

Cognitive Philosophy under the Influence of Confucianism, Taoism and the Cultural Traditions of the Times: Taking Xu Wei's Dialectical Self-Cognition as an Example

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Abstract: Xu Wei was a famous thinker, poet, and artist in the Ming Dynasty of China. Since Yang Ke, who was one of the "Ten Sons of Yuezhong" together with Xu Wei, was a student of Wang Yangming, and the three of them were from Shaoxing, Xu Wei also became a follower of Wang Yangming's "Xin Xue" thought. Xu Wei integrated many traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts from Wang Yangming into his poetry, literature and paintings, leaving behind many ideological treasures. However, there is a very strange phenomenon in the study of Xu Wei's philosophical thoughts, that is, the evaluation of Xu Wei's works by later generations is very different from the evaluation of Xu Wei's works when he was alive. Through the analysis of this special phenomenon, this article enters Xu Wei's dialectical self-cognition world. Taking the case of Xu Wei as an example, we form an objective philosophical analysis of personal cognition under the joint influence of Chinese Confucian and Taoist cultural traditions and the ethos of the times.

1. Introduction

Xu Wei once said, "My calligraphy is the first, poetry is the second, prose is the third, and painting is the fourth", which is recorded in "Biography of Xu Wenchang" by Tao Wangling^{[1]{1341}}, ranking his calligraphy achievement first and his painting achievement last. The biography written by Tao Wangling have become important textual source for later generations to evaluate Xu Wei's achievements, and they also rank Xu Wei's painting achievements last. There has been a lot of discussion about this ranking issue. Some people think that Xu Wei deliberately belittled his own painting out of eccentricity, which is a shocking statement, or there is a suspicion of heroes deceiving people.^[2] This article attempts to restore Xu Wei's real state of viewing painting through Xu Wei's own text and other people's records, combined with an analysis of the art environment at that time, and to explore the reasons for Xu Wei's self-evaluation.

2. Xu Wei's painting experience

Regarding Xu Wei's painting time and process, many scholars have made textual research, and the opinions are different. Scholars such as Xu Shufang believe that Xu Wei began to learn painting

around the age of twenty-nine, while Li Guisheng and Zhang Xiaoli believe that Xu Wei only started after he was released from prison in his fifties.^[3] Judging from the works that are currently preserved, Xu Wei undoubtedly formed a mature freehand brushwork painting style in his middle and old age, but the formation of a painter's style is definitely not a momentary thing. If Xu Wei could not paint at all before he went to jail, it would be unreasonable for him to suddenly form a mature look in his fifties. Therefore, the author believes that even if Xu Wei is not proficient in painting before his style matures, he should at least be able to paint. The following discussion of Xu Wei's comments on Shen Zhou's paintings can also corroborate this statement.

Although Xu Wei did not leave a special painting theory, we can feel from Xu Wei's text how Xu Wei views his own and others' paintings. Even if Xu Wei himself has a modest statement like "I can't paint, but I understand a little bit of the meaning of painting"^{[1]{302}}, we can also see from Xu Wei's text his unique understanding of painting. "Jipu" records that Xu Wei went to Taicang at the age of 26 while "did't achieve and returned".^{[1]{1327}} Although he he did not achieve the expected goal, but from Xu Wei's text records, he is quite familiar with the representative figures and styles of the Wu School of Painting. Because the works of the Wu School of Painting are widely circulated, Xu Wei is very likely to see a large number of works of the Wu School of Painting during his trip to Taicang and other stages.

3. The artistic style of the era and Xu Wei's artistic opinions

3.1 The artistic style of the late Ming Dynasty

Xu Wei one recorded a story of Xie Shichen being shorted: "Wuzhong paintings cherish ink a lot, and Mr. Xie uses ink quite extravagantly. His hometown was surprised, and those who were short when watching the scene agreed. I don't know whether the painting is good or not, it is not about the heaviness or lightness of ink, but the vividness."^{[1]{574}} The story of Xie Shichen being short by the locals mentioned by Xu Wei is not known whether he saw it with his own eyes when he was a guest in Wu, or heard it, but from it, it can be seen that in Xu Wei's era, the "ink-saving" painting style of Wu was obviously a visual rule that was generally accepted. The reason why Xie Shichen's painting surprised the locals and was even belittled by most people was because he liked to use thick ink, which deviated from the generally accepted rule.

