

ANALYSIS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF CHINESE ELEMENTS IN THE WINNING WORKS OF THE WORLD PRESS PHOTO CONTEST

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ABSTRACT

As the world's top photojournalism competition, the World Press Photo Contest has an extremely important influence on a global scale. Chinese photographers have a long-standing tradition of participating in the World Press Photo Competition, and the annual awards reflect the performance and influence of Chinese photojournalism on the world stage. It is true that the award-winning works are increasing, but some works do not show the true state of the current Chinese society and culture, but to a certain extent reflect the impression of China from the Western perspective. This article takes part of the award-winning works of China in the World Press Photo Contest since 1988 as the research object. According to the subject matter and category of the award-winning works, the award-winning works are mainly divided into three categories through research: showing historical figures and reporting major social and historical events, expressing the daily life of the Chinese people, and using images to describe the spiritual world and aesthetic interests of the Chinese people. They are all based on profound Chinese culture and traditional Chinese aesthetics. Performance in the competition.

Keywords: Photojournalism, World Press Photo Contest, China's award-winning works, social impact

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of science and technology today, the art of photography has been widely popularized and developed, and people are paying more and more attention to this important art category. It is particularly important to study its development and change process. Therefore, this article takes the World Press Photo Contest, the most important international event in the art of photography, as an example to study. The competition is organized by the World Press Photo Foundation. It was launched in the Netherlands, so it is called "He Sai" in China. It is one of the most authoritative competitions in the international photojournalism competition. Since the first World Press Photo contest was held in 1955, 66 editions have been held until 2023. The "Hesai Award" collects tens of thousands of photos from more than 100 countries every year. The awards set up different categories, each category includes single and group photos, and sets first, second and third prizes, among which the works of various first prizes have the opportunity to be selected as the annual picture. The winning entries toured in 45 countries and were viewed by more than 4 million people. When Hesai was founded, most of the winners were Western photographers. In 1988, Chinese photographer Yang Shaoming won the Herald Award for the first time with his group photo "The Retired Deng Xiaoping", which filled the gap in China's award-winning works. After entering the 21st century, more and more outstanding Chinese photography works have been recognized by the World Press Photo Contest.

As a world-renowned photography event, the presentation and dissemination of China's image in the World Press Photo Competition will undoubtedly affect the international community's perception of China's image. The award-winning Chinese works are a mirror of the development and changes of China's economy, culture and life. Since participating in this competition, Chinese photographers have gradually grown from early "participants" to "winners", which not only reflects the transformation process of Chinese photojournalism, but also reflects the development and changes of the country. Therefore, the study of the award-winning works in the World Press Photo Contest plays an extremely important role in promoting the development of Chinese photography, especially photojournalism. Its research can make more excellent Chinese photography works come into the world's field of vision through this competition platform, let the world pay attention to the development of China's social economy and the changes in cultural life, and better promote Chinese culture through the medium of photography. On the whole, Hersey's award-winning works present a diverse and complex image of China, but to a large extent, they continue the stereotyped image of China constructed by the international mainstream media. Based on this, the research goal of this article is to analyze and explore the performance and changing trends of China's award-winning works in the World Press Photo Competition, and how they are applied and performed. This research aims to analyze and explore how photography with Chinese elements has changed and developed in the World Press Photo and make a summary.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

At present, many scholars have conducted research on the World Press Photo Contest and its award-winning works. The research results are mainly divided into the following categories:

1. Research on the form of awards

Feng Ruifeng's "Looking at the Latest Development of World Press Photography from the Award-Winning Works of Hesse in Recent Years" introduced Hesai's award mechanism in detail, and emphasized that Hesai's selection is not just a simple evaluation of photos, it also implies the judges' own value orientation and the general recognition of multicultural concepts. Fang Anning's "The Impact of the Dutch Competition Frame on China's Photojournalism" and Wang Fenggang's "Treating the Dutch Competition Correctly and Objectively Evaluating Awards" both believe that the Dutch competition's award mechanism is relatively mature, and

the selection of judges and selection procedures have reflected fairness and justice. Research on the content of award-winning works, such as Chen Wei's "The Vision of "Hesai" World Press Photography Award-winning Works" summarizes that the winning works of Hesai have five characteristics: "important events, decisive moments, superb technology, difficult to obtain pictures, and extensive social influence." Wang Huaichun's "Interpretation of the "Aestheticization" Tendency of Hesai's Disaster Award-winning Works in Recent Years" pointed out: "Hesai's award-winning works focus on human suffering, which is the expression of Western aesthetic traditions in the field of photojournalism. He believes that "beautification" is not a photographer. It is a portrayal of real suffering and a true embodiment of human nature in Western tragedy culture.

