

On the Artistic Thought of Franz Boas

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Abstract: Boas discussed some artistic problems including art, technology, the relations among habit, gender, hierarchy, and artistic style as well as splitting method by applying cultural relativism to analyze some basic characteristics of Aboriginal art in North America. Some of the concepts of Boas's primitive art were doubted by some scholars at one time and Boas responded these artistic views. Boas applied cultural relativism and concept of history to study methods of primitive art, which is suggestive for artistic study.

Boas explores the style development of primitive art along Atlantic coast of North America from an anthropological perspective. His research adopts two principles: one emphasizes people's way of thinking has much consistency in all nations and their forms of culture in the world; the other stresses historical development creates cultural morphology. Boas points out that human thinking is basically consistent and that cultural development includes inheritance and assimilation, both of which have an important role in the formation of the basic characteristics of primitive art.

1. Boas's Artistic Thought

1.1 Art and technology

Boas believes whether modern or primitive man can feel the beautiful things, and human endow things with aesthetic significance through art. However, What on earth can make people feel that they have aesthetic values? Art. Technology and sense of beauty have close and necessary connections. With the continuous promotion of skilled artisans to artistic criterion, artwork from every nation in the world achieve the optimal artistic form, however, the promotion of criterion and extension of imagination are consistent. As Boas talked to drawing and plastic arts, he indicated that relative superiority and inferiority of artistic values of original artwork have close relationships with mechanical technique that gets a certain level.

The relationship between technology and art proposed by Boas is based on Boas's investigation, analysis and research of the decorative patterns of many primitive objects. He thinks, " The representation can be called artwork only if the manufacturing technique is fully mastered by at least some people, and if the manufacturing process is widely used in a particular industry. " Therefore, artistic form is closely related to manufacturing technology. Pottery skilled areas will produce superb pottery artworks, there will be developed sculpture works of engraving in carving technology developed areas... Boas considers the formal element of artwork is also very closely related to the manufacturing process. People give the most interest to the formal beauty, and the original art form is not necessarily in the expression of a certain artistic intention. But when

technology condenses at a higher stage, people will begin to pursue the sense of form, which may be the basis of art. In his view, " Only on the basis of technical proficiency can expressive arts be produced. " In other words, technology not only determines the level of art, but also under the influence of technology, the formal factor is endowed with ideological content, so as to make artistic connotation richer.

1.2 Habit, gender and style

When studying the style of artworks, first of all, we should study the people who produce the artworks, study the pure form factors as the characteristics of the style, and also need to compare similar patterns in adjacent regions. We can understand the region's overall artistic style through the comparison. In his opinion, changes in form and style are related to habits of use. If the shape of the appliance is not easy or laborious to use, it will bring all kinds of difficulties and reduce the accuracy. So the changes in the form of appliances will always be subject to the constraints of people's habitual actions, if beautiful appliances that have the form of strong sense are not in line with the using habits of the body, it will be impossible to be widely used, not to mention be widespread popularity. The form of the appliances may not vary much under the influence of the people's habitual actions.

Different artistic styles also exist within the same tribe, because in addition to different production methods and usage habits, producers with different genders also exist. If the style of decorative arts is related to gender, it can be divided into two categories: one is the male style, the other is the female style. Artworks produced by men mainly concentrated in wood carving, painting and other derived artworks; artworks produced by women mainly concentrated in weaving and embroidery. The male artistic style is symbolic while the female artistic style is pure form. The symbolic style has the significance and the reality while the pure form style only has the names of patterns instead of the obvious meaning.

1.3 Hierarchy and style

According to Boas, symbolic art was related to the development of totem concept. Without the development of totem concept, there is no development of symbolic art. The artwork with high symbolic style is a part of tribal culture. In the tribe, people's thoughts, feelings and all kinds of activities have hierarchical concepts. Different classes have different rights and privileges are often expressed in various artistic activities and the use and possession of different artistic images. The possession and use of artworks are closely related to class and identity. People from different classes enjoy different types and styles of artworks. A high-ranking leader has the right to use certain artistic images and to master certain artistic styles. For example, in ancient Chinese artworks, the state of power, hierarchy and privilege can be observed, and the social conditions behind it can be witnessed and presented. Of course, the decorative pattern of style is only the surface of the form, the function of style is social, witchcraft and religious.

1.4 Splitting method

In discussing the original artwork, Boas analyzed the segmentation phenomenon in pattern formation and established the original prototype of the splitting method. Boas interprets the splitting method used in the original paintings and designs in the northwest coast of North America. He thinks, splitting method in paintings and designs is to make the technique that is applicable to three dimensional objects extend onto a flat surface. In Boas's analysis of splitting method in the North American Northwest Coast, there are some basic factors, the first is the artistic factor: 1. In order to

fit the shape of the decorative facing; 2. In order to completely express the symbol image. The second is the cultural factors: 1. The tradition of using artistic image; 2. The social value of artistic image. These factors account for the strict and consistent use of splitting method in the art of these regions. Boas focuses on the segmentation phenomenon, mainly concentrating on the analysis and application of the principle of Segmentation, and discusses the history of the style evolution of decorative patterns and its relationship with geographical factors.