From the perspective of the criticism circle in the late Ming Dynasty, the rigorous and meticulous and elegant and quiet literati temperament displayed in the paintings of Shen Zhou, Wen Weiming and others in the Wu School of Painting is the core painting style of the Wu School of Painting (Suzhou Painting).^[4] In fact, not only the contemporaries, even a century later, Jiang Shaoshu still used "there is plenty of momentum, but not enough elegance" to describe Xie Shichen's works, it can be seen that "elegance" is deeply rooted as a painting evaluation concept system.

Obviously, Xu Wei has a different opinion on how to evaluate a painting from Jiang Shaoshu and others. Xu Wei believes that the good or bad of a painting lies in whether the work is vivid or not, and has nothing to do with whether the ink is thick or light. Xu Wei did not directly evaluate whether Xie Shichen's "Yuanming Scroll" or other works were good or bad, but from his description of Xie Shichen's works being short by the locals and his attitude of complaining for him, it can be inferred that Xie's works belong to Xu Wei's so-called "vivid" works, and can feel that Xu is empathetic to Xie's experience.

3.2 Xu Wei's painting concepts

In "Writing Shen Zhengjun Zhou Painting", Xu Wei stated: "It is widely spread that Shen

Zhengjun's paintings are mostly freehand, and the rough ones are better. This volume is one of them. However, when I was a guest in Wu in my early years, I saw that he was playing Ruan against Yuanming, and the two were about two feet tall, and several ancient trees were in the chaotic clouds, which were twice as high. The fine strokes are beautiful, absolutely like Zhao Wenmin and Du Junan, and then I saw the Eight Scenic Spots of Gusu, which are exquisite into every detail, and the people are small and only one bean. Only if the work is like this, the grass will be more wonderful. Otherwise, if you are good at walking but not good at running, is there such a reason?"^{[1]{573}}

This paragraph is of course Xu Wei's comment on Shen Zhou's painting, but we can fully see Xu Wei's painting view from it: the freehand brushwork in the painting is indeed wonderful, but only if you have the ability to paint to every detail, can you make the freehand brushwork in the painting go up a level, otherwise it will "be good at walking but not good at running" - good at imitating step by step but difficult to create independently. For Xu Wei, the uniqueness of Shen Zhou's painting is "only if the work is like this, the grass will be more wonderful".

Obviously, Xu Wei has a clear and objective understanding of the process of learning and progressing in painting, and believes that learning to paint is a gradual process, which also reflects from the side that the formation of Xu Wei's painting style is definitely not a one-off. In this understanding, in the "Preface to Mr. Ma", Xu Wei lamented that he was unable to avoid the disaster of prison because he could not paint. There are two reasons for this: one is that Xu Wei had not yet formed a mature style at that time, and was indeed still in the "not good at running" stage; the other, which is also the main reason, is that as a slightly exaggerated rhetoric, it serves to respect and elevate Mr. Ma.

In "Writing Chen Shanren Jiugao's Three Huihou", Xu Wei highly praised Chen He's three flower pieces: "If there is a change in the pottery, it is a strange product, and if you want to imitate it, you will exhaust all your resources and it will not be possible. I have seen many hui of the mountain people, and I have not lost ten or so papers in the past, all of which are not as good as these three products. It is cloudy and cloudy, shiny and rainy, and dewy, is it what is called the change of pottery?"

Xu Wei used the phenomenon of kiln change in ceramic firing to describe the wonderfulness of these three flower works by Chen He. For Xu Wei, the ultimate beauty of painting is the same as the kiln change of ceramics, which is "strange". This aesthetic is accidental and cannot be obtained by subjective imitation. Combined with Xu Wei's own painting practice, this paragraph is not only Xu Wei's praise for Chen He's good work, but also shows Xu Wei's own artistic pursuit. What he aspires to achieve is just like the rare and wonderful kiln change in ceramics, the "cloudy and cloudy, shiny and rainy, and dewy" atmosphere of the picture.

