a typical example of Song Dynasty poetry; Calligraphy advocates nature, is vigorous and elegant, and its calligraphy ideas have had a great influence on calligraphers at that time and in the future, accelerating the development of calligraphy. [1]

2. Su Shi's “Wuwei” Calligraphy

Su Shi's theory of calligraphy can be said to be a fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. His theory of calligraphy is based on “non action”. He believes that “immobility” is primarily “nothingness”. He said, “The traces of ink come from reality, from reality to unreality.” As long as it is not for temporary happiness, but to satisfy one's own desires. Although it is not necessary to use objects, being able to hold one's heart is the height of a sage, only the beauty of a child. He believes that the creation of calligraphy is a form of enjoyment, seeking to forget

oneself, and the trajectory of strokes and ink can only be reflected through tangible words, but tangible must have drawbacks. Not relying on external things, but maintaining one's own cultivation within oneself is the magnanimity of a sage, which no one can match, and only Yan Yuan, the sage, can achieve it.

Secondly, he believes that "inaction" means "inability". He wrote in "Shi Cangshu Drunken Ink Hall": "The way of calligraphy is not to follow one's heart, and the strokes move according to one's heart." He also wrote a poem called "On the Book of Ciyun Ziyou": "Although I don't understand reading, I understand reading better than I do". If you can understand the meaning, then try to speak without practice. This indicates that Su Shi not only needs to break away from the "law" in calligraphy, but also to achieve the goal of "meaning", that is, to achieve a return to simplicity and authenticity in artistic conception. Su Shi's proposition of "words must be done" also stems from the Taoist concept of Laozi and Zhuangzi's demand for liberation from constraints and seeking freedom. He believes that calligraphy requires meaning rather than artificiality. So, he has a high evaluation of Zhang Xu's calligraphy, believing that his calligraphy is a kind of decadence with a sense of freedom, without any unnecessary strokes, but with a sense of freedom. When one is in a state of decadence, one naturally needs to break the rules.

He also talked about "using a pen without organization, we should prioritize emptiness." It is obvious that this is what he appreciates as "inability". "At the beginning of calligraphy, excellence is not valued. Although cursive seal script accumulates over time, it is futile to rush for a moment. The ancients said that haste is not as good as running script. For him, calligraphy is a manifestation of spirit, why use an artificial way to express oneself?" When starting writing, don't think you must do it well in order to achieve better results. Otherwise, before we start writing, we already bear a heavy burden. How can we leave here? So Su Shi was both humble and proud. He said, "Although my calligraphy is not good, I can have my own innovation without violating my predecessors. This is a big piece." Su Shi adopted a dialectical attitude towards "having laws" and "being unable". He built his own artistic style on the foundation of "not losing the law", drawing on the strengths of others.

3. Su Shi's Calligraphy Aesthetics of "Wuwei"

3.1. *Originating new ideas*

Su Shi has strong creativity, advocating innovation in poetry, ci, literature, and books, advocating creativity, and having his own unique insights. The writing structure in Chinese calligraphy has already been established, and it is very difficult to break the mold of our predecessors. Su Shi advocated "taking meaning from meaning and seeking innovation". "Yi" means to express the author's emotions and interests in calligraphy creation. Su Shi's "Ci Yun Zi You Lun Shu" is a concrete reflection of Su Shi's thought on calligraphy. Su Shi wrote at the beginning of "The Analects": "Although I am not good at reading, no one is as familiar with books as me. If one can understand the meaning, it often means not learning. "Not good at writing" is Su Shi's own evaluation of himself. His main idea is to "understand its meaning", advocating that the words written should have the author's mood and emotions. [2]

Taking the "Huangzhou Cold Food Poetry Collection" as an example, Su Shi was free and unrestrained, and every line of the article was written with great momentum and artistic conception. The Huangzhou Cold Food Poetry Collection is a work

created by Su Shi during his exile to Huangzhou in the Wutai Poetry Case. The entire poem has a desolate and desolate artistic conception, fully expressing the author's inner sorrow and sorrow. The beginning of this sentence is very direct, saying that he has been in Huangzhou for three years, and in the blink of an eye, it is spring. Rainwater falls on the branches, mud stains the feathers of the swallow, which is very helpless and also very depressing. From simple narration to nostalgia for spring, Su Shi's emotional fluctuations are obvious. Therefore, Su Shi started writing casually, especially with the words "I came to Huangzhou" of the same size and even strokes, indicating that Su Shi was relatively calm when writing this poem. Three years passed by in a flash, and in the blink of an eye, the Cold Food Festival had arrived. As he thought about it, he couldn't help but feel a sense of loss. The four big characters in the poem "cherish every year, do not pity the spring" suddenly became larger due to Su Shi's emotions, and the ink became heavier. Compared with the first "cherish" character, it appeared particularly heavy.