2. Research on the Chinese works that won the competition

The research on the works in the World Press Photo Competition is still mainly focused on individual works or several groups of works, and it has not been able to comprehensively examine the performance of Chinese award-winning works in the World Press Photo Competition from the perspective of a time span or social development. Therefore, this is also a gap that this research has filled.

Analyze the content, subject matter and art form of specific award-winning works. For example, Xu Bin analyzed the award-winning work "Warming Up" in "Overlooking "Warming Up"": "This photo is the kind of rare film that makes people fall in love at first sight and can produce aftertaste. It first attracts people with a strong sense of form, simple elements, pleasant colors, and dangerous composition. He also introduced the creative concept and emotional projection of his award-winning works. For example, Fu Yongjun said in "From "A Tree by the West Lake" to "I Miss Mom and Dad"": "I shoot something because I have feelings for it and I like it, not because I want to get something.



Figure 1 Warming Up (Photography by Chu Yongzhi)

Source: Baidu



Figure 2 A tree by the west lake (Group photo by Fu Yongjun)

Source: Baidu

3. Discuss the communication influence brought by the award-winning works of Hesai China

Some scholars have fully affirmed the award-winning Chinese works from the perspective of social influence. For example, Zhao Fenglan of China Culture News said in "From Hesai to Huasai: The Responsibility of Chinese Journalists": "Through participating in the World Press Photo Contest, Chinese photographers have gradually matured in the exploration of news perspectives and grasping themes, and the overall appearance and level of Chinese photojournalism have been greatly improved." In the first place, photographic works related to our country's materials have won awards again and again, and China is attracting more and more attention from the world. But when we look at the award-winning works, we will find that there are stereotypes in the works of these Chinese and foreign photojournalists or photographers. Most of the award-winning works are Chinese medicine, sports, and martial arts of China.



Figure 3 Acupuncture Weight Loss (Qi Xiaolong Photography)

Source: Baidu



Figure 4 China Gymnastics Championship (Photo by Jia Guorong)

Source: Baidu

Through reviewing and sorting out the literature, it is not difficult to find that since 1988, the awards for Chinese photographers have been continuously enriched and developed in terms of subject matter and quantity. From political themes in the early stage to culture and art, and then to daily life in the later period, it is no longer simply to shoot news photography in the way of attracting people's attention, and the daily photography works are constantly enriched and developed.

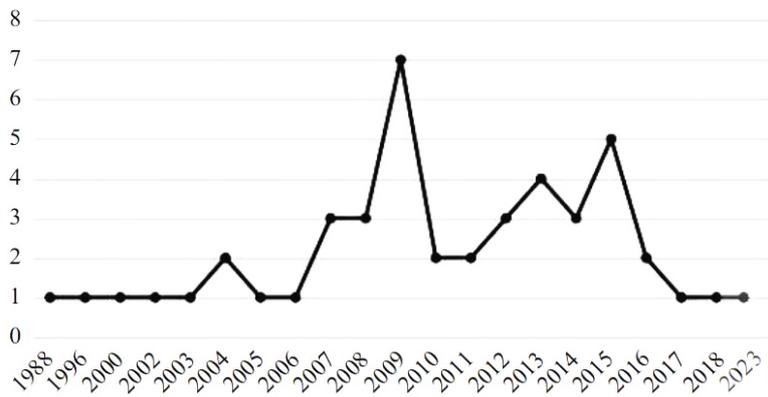


Figure 5 Statistics on the frequency of awards for Chinese photographers in the World Press Photo Contest

Source: Author

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses literature research and interviews as the main research tools for qualitative research. Interview content was analyzed by descriptive statistics and hierarchical multivariate analysis. The research body is mainly divided into the following parts. The first is to check the previous award-winning works of World Press Photo and conduct a comprehensive review. The second is to read related publications and documents. The third part is to interview Chinese photographers who participated in the World Press Photo competition and won awards. After sorting out relevant information and data through qualitative analysis method, the following three ways of analysis are carried out:

- 1. Descriptive analysis:** explain the creative background and theme of previous award-winning works. By collecting and consulting relevant materials, the specific performance of Chinese award-winning works is summarized.
- 2. Comparative analysis:** According to the changes and development of Chinese news photography, comparative analysis of the performance of Chinese elements in the award-winning works.
- 3. Inductive analysis:** By consulting books, materials and literature publications about Chinese award-winning works, understand Chinese works in the World Press Photo Contest, and analyze previous research results on the development of Chinese photojournalism.