Looking through Xu Wei's words about painting, we can see that Xu Wei's pursuit of painting is very personalized. It is precisely because of a strong personal pursuit that Xu Wei did not imitate the orthodox style of Wu School at that time in the process of forming a mature style. One of Xu Wei's characteristics of transcending the times is that he does not belittle or reject other painting methods when he pursues freehand brushwork. This can be seen from his objective evaluation of many painters. He commented on Song Huizong's painting of eagles "The imperial pen is personally depicted as if there is a god", Tang Yin "Small smearing and big smearing are all high and ancient", and commented on Chen Chun "Flowers and plants are rich in one world". It can be seen that Xu Wei, facing a painting, does not care about a certain visual feature or technique style, his evaluation standard is entirely in the "vivid" in the painting, whether it is meticulous or freehand, as long as it conforms to the principle of vividness It's a good work.

4. External scrutiny of Xu Wei's paintings

Xu Wei's painting viewpoints such as "vivid" and "occasionally get strange products" are commonplace in our eyes today, but at that time they obviously contradicted the big environment that emphasized the "theory" of painting-in all people regard the rigorous and meticulous and elegant and quiet style of Wu School of Painting as the orthodox painting, Xu Wei's pursuit is naturally out of date and difficult to be recognized by society. In "Casually Painting Fish While Making This", We can clearly feel the reluctance revealed in Xu Wei's words by how he described the gap between himself and the people around him in dealing with paintings.^{[1][159]}

Dream Garden Painting and Calligraphy Record recorded a postscript by Xu Wei: "Shen wenquan once served eighty pages of peach blossom paper, asking for wonderful artworks. I had to do that even I have been tired of painting for a long time. Although the painting rhyme is not completely in line with the ancient law, but a kind of wild air comes unexpectedly, it is also a joy." This is a natural explanation for his own painting, because Xu Wei's painting is entirely based on his own artistic proposition, and he is worried that his friends may not be able to fully understand. And the statement shows that although Xu Wei insists on his artistic proposition, he is not without doubt about his artistic pursuit, so he asks for his friend's opinion.

Xu Wei has been forced to paint by his friends many times in his life. For his own painting, Xu Wei naturally hopes to be recognized by the world, but his pursuit of "not in line with the ancient law" artistic language has a large gap with the painting form generally recognized by the world. Mei Kesheng called him "sick and strange in people, people are strange in poetry, poetry is strange in characters, characters are strange in prose, prose is strange in painting", which is different from Xu Wei's own ranking, but also ranks painting at the end. This also indirectly shows that the people of Xu Wei's contemporaries could not recognize his painting like later generations, and the postscript of "the bottom of the pen is nowhere to sell, and the wild vine is thrown away" will appear in Xu Wei's works that are still in existence today. On the one hand, the artistic proposition of painting is difficult for the world to understand, and on the other hand, it is often forced to paint to entertain, it is quite easy to understand the tiredness of painting expressed by Xu Wei in the text.

During Xu Wei's lifetime, his paintings were not valued, and their dissemination was very limited in that era. Twenty years after Xu Wei's death, Huang Ruheng expressed surprise at Xu Wei's poetry, prose, and calligraphy in the text, but did not comment on his painting.^[5] The reason for this is of course that Xu Wei's painting is indeed as Huang Ruheng said that there are few surviving works, and it is impossible to make a comprehensive evaluation because of the few sightings, but another reason is probably that Xu Wei's extremely personalized works did not have a fixed norm to discuss at that time, and it was difficult for Huang Ruheng to comment on Xu Wei's painting, so he did not comment. Today, we can of course clearly recognize Xu Wei's foresight, and can clearly see that Xu Wei is seeking a kind of "occasional" vivid and wonderful product in painting, and has his own unique understanding of the standard of painting evaluation and artistic pursuit. But the reason why Xu Wei shouted "The ancients have already talked about the book like this, let alone painting." is precisely because in the era when Xu Wei lived, some basic artistic principles in his opinion were not yet recognized by society, let alone his pursuit in painting.

5. Conclusion

In summary, Xu Wei ranked his painting achievement fourth, which is undoubtedly a rational statement that would be made in the environment of that era. Although there is a sense of helplessness in this, it is mainly due to the reality. Of course, history will eventually justify Xu Wei's artistic pursuit. Since the early Qing Dynasty, Xu Wei began to be discussed in parallel with Chen Chun, whom he admired, and in the following hundreds of years, "Qingteng Baiyang"

gradually became the peak of Chinese freehand flower and bird painting.^[6] Despite this, when we appreciate Xu Wei's works today, we should still objectively understand Xu Wei's own helplessness and entanglement when facing painting.

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