

## ANALYSIS OF THE "IMAGERY" OF LI GONGLIN'S "FIVE HORSES"

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**Abstract:** "Imagery" and "getting meaning and forgetting image", "Nature's magical existence", "Artistic conception", "Acquisition of the image and taking the truth", "The body is the mountains and rivers and taking it", "bamboo in the chest" and other aesthetic propositions and aesthetic categories are related closely. In the Song Dynasty, literati official painting began to rise, which put more emphasis on the function of paintings to "create images to express meaning". As a influential literati official painter in the early Northern Song Dynasty, Li Gonglin's paintings are seeking to express "imagery" especially. This article focuses on Li Gonglin's "Five Horses" and analyzes the imagery from four aspects: the shape, the use of brush, the use of ink, and the composition of the objects.

**Keywords:** Five Horses, Imagery

### 1 LI GONGLIN'S "FIVE HORSES" AND "IMAGERY"

#### (1) Interpretation of "Imagery"

As an aesthetic category, "imagery" means that the image of foreign objects is closely integrated with the creator's affection in the activities of artistic conception. The creator relies on the image of the natural object to contemplate, and the object image is conceived in the creator's affection and transformed into an aesthetic image. This is one aspect. According to Mr. Ye Lang's comment on the word "imagery" in the "Outline of the History of Chinese Aesthetics". On the other hand, the imagery embodied in the work is not only the embodiment of the universe and life, but also the external manifestation of the creator's spiritual connotation.

"Imagery" as an aesthetic category has gradually evolved from a philosophical category to an aesthetic category. It originated from "Yi Zhuang". "Yi Zhuang" puts forward the proposition of "create images to express meaning", highlighting the category of "images". Although images at this time cannot be equated with aesthetic images, they can lead to aesthetic images. First of all, in "Yi Zhuang", "Yi" is image, the image is similar. What is certain is that the imagery is an imitation of the universe. The artistic image is also an imitation of all things in nature. Secondly, some of the lines in "I-Ching" are a manifestation of artistic image. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Wang Bi put forward the "getting meaning and forgetting image", which was not only a philosophical proposition, but also an aesthetic proposition. The proposition of "getting meaning and forgetting image" is a further development of "create images to express meaning" in "Yi Zhuang" and a deeper

discussion of the relationship between meaning and images. First, it clarifies the relationship between "saying", images, and meaning. "Saying" is to illustrate the images of things, and images are to show the meaning. Therefore, in order to get the images you have to forget "saying". In order to get the meaning, you have to forget images, which promotes the transformation of images into the category of "imagery". This requires that our understanding of the art ontology no longer stays at the abstract and general stage, but enters a more inner and deeper level. Secondly, "getting meaning and forgetting image" provides inspiration for us to grasp the characteristics of aesthetic view, including transcending finite objects and concrete images. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Liu Xie first proposed the term "imagery" in his book "Wen Xin Diao Long", and made a deep analysis of aesthetic imagery, including "yinxiu", "fenggu", "shensi". The "imagery" at this time mainly refers to the imagery in the creator's mind. Since the aestheticians of Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties put forward the aesthetic category of "imagery", in the Tang Dynasty, people realized that "the main body of art is "imagery", and the creation of art is also the creation of "imagery". At this time, "imagery" is closely related to "qi". People believe that painting and calligraphy should express the nature and life of good fortune and pay attention to "nature and good fortune". This can be found in aesthetic propositions such as "Nature's magical existence" and "Acquisition of the image and taking the truth" put forward by aestheticians in the Tang and Five Dynasties. It can also be verified from Zhang Huairuan's "Literature", "Book Break", and Sun Guoting's "Books". The discourse of "imagery" by aestheticians in the Song Dynasty is a further development of the Tang Dynasty. Mr. Ye Lang believes that "imagery" has two meanings. The first "imagery" is the imagery in the creator's mind, and the second "imagery" refers to the imagery embodied in the work. If we say that aestheticians in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties focused on the imagery in the creator's mind, aestheticians in the Tang and Five Dynasties focused on the imagery embodied in their works. So the study of "imagery" by aestheticians in Song Dynasty is a combination of the two. Among the works on the aesthetics of calligraphy and painting in the Song Dynasty, the more important discussion of "imagery" is Guo Xi's "Linqan Gaozhi" and Su Shi's poetry and promotion of calligraphy and painting. That is, Guo Xi's aesthetic propositions of "the body is the mountains and rivers and take it", and Su Shi's aesthetic propositions of "bamboo in the breast" and "bamboo in the hand". "Guo Xi's 'The body is the mountains and rivers and taking it', which focuses on how the painter constructs the aesthetic imagery in his mind through aesthetic observations. Su Shi's propositions of 'bamboo in the chest' and 'body and bamboo transformation', which focus on how to express aesthetic imagery through pen and ink after composing aesthetic imagery in the artist's mind."