Compared to the Ciyun Ziyou Lunshu, the Huangzhou Cold Food Poetry Collection has a slightly more desolate artistic conception, making it appear more natural and free spirited overall. The use of ink is more concentrated, and the character structure appears particularly unique, often interrupted in places where it should not be interrupted. The shape varies in thickness and density, perfectly presenting the artistic conception of the entire poem. This is the best interpretation of Su Shi's "understanding its meaning". Guided by this creative philosophy, Su Shi's works are full of vitality and strong artistic expression ability, which has aroused strong emotional resonance and great interest in them among future generations. [3]

Innovation lies in novelty, which means that in the creation of calligraphy, one should not be bound by fixed frameworks, be brave in innovation, and break free from traditional constraints. The development of Chinese characters is closely related to the development of Chinese characters. In the process of their generation and development, Chinese characters have already consciously pursued their aesthetic influence. Before the Song Dynasty, there were famous calligraphers such as Li Si, Wang Xizhi, Zhang Xu, Huai Su, and so on. Their calligraphy skills are exquisite, and their aesthetic level is very high, which is the main template for future generations to learn. Su Shi believed that his brush and ink were all at will and did not "practice the ancients". His unrestrained writing style had a great impact on the calligraphy of Song Dynasty literati, promoting the emergence of the "Shang Yi" style.

3.2. Artistic cultivation

Looking at painters throughout history, their profound cultural heritage is beyond the reach of ordinary people. Art creation is based on appreciation and insight, and art appreciation and understanding require creators to have a certain level of humanistic cultivation in order to create enjoyable works. Su Shi believed that in this regard, his calligraphy was also the same. So, as a calligrapher, we should strengthen our humanistic literacy. Firstly, the author should strengthen their cultural literacy. Su Shi advocated that extensive reading and strengthening one's own cultivation are the first elements for calligraphy writing. The two nephews of the Liu family asked Su Shi for ink treasures, and Su Shi responded with a poem. Su Shi once said, "A word is not worth it, a word is not worth it, and a hundred feet of a rod is worth it." Su Shi believed that only by reading more can one truly understand its meaning, write like a god, and no longer need to imitate the hands of others. Su Shi was fond of reading and repeatedly advised others to read more, insisting that "writing a book should be both

skilled and knowledgeable”. He advocates for “advancing both skills and knowledge”, striving for excellence in skills and not slacking off academically. Only in this way can calligraphy be free to do as one pleases. Otherwise, blindly pursuing skills without considering knowledge will ultimately lead to being superficial, failing to win the audience’s affection, and losing the opportunity for growth. Su Shi advocated “putting learning first”, with the ultimate goal of expressing the author’s “intention”.

When Su Shi wrote the “Su Tie on the West Tower”, although he studied Wang Xizhi, he did not seek similarity in form, but wanted to make his calligraphy have the charm of Wang Xizhi. He felt that Wang Xizhi had reached a state of transcendence from the secular world, both in terms of knowledge and ideology. To achieve this, the first thing to do is to strengthen one’s own knowledge, enrich one’s mind with reading, and make one’s writing feel like a “god”. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen the author’s moral character. Su Shi believed that the author’s moral qualities can be seen in calligraphy, and strengthening moral cultivation can enrich the “spirit” and achieve a state of unity between “form” and “meaning”. Su Shi’s “On the Book” said, “A person’s appearance can be good or bad, and the attitudes of gentlemen and villains cannot be concealed. There is a subtle thing between words, and that is the temperament of gentlemen and villains, which cannot be deceived. Although calligraphy is good, gentlemen and villains cannot mess around on their own.” [4]

Su Shi said: There are two types of people: beauty and ugliness; Some people are good at speaking, while others prefer silence; Some people are skilled in calligraphy, while others are not proficient in writing. This is very common, but it is easy to distinguish between gentlemen and villains. So, he believes that the achievements of calligraphy are closely related to the author’s character. Although Su Shi had a difficult fate, he was already an outgoing person who had a special love for the ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Therefore, his attitude towards life was very calm, and his calligraphy also had its own characteristics, forming a unique artistic form.

