James Cahill's Song Painting World and the Early Painting History of Ancient China

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Abstract. Mr. James Cahill devoted himself to connecting the changes in the painting history from the late Western Zhou Dynasty to the Song Dynasty into a systematic exposition. That is, early Chinese painting changed from decoration to the continuous exploration of the reproduction of nature and visual faithfulness, and reached its peak in the Song Dynasty, becoming another great naturalism and reproduction painting tradition comparable to the Italian Renaissance. In order to expand and enhance the world influence of Chinese visual art, James Cahill has put forward unique academic ideas, aiming at guiding a kind of understanding and enlightenment of ordinary perception of life.

Keywords: James Cahill; Song painting; literati painting; natural reproduction.

1. Introduction

Mr. James Cahill is an internationally famous Chinese art historian. The history of painting he taught covers the transformation of "period style", the relationship between teachers and successors, the judgment of the authenticity of works, the social function of images, and other aspects. The inner logic is visual, that is, through watching, grasping, and recognizing the visual mechanism behind the painting, ordinary viewers around the world can feel the way of life, spiritual ideals, and historical reality of ancient Chinese people through watching. And the series of lectures can also be regarded as a visual history of ancient Chinese culture and civilization.

2. Reproduction of nature

In fact, in the images of bronzes and sculptures in the late Western Zhou Dynasty and the spring and Autumn Warring States Period, James Cahill knew an intention to reproduce nature and proposed that such an intention gradually replaced the decorative painting style. He also hopes to use the multi-dimensional interpretation of the Song painting tradition to take reproduction and natural realism as a key to analyze the visual logic and social connotation of early ancient Chinese painting. He adheres to the concept of "morphology of forms", that is, to understand and recognize the "stylistic series" of early ancient Chinese painting based on "internal evidence".

The so-called "inward evidence", in James Cahill's view, is the "brushwork, brush drawing, brush strokes" of Chinese painting and the ancient Chinese religious philosophy and the corresponding natural and cosmological views it contains. In addition, the kind of brush and ink structure based on representation and realism allows the viewer to feel that the painter holds the brush in his hand to carry out movements in order of priority of painting, which is an important way to enter the world of Chinese painting. The identification of images also depends on this empathy and understanding of the brush and ink structure. Also, it is the power brush and ink that would enable the viewer to understand the visual charm of the painting and enjoy watching. In addition, the viewer can also have a natural and sensitive response to the repeated speculation of the brush and ink, appreciate the unique charm of the controlled movement of painting, and even replace the identification and interpretation of the image itself, which becomes the crucial standard for painting evaluation.

Obviously, James Cahill's theory of Chinese painting brush and ink does not point to the familiar concept of "calligraphy and painting are of the same origin" or "calligraphy is the basic value of Chinese painting". He himself insisted that, no matter the technique or style, there are differences

between Chinese calligraphy and painting. As an ancient concept, the homology of calligraphy and painting can only be regarded as "poetic authenticity", rather than a principle that should be believed. James Cahill's confirmation of the reappearance of natural interest in early ancient Chinese painting is connected with the systematic expression of "brush and ink" as "natural order", that is, "reason" or "Tao". Landscape painting, with its brushwork and texturing method, shows the shape, texture of trees, rocks, and peaks. Although it cannot completely fit with nature, it is also a way to organize a natural world with a visual connection. In the process of continuously refining the diversity of vision, painters make the pictures unified, thus naturally becoming an organic structure rather than a collection of individual elements.

3. "Poetic Painting"

James Cahill's concept of "poetic painting", in addition to "similarity in the form", has an important feature of "narrative". His understanding of Chinese poetry is a common view of western scholars. In this type of painting, the painter usually sets several paragraphs of the story first, and then depicts the scene step by step. Thus, people can gradually analyze the close relationship between painting and articles with the extension of the screen. It can be seen that "narrative" is a commonly used word in the Western context. The "narrative" defined by western scholars is not suitable for Chinese poetry. Chinese poems are very short, and generally do not "describe a more complete event or scene", which is the biggest difference between Chinese poetry and Western poetry. James Cahill's so-called "narrative" is to understand Chinese poetry in the western context, and he believes that narrative is also a feature of Chinese poetry. From this perspective, we can say that James Cahill's concept of "poetic painting" is based on the vision of "western centralism".

Another characteristic of James Cahill's concept of "poetic painting" is "entertainment". Although in ancient China, there were often activities such as literati gatherings and palace feasts, Chinese painting did not take "entertainment" as its main function. By reviewing the traditional Chinese poetic maps, we can see those poetic paintings are paintings that express the connotation of poetry and prose with poetry as the theme. Poetic painting not only needs to establish a certain connection with the content of poetry and prose works, but also should explain the meaning and interest of poetry and prose with visual images, so as to show the blending of objects in the painting and poetry and prose. It is the re-expression of poetry and prose in the way of painting images, and is the result of the artist's interpretation of poetry and reproduction of poetry.