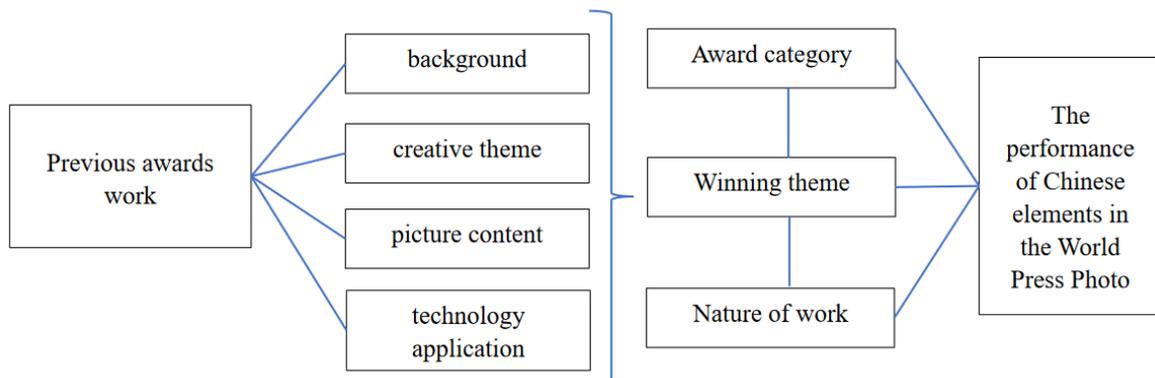


Figure 6 Conceptual Framework

Source: Author

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Characteristics of Chinese award-winning works

Since winning the World Press Photo Contest for the first time in 1988, Chinese works have experienced the silence of the Herald Award in the last century. After 2002, Chinese works have won the Herald Award every year. Especially in 2009, Chinese photographers won multiple awards in the Dutch competition for their earthquake and Olympic themes. Five of the seven award-winning works were based on the theme of the Olympics and earthquakes. It is not difficult to find that the reason why 2009 became the era with the most awards in history is still inseparable from the hot events in Chinese society, namely the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and the Beijing Olympic Games.

China's award-winning works are still mostly focused on news themes, and the art themes in the World Press Photo contest are less involved. It is not difficult to find that sports is the strong point of Chinese photographers. There are few award-winning works in general news and breaking news categories, and Chinese photographers have never won the Herald Photo of the Year Award. This has something to do with Hesse's judging criteria and the current situation of photography in China. Wars and coups are often the main themes of international photography competitions, and the World Press Photo Contest is no exception. China's society is stable, so there are few related topics. In addition, judging from the 48 award-winning Chinese works so far in 2023, Chinese photographers mostly focus on their own subjects, and pay less attention to areas with political turmoil in the world. Gu Zheng, a well-known Chinese photographer who served as a judge for the final review, pointed out that many winners of the World Press Photo Contest are foreign freelance photographers, and they are all motivated people who rush to the front. China still lacks such a team.

2. The performance of Chinese elements in the World Press Photo Contest

2.1 Political elements

When it comes to Chinese elements, many people first consider political and economic themes because of their foreign media occupy many positions in the presentation of China's image. Looking at the 48 award-winning works, in fact, the political theme is only reflected in the work "The Retired Deng Xiaoping", which was awarded for the first time in 1988. Because the protagonist in the picture is the pioneer of China's market economy at that time, China is implementing the reform and opening up policy to encourage foreign capital to enter China and develop the market economy. The international community is curious and confused about the direction of China's development. This group of photos shows Deng Xiaoping's life after retirement, which is of high viewing value for audiences all over the world.



Figure 7 The Retired Deng Xiaoping (Photography by Yang Shaoming)

Source: Baidu

2.2 Social elements

In addition to the traditional expression elements of politics, along with the progress and development of China's social economy, it will bring inadaptation to the natural environment and related social problems. Therefore, there are a large number of corresponding social elements in the award-winning works that express China's rapid development. Among them, nearly half are breaking news and disasters that objectively present Chinese society, such as "Saving the Bride Who Jumped from a Building" and "Dalian Oil Pollution Rescue".



