

Stylistic Force and Imagery: Inspiration of Public Art and Sculpture Creation Methodology From the Perspective of *Wen Xin Diao Long*

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Abstract

Methodology, which is a philosophical concept, is not only a theory about how people understand and transform the world, but also a series of specific methods for analysis and research, systematic summary, and finally put forward more general principles. Literature and art, text and sculpture all have genre determined according to emotions and feelings, and then the force formed according to the genre. Therefore, through the interpretation of *Wen Xin Diao Long*, which contains profound philosophical connotation, this paper will draw nourishment from the field of literature and introduce it into the field of public art and sculpture creation, with a view to endowing sculpture with profound connotation and enriching creative ideas and direction.

Key words: *Wen Xin Diao Long*; Stylistic force; Imagery; free will; Living in the present; Energy ascension

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Wen Xin Diao Long, which is large in scale and precise in thought, is a summation of literary creation theories written by Liu Xie. It constructs systematic stylistic theory, critical theory, creative theory and aesthetic theory, and occupies a prominent position in the history of Chinese aesthetic thought.

In *Wen Xin Diao Long*, There are 43 references to

“force”, definition of which can be roughly attributed to two sources. One is mentioned in *Sun Tzu's Art of War*, which refers to the natural forces generated under a specific situation. On the basis of this, Liu Xie further defined it in the book *Wen Xin Diao Long · Stylistic Force* as “Force, therefore emerges by taking advantage of the situation”, then, he extended the theory by indicating “a genre is chosen according to the feeling expressed; stylistic force takes shape according to genre”, which refers to the style of conforming to the specifications and style requirements of a certain genre, that is, the common style of a specific genre, also the objective factors of style. The other one is derived from the theory of other companion arts. As for calligraphy, painting and writing, “when a composition takes form, its force emerges”. They all should be “smooth and pleasing to the eyes”, which means arousing sense of beauty, and end with lingering tendency, or in other words, aftertaste. Therefore, it can be inferred that “force” has two meanings: one is “the objective factor of style and the aesthetic feeling of dynamics”, as mentioned in the *Wu Se*, meaning “there is no way to create novel works without relying on the rules, following the trend of article, or borrowing ingenious methods of predecessors”. The other one is “situation, trend”, as mentioned in *Yi · Kun*, meaning “the tendency of the earth is thick and smooth”. “Force” combines the objective factors of style with the dynamic aesthetic feeling. It can be used as a reference and guide in making public art and sculpture creation methodology a tool for realistic interpretation and mass communication.

Public art and sculpture works are occupied spaces with full artistic tension and artistic appeal. The expression of space contains the potential aesthetic recognition of human, and presents the tendency of a shape, or to say the sense of stylistic force. There are three references to “stylistic force” in *Wen Xin Diao Long*, with roughly two meanings. One is described in *Wen Xin Diao Long*

· *Stylistic Force*, “The circle is the shape drawn by the compasses, and it has the stylistic force to twirl naturally, the square is the form produced by the set-square and it has the stylistic force to sit secure. The stylistic force of writing is no more but so” (Liu, 2007, p.226), which explains the objective factors of the article style and the dynamic aesthetic feeling of the article. The other one, as described in *Wen Xin Diao Long · Kua Shi (Hyperbole)*, “in the delineation of not only the appearance but also the air and grace of mountains and oceans, the magnitude and majesty of palaces, altitudes were always unspeakable” (p.272), was used as a verb to describe the shape of figures.

Basing on the view that content determines style; “Style” is the basis of the existence of “Force”, it can be summed up as the closed loop of “emotion-style-emotion”. Liu Xie further refined the concept to be both definite and indefinite, flashing the brilliance of dialectical thinking with overtones of form determining content. For the connection between speech and idea, text and emotion, there are different views that words can or cannot convey all of the thoughts, or words can be forgotten as long as one can grasp the thought. However, the “emotion” arising from the “stylistic force” not only refers to thoughts and concepts, but also refers to the impression and emotional appeal of artistic thinking. In terms of the visible and perceptive conception and creation of sculpture, it can be adapted, integrated and self-consistent to form a closed loop of “emotion - style - force - emotion”. Emotion, a kind of unregulated natural expression, is a perceptual concept with a wide range of meanings. Most of the themes and the author’s feelings can be described as “emotion”. Therefore, in *Wen Xin Diao Long*, Liu Xie often uses words related to “emotion” to represent content, such as “sentiment”, “sense of reason” and so on. It seems more appropriate that Mr. Wang Yuanhua interprets “sentiment” as “the emotion permeated with thought” in the *Creation of Wen Xin Diao Long*. Chinese characters are extensive, profound and all-encompassing. From the dimension of “interpenetrating thoughts and feelings”, sentiment, sense, feeling, affection, image, etc., all have this connotation. During the actual process of sculpture conception and creation, the theory of “imagery”, which is more well-known and recognized by the public, can be optimized and replaced and derived from emotion. That is, “image” comes first, “image and tendency” are superior. “Figure” exists, the integration, reciprocation and inner circulation of “image – stylistic force- image “are carried by” figure and image “.