2. The talk of Zhu Di and Boas

Zhu Di argues that Boas gets to the heart of his argument about the relationship between primitive art and beauty, and that Boas correctly points out the essence of the matter. It is clear from Boas's argument that beauty is determined by aesthetic attitudes. " Therefore, the difficulty for him in determining whether an artifact is a " artwork " or " the former artwork " is not in the work itself, but in creating the subject of the work and the subject of appreciating the work. "

Zhu Di rejects Boas's criterion for distinguishing " artistic " from " the former artistic " , that is, what purpose does the work serve? Boas believes that " artistic " , that is, works that art for Art's sake are art; " the former artistic " , that is, works that serve temporary purposes are not art. In this way, some prehistoric artworks known as primitive art are completely excluded, because prehistoric art does not serve art. However, the fact is not so, the art system in the whole modern sense, is precisely based on the " the former art " basis. For example, sculpture, painting, dance, music, drama and other arts are inheritance and development of " the former art " . Art and the former art are not side by side. Art depends on the former art while the former art is the foundation of art. Without the former art, there is no art.

Boas analyzed the reappearance's art of Indians from North American plains, which is limited to pictures and words, and is often crude in form, lacking in painting skills. The paintings were created by local people as a reminder of life and are not decorative, so the reappearance's art is not art. Judy argues, " It is certainly not unreasonable to say that pictorial writing is not art, but in fact, the problem is more complicated because in the broadest sense, the earliest artistic images always have a symbolic nature. " Pictorial writing as a symbol, has no emotion. The symbol is only the carrier of emotion, and it can produce certain meaning. If the meaning produced by the symbol can be accepted by the subject, the symbol will produce the function of emotion. " To say that buffaloes in the Cave of Altamira represent the emotions of prehistoric hunters is not to say that the images themselves of buffaloes have emotions, but simply that the meaning of the images may evoke an emotion for the simple reason that emotion is a formless state of mind. "

Zhu Di thinks that Boas's discussion about primitive art completely excluded the elements of primitive religion and went to the other extreme by distancing himself from the concept of primitive religion in search of an answer to primitive art. Boas opposed the theory of Artistic Imitation and put forward the theory of Artistic Expression. Zhu Di also opposed it. In his opinion, firstly, the idea of expressionism came very late. Secondly, it expresses man's subjective inner world through the objective world. Finally, he concluded Boas's theory of Artistic Expression into the theory of Expression that uses the modern concept to establish a new theory instead of the original religious theory, in order to break away from the theories of Taylor, Fraser and Bruhl.

3. The revelation of Boas's artistic thought

Boas's research technique of primitive artworks provides a different way of thinking for the researchers of art history, examining art phenomena and studying art issues from an anthropological perspective. It is what the researchers of art history lack and need to draw lessons from.

Boas has a point about the relationship between art and technology. Li Zehou also agrees that "

The word ' art ' , whether in Chinese or in Western, is derived from technology. It refers that the technological operations in material production activities achieve the high degree of consistency between the Entelecheia and extrinsic regularity of human beings. Art is a definition of technical proficiency." Li Zehou puts technical proficiency as one of the criteria for defining art. However, Boas argued that technology was crucial to art. We can see that art and technology are indeed inseparable. When Boas examines the relationship between technology and art, he believes that concrete problems should be placed in the corresponding historical background. Combined with the contents of art at that time, it's not independent of geographical factors to examine people's spiritual needs and aesthetic concepts at that time. These research ideas are very worthy of reference.

The phenomenon of segmentation proposed by Boas has also been well established. In decorative art, the principle of segmentation is similar to what is known in design art as a decorative technique suitable for patterns. Through the verification of ancient Chinese patterns of appliance, we can find that the splitting method are used more. When talking about the relationship between gender and style, Boas proposed that the male artistic style in primitive art is symbolic while the female artistic style is pure form, and the symbolic style has rich significance and reality while the pure formal style only has the names of patterns without significant meaning. The author's understanding is: The female artistic style does not have the remarkable meaning, which has the relations with the female social role. The role of women in life is internal. The Art of pattern created by women is not easy to be changed greatly in the process of passing on from generation to generation. Therefore, the meaning of its artistic style is relatively stable and its sense of reality is not obvious.

"The development of the decorative patterns in the prehistorical and post-historical periods in Europe and Asia shows that certain historical conditions played a decisive role in the artistic characteristics of the primitive peoples... ". The author agrees with the Boas's view that understanding the art of nations requires understanding the history of nations. Because artworks and artistic forms have the space-time nature, the development road of each national art is different, the history development degree is also different. Therefore, art can not be separated from history to study art phenomena alone. Art is a living thing, and in artworks has their national characters. Human beings have roughly the same living conditions and ability to adapt to the environment. These similarities and differences are not only closely related to the historical development of various ethnic groups, but also to the migration of human beings and the spread of culture. Many inspirations can be drawn from Boas's artistic thought. Boas's methodology for studying culture, as well as his many ways of thinking about the artistic direction and observation, can broaden the horizon of art researchers and provide more clues for reflection.

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