Finally, another feature of James Cahill's concept of "poetic painting" is "identification". However, in the history of Chinese poetic painting, the phenomenon of "identification" does exist and is still relatively common. But this "identification" is based on objective evidence, not random and borderless. Dialectically speaking, in the analysis, description and interpretation of Chinese painting works in James Cahill's works, although the author tried his best to start from the perspective of Chinese people and Chinese painting, due to the limitations of the author's identity and different bases of cultural knowledge, his analysis and interpretation inevitably used the cognitive style and knowledge of western painting. And it determines that James Cahill inevitably looks at and defines Chinese poetic painting from the perspective of westerners. In the context of today's confident culture, we need to understand Chinese poetic painting in the context of the Chinese people themselves. As a result of that, we require keeping an open mind about the views of others, and we cannot lose the judgment.

4. About "imitation"

"Imitation" is an important concept in the Chinese painting tradition. Later generations learn the style of their predecessors by imitating the works of the ancients. In James Cahill's view, "imitation" is not only a way of painting, but also a way of promoting the development of style as a conscious way of art history. He emphasized that the works before the Yuan Dynasty realized the "reproduction"

of style through "imitation" as a traditional approach, and rose to the spiritual appeal of literati painters to "restore the ancient". In the late Ming Dynasty, "imitation" gradually broke away from the traditional connotation. In James Cahill's view, it gradually evolved into a strategy. Literati painters had the ancient flavor through "imitation", providing "verbal" support for achieving style change. Losing the spiritual appeal of the ancient style, "imitation" has become a conscious mode of art history and a tool to realize the style's turn. Therefore, James Cahill believes that the inheritance of literati painting has become a form.

"Imitation" is used to express the continuity of historical development. This continuity itself has a certain relationship with the continuity shown by the development of style. Therefore, in James Cahill's understanding, it is acceptable to understand it from the "reproduction" of the previous style and a strategy for style development, which is more conducive to the understanding of the traditional connotation of "imitation" by westerners. However, as a continuous way of painting development, "imitation" has to be associated with "literati painting" and "painting" itself. In other words, "imitation" can be used as a continuous expression in a general sense, and does not include reflection and criticism of historical development. Therefore, James Cahill believes that this is just a strategic way, a form of expression that gradually loses its traditional connotation.

5. Accommodation and difference

James Cahill often compares Chinese and Western painters, schools, and works. This kind of reference and comparison between Chinese and Western classical painters and paintings is an effective way to guide European and American audiences into the world of ancient Chinese painting. At the same time, it also contains James Cahill's insights into the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western painting in terms of form, image concept, and aesthetic value. In his view, the representational representation of the poetic realm of the Southern Song Dynasty's academy painting is the most commendable part of Chinese painting, which is similar to the western representation of artistic tradition. Then, the reappearance of the poetic flavor of Chinese painting has even had an impact on some modern painters from western countries.

Moreover, James Cahill discusses the visual integration and differences between Chinese and Western painting from the perspective of the representation of painting forms and images, lyricism, narration, and their expressions. He criticized many scholars for focusing their research on how Chinese painters learned from the Italian focus perspective, and believed that "focus perspective was only occasionally used in the works of some painters in late ancient times".

Romantic landscape painting is also a way for European and American viewers to resonate with ancient Chinese landscape painting. Of course, he also acknowledged that the cross-regional and cross-cultural communication path of style and motif is sometimes not easy to define and distinguish. Indeed, there are similarities between modern German and English romantic landscape painting and ancient Chinese poetic landscape painting in terms of the construction of poetic scenes. It is the common perception of the shortness of life, the imperfection and the eternity of nature, and the way to make this perception visual, that is, to create a lonely and ethereal poetic space in a soft and simple form, so that Chinese and Western painting can be connected. He believes that, whether it is a figurative reproduction of image language or a visual form of expression, the poetic realm of its creation, and construction has the power of universal communication across cultures and contexts, which is the same as that music is a world language. In fact, the discrimination and interpretation of the musicality of ancient Chinese painting is also an important way for James Cahill to cut into the history of ancient Chinese painting.

James Cahill is a fighter. With his great personality and tireless research on Chinese painting, he has developed from questioning the traditional Chinese culture and recreating and writing the new value of Chinese painting. Thanks to the efforts of James Cahill and other predecessors, the community of western art would have gradually begun to pour attention into the development of

Chinese art. In recent years, the content of Chinese painting has begun to appear in many chapters of western art history as the best proof.

6. Conclusion

In short, viewing rather than relying on a certain theoretical discourse as the guide, is a proposition of James Cahill's visual research on ancient Chinese painting. For him, to break through the constraints of literati painting history concepts, many phenomena in ancient painting history that were marginalized by the mainstream discourse of literati painting became the focus of his research in his later years. And the way he tried to guide ordinary viewers to recognize Chinese ancient paintings, especially early ancient paintings, with the eyes of reproduction and realism is also a well formed eye.

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