There is also an interpretation of “Yi Xiang (imagery)” in *Wen Xin Diao Long*, in which there are 69 references of “Yi(meaning)” and 26 references of “Xiang(image)”. “Yi”, such as described in *Chapter Xu Zhi (Declaration of intent)*: “language cannot exhaust meaning, even the Sage finds it hard to do so” ; or in *Chapter Feng Gu*

(*The affective air and the literary bones*): “One can turn out works of new interest in striking language”, means mind, idea, and thought. “Xiang”, such as described in *Chapter Wu Se (The beauty of nature)* : “They lingered in the midst of ten thousand images, and meditated in the realm of sounds and melodies”, or in *Chapter Shen Si (Magical imagination)* : “The spirit enters the world by way of images, thus the multitudes of feeling and emotion are born in literary writing”, and in *The Great Appendix of the I Ching sectionII*: “Therefore, what we call the Yi (change) is (a collection of) emblematic lines. They are styled emblematic as being resemblances”, respectively means the concrete image of things in reality, namely appearance; emblem, artistic image; and the interpretation of Yao & Gua (lines on a trigram) in *I Ching (The Book of Changes)*. As for Yi Xiang (imagery), as it is said in chapter *Shen Si (Magical imagination)* , “with a mind of unique perception, one can wield the writing-brush to capture the images in one’s vision” , and in *I Ching*, “Confucius said: the sages show images for expounding meanings” (Chen, 2007, p. 31). Yi (meaning) refers to the author’s subjective spiritual world; Xiang (image) refers to the objective material world reflected in the work. Yi Xiang (imagery) is a higher aesthetic concept than Yi (meaning) and Xiang (image). It is the combination of meaning and image, the blend of emotion and scene, the artistic image of the author’s subjective thought and objective image, and an embodiment of the fusion of image and stylistic force.

In this dimension, during sculpture creation, one can deeply experience in the mind: sense of intention in front of style, the connection of style and force, force manifested in image, the echo of image and meaning, and the synergy of stylistic force and the imagery, and finally achieve the realm of “creating new ideas in the Dharma, and placing wonderful ideas outside the bold and unconstrained.” By considering the objective “image”, realistic “style”, imaginary “force”, constructing subjective “meaning”, clarifying the idea of sculpture creation and creating the atmosphere of ascension, the result will naturally be superior to the idea. For the creator and the viewer, the work cannot be competent without fixed patterns or emotion. However, having fixed patterns and emotions may have good effects, but in the long run, it may lead to aesthetic fatigue. Having fixed pattern and no emotion, when rational thinking is absolutely dominant, may have certain effects, but the lack of artistic tension and appeal is inevitable, perception and artistic conception is difficult to hold constant. Having emotion and no fixed pattern, seems to be the most ideal state, which is people-oriented with continuous awareness. Using philosophical thinking and text power to guide the creation of public art and sculpture is more real, simple, and moving than imagination or complete reality, and more close to the true state of human beings.

“Free will” is the highest value of artistic creation. If creation causes the sculptor to lose himself, it is not true creation. As the philosopher Adorno said, “Art is transcendental. Without sublimation and transcendence, there will be no light shining on sentient beings and everything in the world.” For truly great sculptor, the process of his clever thinking should transcend the reality, enlightening wisdom. It should be a kind of present, free mental state rather than a simple representation of the objective reality.

For sculptors, the combination of style and force, the combination of meaning and image, and the interaction between stylistic force and imagery can greatly help them achieve the “free will” in the design and creation process of their works.