3.3. Books are natural

In the history of Chinese aesthetic development, “nature” is a very meaningful aesthetic concept. Regardless of poet, poet, calligrapher, or painter, they all have “nature” as their aesthetic goal of creation. Li Bai is known as the “Immortal Poet”, whose lyrics are like flowing clouds and flowing water, with melodies and melodies that are catchy and catchy. Su Shi advocated that calligraphy should have a “natural” side, a natural feeling, and not blindly accumulate skills. It should have its own thoughts. To achieve “natural” calligraphy, one must first achieve spiritual freedom. Laozi advocates that “everything can be done” in order to achieve “the nature of human beings” [5].

Su Shi applied this characteristic to calligraphy. In the “Huangzhou Cold Food Poetry Collection,” Su Shi wrote freely, with font size and weight varying according to his own wishes. In plain places, the strokes became lighter; Whenever he gets angry, his pen becomes heavier. Although the entire poem is majestic, full of ups and downs, and has many negative emotions, Su Shi’s inner freedom is very obvious. Secondly, to achieve “human nature”. After exploring the relationship between humans and nature, Li Zehou proposed the concept of “humanization of nature”. To naturalize the art of calligraphy, one must integrate their own “spiritual realm” into their calligraphy, making it an extension of their own soul. Su Shi advocated that “calligraphers have gods, qi, bones, flesh, and blood, so they cannot be compared to

the structure of the body”. The “bones”, “flesh”, and “blood” of the body are material, while the “qi” is divine. If both aspects are achieved, the beauty of the work will be higher. To write calligraphy with “spirit” and “qi”, one must be closely related to all things in heaven and earth, understand the meaning and essence of life, and integrate it with one’s own creation. This was reflected in Su Shi’s later works. For example, when Su Shi wrote “Dongting Chunse Fu”, he had a profound understanding of life. Therefore, the structure of this poem is rigorous, and the writing style is old and spicy, which is Su Shi’s perception of life and has high aesthetic significance.

3.4. Following the law

Su Shi had a broad interest and advocated imitating his predecessors and following the rules of the book. While “following the rules” may seem contradictory on the surface, in fact, the two are inseparable. The prerequisite for innovation is to abide by rules, and the consequence of following rules is to create new things. Calligraphy is different from other artworks in that each stroke has its own technique, just like when Leonardo da Vinci first learned painting, the first thing he had to draw was an egg. So, as long as the skills are proficient, there will be more possibilities for the creation of calligraphy. To abide by rules is to imitate others. Chinese calligraphy has a long history, so copying the works of famous masters is the quickest way to learn calligraphy. [6]

Su Shi studied Yan Zhenqing, Wang Xizhi, and Yang Ningshi, and combined their works with his own, creating his own unique literary path. Su Shi believed that in order to achieve success in calligraphy, one must imitate the calligraphy of famous masters. The traces of the “Two Kings” can be seen from Su Shi’s early creation of the “Zhiping Tie”. This is mainly due to the calligraphy master Wang Xizhi, whom Su Shi admired in his early years. Therefore, the entire calligraphy style tends to be gentle and the characters are thin, which is the characteristic of the “Two Kings”.

The second is refining techniques. “Qiao” is the lifelong goal pursued by many calligraphers. Only with exquisite skills can calligraphy art have an aesthetic height, and the creation of calligraphy will enter a new height. Su Shi’s literary style can be divided into three stages: early, middle, and late. In the early stage of Su Shi’s calligraphy, the form was beautiful and the composition was neat. By the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, Su Shi extensively absorbed the strengths of various famous calligraphers and applied them to his own calligraphy. Therefore, his calligraphy was vigorous, fluctuating, and full of changes. In the later period, Su Shi’s calligraphy reached the pinnacle of perfection and gradually developed his own style of writing. Therefore, his writing had strong meaning, rigorous structure, and skilled brushwork. Emperor Qianlong praised Su Shi’s late calligraphy work “Dongting Chunse Fu” as “beautiful and rich at the beginning and end”, believing it to be one of Su Shi’s most outstanding calligraphy works.

4. Conclusions

In the calligraphy of the Song Dynasty, there was Su Shi, who couldn’t create meaning, Huang Tingjian, who sought charm by breaking away from customs, and Mi Fu, who had genuine charm. All of this demonstrates a spiritual temperament reflected in the book theory of the Song Dynasty. This literary world, wave after wave, calls on people’s calligraphy to transcend the mundane world, freely express their emotions and interests. Su Shi is undoubtedly a pioneer. After a long period of

creative practice, Su Shi has developed his unique aesthetic concept of calligraphy and developed a set of calligraphy theories that have been tested through practice. Su Shi's calligraphy theory and works not only led the trend of valuing meaning, but also had a profound impact on the development of calligraphy art in later generations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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