Figure 8 Rescue the Bride Who Jumped off a Building (Photo by Li Yang)

Source: Baidu

Chinese freelance photographer Lu Guang's work "AIDS Village" won the first prize in the contemporary hot spot category of the 47th World Press Photo Contest. This group of photos actually reflects China at that time. In the mid-1990s, many poor farmers in Henan Province were infected with AIDS because of selling blood. In China at that time, the existence of AIDS had not been officially recognized, and some villages even had more than half of the population infected with AIDS, so they were called AIDS villages. Therefore, reflecting China's current situation to the world at that time is not so much a propaganda report as it is to let the world realize that there are many holes behind a rapidly developing country.



Figure 9 AIDS Village (Photography by Lu Guang)

Source: Baidu

If news about AIDS villages, environmental pollution, or breaking news is one of the means of expression of social elements, then the group photo "That Moment" of himself taken by the late famous Chinese photographer Ou Zhijiang is more like a review and supervision of the status quo of Chinese social development. The judges thought that Ou Zhijiang's entries had a mysterious quality. At first, they knew nothing about the photos. The only reason they made it to the next round was because the pieces looked so different from the others. Obviously, these

photos are not documentary photography, but they are quite fascinating, and people have a sense of ambiguity and weirdness. These images are very powerful, and this power is based on a sense of confrontation between the individual and the group.



Figure 10 That Moment (Photography by Ou Zhikang)
Source: WPP official web

Therefore, we can find that whether it is the traditional report on key emergencies of social issues, or the record of the natural environment brought about by social development, or the work "That Moment" created by jumping out of traditional news documentary photography. The attention to society in award-winning works will always be one of the key performance elements that cannot be erased. Because the essence of photojournalism is to record through discovery, and finally express through images.

2.3 Cultural elements

Mentioning the word culture cannot be separated from China's long history of 5,000 years. It is true that China has a very profound cultural history, but in the creation of the World Press Photo Contest, there are not many cultural elements, even rare. The more elements that show the awards are traditional sports culture. After summarizing, it is found that the cultural elements mainly involve traditional Chinese martial arts, acrobatics, Peking opera and sports. The cultural elements in the early award-winning works still remain in traditional literary and artistic projects. In the final analysis, it is due to the high degree of attention and unfamiliarity with it worldwide. People don't know their origins or how they behave, so images can be used to communicate well, thereby unraveling the doubts in people's hearts. For example, "Liaocheng Children's Acrobatics School" shot by Mr. Li Nan, the first prize winner of the Dutch competition in 1996, is enough to show the attention of Western countries to traditional Chinese literature and art.



Figure 11 Liaocheng Children's Acrobatics School (Photo by Li Nan)
Source: We chat web

The composition of the picture adopts a conventional symmetrical composition, and the symmetrical method is more in line with the principle of the golden mean in traditional Chinese culture, and it happens to express the acrobatic art in traditional Chinese literature and art, which can be said to be more appropriate. At the same time, in order to show the thrilling instant of acrobatic art, the author used the high-speed shutter in photography technology to record the instant of acrobatics kicking a bowl. This expressive technique borrowed from the French photographer and the father of modern photojournalism Kadir Bresson's "decisive moment", and selected a representative moment of a certain event to record. Although it is only a few tenths of a second, it is enough to present the characteristics of the event to the audience. Apart from acrobatics, gymnastics in sports is also one of the most important cultural elements. The reason is that it originated from a stereotype of Chinese gymnastics in Western society. As we all know, gymnastics training is extremely hard, but in the attention of the news and public opinion, this traditional training method has been elevated to the perspective of human rights education. Therefore, whether it is Jia Guorong's "Chinese Gymnastics Championship" in 2002 or Qiu Yan's "Li Xiaoshuang Gymnastics School" in 2005, it not only captures the wonderful performance of athletes, but also objectively depicts the competition scene, and also negatively presents Chinese gymnastics education. Gymnastics has always been China's strength, but gymnastics education has been criticized both at home and abroad. As a cultural element, gymnastics has also become a key performance in the World Press Photo Contest.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In general, more and more Chinese elements have been presented in the World Press Photo Competition in recent years, while these elements have shown less of China's political and economic image; socially, it has focused on China's practical problems in the process of social development and transformation, as well as the living conditions of disadvantaged groups; in terms of culture, the overall presentation is relatively diverse, but there are still symbolic misunderstandings; in terms of environment, it presents an image of China that pursues too much development speed at the expense of the natural environment. Although Hersey's award-winning works present a diverse and complex image of China, they also to a large extent continue the stereotyped image of China constructed by the international mainstream media. Therefore, we need today's photography creators, with the help of the global media situation, not only to introduce China through images from the perspective of politics or sports, but also to create from multiple perspectives such as China's excellent culture and economy, breaking the original stereotype.

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