1. STYLISTIC FORCE IN THE PRESENT

Live in the present; follow the style into the tendency. The idea of “free will” is revelatory and transcendent for the sculptor and his works.

Art is a verb, and should not just be interpreted as a noun, meaning “being art” rather than “art”. Just as it should be “living”, rather than “life”; “loving”, rather than “love”; a link, rather than a relationship; “in the process of creation”, rather than “creation”; “Sculpture in progress”, rather than “sculpture”; “singing”, rather than a song; “dancing,” rather than a dance. We should see and feel the difference between the two meanings. A sculpture is a finished product, even the ending has been arranged, and there is no need to do anything more. The finished product is “dead”, but life does not know where the period is, we should capture the moment, feel the reality of the present, because direct feeling is more universal and beyond the times. “Body” has limited bearing capacity, quantity and degree, while “style” can extend infinitely, disperse and reverse. The stylistic force in the present makes the limited sculpture “body” feel life and radiates the infinite sculpture “stylistic” sense of vitality.

2. THE ENERGY ASCENSION OF IMAGE

Resonance of the same frequency, that is, image into meaning. This spiritual creation idea with “free will” is a kind of liberation for sculptors and their works.

As written in the Collected Works of Mid-Mountain: life’s millstone is very heavy. You think it’s crushing you, but it’s actually teaching you to be delicate, to help you present the details of life, so that you don’t go through life too rough.” Energy is present, and in the throes of human drama, it is easy to forget this fundamental principle of human empowerment. The sculptor, who is a “sovereign” being with free will, should clearly and unequivocally choose to export and accept the energy “art” gives, which is a great gift from art.

Discerning imagery is an important resource that needs to be used at all times, but parsing is different from judging. We should be explorers and disseminators of artistic truth. Judgment will obscure the truth, inject the “emotion” of the past step into the judge and receiver, perpetuating the “hurt”. We need to seek and explore “image”, so as to unify the subjective thought ability of sculptors and their works with the objective objects, leaving “stylistic force” and “space”. Using “image” to empower thoughts and raise energy is the same for sculptors and audiences -- nourishing art in and people in an artistic way.

Violating the laws of art and freedom of creation may not only fail to produce the desired effect, but also affect the sculptor himself in a bad way. Both “style” without “force”, and “image” without “meaning”, will cause the freshness and enthusiasm of sculpture creation to be “invaded” by the sense of powerlessness and boredom, affect the energy field of creation, and then reduce the “vibration”. It is crucial to pay attention to the “free will of creation”, “stylistic force in the present” and “energy ascension of imagery” in time, so as to maintain the vibration of sculptor’s creation at an appropriate level and make sculptor and sculpture resonate with each other.

With the acquisition of stylistic force and the increase of imagery frequency, sculptors tend to choose to focus on the present rather than the past or the future. Whenever the sculptor feels that he has lost the present “style” and “image”, he may be in a state of “aphasia” for a longer time. That is to say, before the sculptor becomes fully conscious, there is a period of back and forth between conscious and unconscious, between present and the state of mental identity. Again and again, he lost the present, then came back to the present. In the end, “entanglement and repetition” became the general state of the sculptor, and the near “potential” and far “meaning” can just “rescue” him.

When the sculptor respects the “stylistic force “ and “imagery “ of the moment, all the unhappiness and struggle will disintegrate. Joy and ease began to circulate inside and outside the sculpture. When sculptors act out of the awareness of the present, whatever they do is infused with quality, care and love -- even in the simplest of sculptural acts. No need to worry much about the effect of the work, just focus on the sculpture itself. Let the “stylistic force “ and “imagery “ roam freely in the work and surrounding environment, and the effect of the work will appear naturally. By conforming to the nature, stylistic force and imagery, one may obtain wonderful ideas, and a sudden flash of understanding. Constant effort yields sure success. Just accumulate as much as possible but to release a little at a time.

The world is changing rapidly, and external information will affect the goals and structures in people’s

consciousness, which will lead to the loss of order in people's heart. Artistic creation is no longer simply about describing the phenomenal world, but about feeling the beauty of the "source" -- free will, living in the present, energy ascension, restoring inner order of peace and joy. Perhaps, "stylistic force" and "imagery" can give artistic creation another "meaning", which is beyond the meaning of life.

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