## (2) Li Gonglin's "Five Horses"

Li Gonglin is an outstanding representative in the field of official painting in the early Northern Song Dynasty. His "Five Horses" (Figure 1) is a handed down work of Li Gonglin. The works are rigorous and condensed with brushes, and are influenced by painters in the Tang Dynasty. His works are deeply rooted in ancient methods, such as absorbing the essence of Han Wu, Wu Daozi, Zhou Fang, etc. He attaches great importance to the traditional cultural spirit, forms a system of its own, and has far-reaching influence. In his "Five Horses", there are five steeds and a horse officer beside each horse. The names of horses are "Haotouchi", "Manchuanhua", "Jinbocong", "Zhaoyebai", "Fengtoucong". Li

Gonglin's observation of horses is extremely subtle. He describes each horse's personality characteristics and inner spiritual temperament through different modeling characteristics.

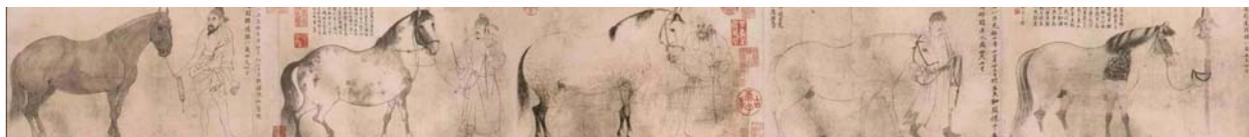


Figure 1: Li Gonglin's "Five Horses"

## 2 WRITE SHAPE IN LINE, THE IMAGERY OF THE SHAPE

Line is one of the mediums of painting modeling, which is not only an important factor in Chinese painting, but also an indispensable modeling method for Chinese painters of the past dynasties. The lines of Li Gonglin's "Five Horses" are unique and innovative. He infused horses and characters with strange spiritual connotations in the paintings, so that the pictures can achieve "imagery" modeling methods and unique aesthetic qualities.

Li Gonglin uses skillful lines in "Five Horses" to depict the texture and spiritual temperament of the object. The shape of the horse in the picture is subtle, and the shape is vivid and precise. The hands, feet and legs are portrayed vividly, and the morphological characteristics of different species can be distinguished. For example, Fengtougong's image is tall and strong, with prominent head structure, simple lines, thick and strong lines on the body, especially the waist line, which is powerful and elastic. The horse officials who lead Fengtougong have strong regional and ethnic characteristics. The depiction of this characteristic is concentrated in the use and modeling of lines. The facial features and eyebrows of this horse official are portrayed with fascinating expressions by thin lines, showing the character's identity and spiritual connotation. The lines of the figure's pleats are sudden and varied, and the lines are smooth and tactfully free, blending with the character object, smart and transparent. Another example is Haotouchi's shape, with a long and fat body, neat and strong four hooves, and a soft and sparse mane, which blends the lines with the body's ups and downs, turns and other changes. Another example is Jinbocong, with a slim and slender figure. The waist structure is outlined in a short arc of different weights. The bones are tall and strong, showing a fairly skinny steed, with the plain beauty of both flesh and blood. As far as the whole painting is concerned, the lines are refined, generalized, delicate, and the shape is precise, and the movement and the static are suitable. The painter fully expresses the shape and texture of the object by virtue of the intensity, thickness, virtual reality, lightness and softness of the ink pen lines, turning the objective image into a subjectively conceived "imagery".

## 3 SPARSE AND DENSE-THE IMAGERY OF THE BRUSH

Li Gonglin's calligraphy has the style of the calligraphers of the Jin and Song dynasties. He integrates calligraphy into painting, and his brushwork is elegant. His paintings also have the style of Wu Daozi. His research on tradition is profound and extensive, and he has his own style. Li Gonglin's "Five Horses" is majestic and vigorous, dense and uneven, using brush strokes to capture images, which

makes the horses in the painting vivid and exquisite. Su Shi commented on his painting method: "Strong gestures", Song Lian commented on his painting method: "Nature, Ups and Downs" Etc., which highlights the "imagery" of Li Gonglin's artistic technique and aesthetic taste.

In the field of figure painting, Li Gonglin realized the breakthrough and transformation of the literati's interest in the physique of the courtyard. The horse officials in his work "Five Horses" are also not listed. The lines are thin, strong and flexible, dense and precise, rippling the aesthetic connotation and realm of the literati in the rhythm of flying pens. For example, the Maguanren of Zhaoyebai Zhaoyebai has a plump and plump image, and his face is full of beards and simple hats to form a dense relationship. In his exquisite paintings, the tightness of the arms and the sparseness of the clothes form a sharp contrast. The horse officer who hauls Haotouchi has a delicate pattern and a flying skirt tail. The pen is like a willow leaf, and the orchid leaf is like a pure vegetable strip. The thickness and fineness change lightly. There is a natural space between the lines, which is quite charming. In the painting, the lines of Haotouchi's mane and tail are dense and well-defined, forming a strong contrast with the white space of the body, highlighting the horse's robustness and characteristics, giving people a simple and extensive feeling. Another example is the spots on Manchuanhua, which seem to be distributed freely, but they are scattered in an orderly distribution, with sparse and dense distribution, creating a unique aesthetic attitude and atmosphere.

#### **4 CONDENSED AND SIMPLE-THE IMAGERY OF USING INK**

Li Gonglin's painting method is simple and has a leisurely "imagery". The use of ink and color is condensed, simple, elegant, simple and refined without losing the style of pen and ink. "Five Horses" is colored with light ink. On the basis of respecting objective reality, the painter puts more emphasis on subjective self-expression. The horse he performed is not a tool for riding or shooting, but as an independent aesthetic that breaks away from the world and brings new interest to people.

"Five Horses" uses light ink and color, and pays attention to the grid method. For example, Jinbocong, in addition to the horseshoe outline with ink lines, the whole body is smudged with distinct ink colors, which has a strong sense of volume and heaviness. On the heads of Manchuanhua and Fengtoucong, the painter used ink to distinguish the front and the sides, making the head more blocky. The spots on Zhaoyebai's body are distributed freely, the ink color is natural, and the shades are different, overflowing with a vivid texture. For the tails of the five horses, the painter adopts different forms of expression. Except for Haotouchi, which is only outlined by curved ink lines, the other four horses are smudged with different degrees of ink. The heaviest ink colors are Haotouchi and Zhaoyebai. The former has its tail twists and turns, while the latter is neatly decorated and elegant and natural. Jinbocong's ponytail is made of light ink and color, and the ink colors are unified and layered, and the pen and ink are subtle, showing the texture of the ponytail. Fengtoucong's horsetail ink is distinct in color, with dry ink flying white, showing a strong light-dark relationship and a sense of volume. "Five Horses" seems to be expressed only in a single ink color, but it is full of rhythm and aesthetic connotations of literati and officialdom, giving people a plain and vivid beauty.

#### **5 THE EMBODIMENT OF "DAO"—THE IMAGERY OF COMPOSITION**

"Dao" is the central category of Laozi's philosophy, that is, everything under the world is born from "being", "being" is born from "nothing", and everything under the world is a combination of "being" and "nothing", and "virtual" and "real". Achieve a free aesthetic imagery. Li Gonglin expresses the external images of horses and horse officials through skillful painting techniques, as well as the internal appearance and characteristics of horses and characters. The layout of juxtaposition and repetition makes the picture more tense, achieving the unity of "virtual" and "real", "being" and "nothing".

From the perspective of the overall layout of "Five Horses", there are only five horses and five horsemen in the painting. There are no decorations behind the horses and characters. The picture is ethereal and clear, covering the "nothing" and "being" of "Tao". , The combination of "virtual" and "real" brings unique aesthetic taste to viewers. The postures of the five horses are slightly different, and the face and body are facing in the same direction. This repeated layout method does not produce a dull, flat, and restrained effect on the picture, but makes the image more orderly and tidy. There is a strong sense of stability and wholeness, presenting a harmonious and unified art form, that is, the combination of the "being" of the repeated layout of the picture and the "nothing" of the implied art form. In the painting, the pen and ink of the five horses are rigorous, especially the muscles and bones on the horses, which are delicately portrayed as true. For example, Zhaoyebai's crotch and arms are covered with variegated spots, and the ink color of the variegated spots has shades, falseness and solidity. You can imagine the strange fur and color of this horse. Its head is plump, precise in structure, and layered in reality and reality, which strengthens the horse's spiritual temperament. The five Maguans in the painting are of different shapes and have their own unique spiritual temperaments. The repeated placement of Li Gonglin's standing postures highlights the subtle dynamics and spiritual connotations of the characters, making the pictures produce a strong sense of rhythm, that is, the "real" of the characters' postures are unified with the "virtual" that presents their spiritual connotations.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Li Gonglin's "Five Horses" uses line writing, precise modeling, majestic and vigorous pen strokes, condensed simplicity with ink and color, and uses the layout of juxtaposition and repetition to embody the imagery of "being" and "nothing", "virtual" and "real". Li Gonglin's paintings overflowed with literati interest and the contribution of "innovative ideas" that influenced the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, such as Zhang Wo, Qiu Ying, Chen Laolian, Ding Yunpeng, etc., all of them studied from Li Boshi.

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