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# Research on Composition and Light-Shadow Application in Campus Scenery Photography

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**Abstract:** Campuses, with their natural landscapes, cultural buildings and academic atmosphere, serves as a unique carrier for photography creation, rich in visual materials. From a professional artistic perspective, campus scenery photography is not merely the simple shooting of scenes, but rather a comprehensive externalization of the creator's aesthetic tastes, observational perspectives and visual psychology. This article analyzes the formal principles of composition and the shaping function of light and shadow. By interpreting composition knowledge such as the composition with points, lines and planes, perspective relationships, and color arrangements, as well as the specific application of natural light and ambient light in creating the emotional tone of the picture, the article explores paths for exploring the infinite visual tension within a limited campus scene, hoping to provide practical references for campus photography practice.

**Keywords:** Campus Scenery Photography; Composition; Light and Shadow; Strategy

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## 1. Introduction

For college students, photography is not merely about a technical learning process, but also a combination of shaping both habits of visual thinking and the perspective of observing the world. The campus, as a place for daily activities, is often overlooked due to its familiarity, yet the essence of art lies precisely in exploring the extraordinary and the amazement within the ordinary. Campus scenery photography, as an important medium for carrying campus culture and embodying students' sentiments, has its core value in transforming the objective physical space into the artistic expression of subjective emotions through lens language. Light and shadow are the soul of a picture, endowing it with emotional tension, while composition is the skeleton of a picture, establishing visual order and structural logic. Exploring the intrinsic connection between Light-shadow and composition in campus photography and achieving a harmonious resonance between formal aesthetics and emotional expression is of significant practical significance.

## 2. Visual Psychology and Form Construction: The Compositional Logic of Campus Scenery

Composition is the process by which photographer select and arrange elements when converting three-dimensional

reality into a two-dimensional plane. In fine arts studies, students understand that composition is not a rigid doctrine but a response to the laws of visual psychology. Campus architectures feature a strong sense of geometry and clear lines, with regular pedestrian flow patterns, providing an ideal scene for composition practice.

### **2.1. Refining Geometric Order and Formal Sense**

Most campus buildings bear the imprint of modernist design. The facades of teaching buildings, libraries, and other structures are composed of diverse geometric elements such as straight lines, curves, rectangles, and circles. The creator needs to use abstract thinking to extract pure geometric forms from the complex architectural entities. For instance, when photographing the steps of a library, one should transcend their functional attributes and capture the rhythm formed by the repetitive progression of lines. Shooting upward with a wide-angle lens can enhance the vertical lines, creating an upward sense of sublimity and oppression, which aligns with the expression of academic solemnity. When shooting corridors or arcades, the repeated arrangement of arches can create a rhythm in the picture and guide the viewer's gaze to extend in depth. The essence of composition is the re-encoding of geometric elements, requiring simplification—removing interfering elements like air conditioning units and drying clothes—allowing the picture to present a near-abstract formal beauty.

### **2.2. The “Picture-within-Picture” Metaphor of Frame Composition**

Natural frames are ubiquitous on campus, such as doorways, window grids, areas enclosed by branch shadows, and even playground fencing. The value of frame composition lies not only in enriching the layers of the picture but also in implying a metaphor of “voyeurism”. As fine arts students, we possess keen perception of spatial layers and often use the dark silhouettes in the foreground as frames to incorporate the main subjects in the middle ground, such as buildings or people. This technique can quickly focus the viewer's attention while creating a profound and quiet campus atmosphere, breaking the monotony of the two-dimensional plane and constructing a strong sense of depth, as if inviting the viewer to explore the academic mysteries and youthful narratives deep within the campus through the lens window<sup>[1]</sup>. Meanwhile, the sense of solemnity and order represented by the frame adds a rigorous and orderly atmosphere to the picture.

### **2.3. Creating Artistic Conception through Negative Space**

The aesthetic principle of “treating blank space as black” in Chinese painting can also be applied in photographic composition. When shooting campus scenery, there is no need to fill the entire frame. The sky, water surface, or plain walls can all serve as carriers of negative space. For instance, when shooting a teaching building in the morning, let the building occupy only the lower third of the frame, while a large area of sky serves as negative space, creating a “void above, solid below” visual effect. This composition not only highlights the outline of the building but also leaves room for the viewer's imagination. Negative space is not empty but a container for emotions, capable of conveying the tranquility and vastness of the campus or the faint melancholy unique to youth. For fine arts students, the key to advancing in composition lies in learning the subtractive thinking and reserving “breathing space” for the picture<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **3. Linear Perspective and Spatial Depth: Reconstructing the Physical Space of the Campus**

Photography is an art that presents three-dimensional space through a two-dimensional plane, where lines and perspective are the keys to constructing a sense of depth. The clear axes and perspective convergence points of campus space provide natural scenarios for perspective experiments in creation.

### **3.1. The Guidance and Convergence of Linear Perspective**

On tree-lined avenues, long corridors, or main roads, the visual phenomenon of parallel lines converging toward the

distance provides natural creative material for campus photography. The core value of linear perspective is guiding the line of sight and shaping a sense of deep space—lowering the camera to use roadway perspective lines as foreground guidance causes viewers' gazes to naturally focus on distant subjects like a bell tower or a receding figure at the vanishing point. This composition possesses both formal beauty and implicit metaphors of “exploration” and “pursuit,” echoing the persistent journey of university life. Using a wide-angle lens to reinforce perspective effects makes the sense of line convergence even stronger, endowing the picture with dramatic visual impact and further enhancing its tension.

### **3.2. Rhythm and Melody of Repeated Lines**

The orderly window grids of teaching buildings, the arrayed sections of library bookshelves, and the lane lines of playground tracks are natural carriers of visual rhythm in the campus. When composing, one can step out of the inertia of level shooting and try diagonal or curved composition logic. When shooting a lecture hall, tilt the camera to shift the horizontal horizon, allowing the lines of the seats to cut the picture diagonally. This “unstable” composition can break the monotony and create a dynamic visual experience. The creation of visual rhythm is like the composition of a silent melody. By controlling the density, length and thickness of the lines, a rhythmic visual expression can be constructed in the picture<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3.3. Layer Distribution of Foreground, Middle Ground and Background**

Excellent campus scenery photography requires a clear layering system in the picture. The foreground serves to enrich the depth of the picture. The middle ground is the core subject, responsible for conveying the main content. The background plays an extending role, helping to expand the spatial dimension. When shooting scenes such as flower beds and artificial lakes on campus, low-angle flowers and plants can be selected as the foreground and blurred. The middle ground focuses on students reading in the morning or couples strolling. The background is laid with the blurred outline of teaching buildings. By using a large aperture to control the depth of field and through the contrast of sharpness and blurriness, the effective separation of each plane can be achieved, making the three-dimensional effect of the picture more prominent. As college students, when composing, one should actively sort out the relationship among the three, avoiding the problem of a flat picture, just like the meticulous handling of the relationship between black, white and gray and spatial layers in sketch creation, to refine the texture of the picture.

## **4. The Emotional Spectrum of Light and Shadow, the Narrative Function from Dawn to Nightfall**

Light is the brush of photography, and shadow is the concrete manifestation of the brushstroke. The characteristics, direction and intensity of light directly define the texture and emotional tone of the picture. In campus scenery photography, light and shadow are not merely illumination media but also core narrative elements. As time passes, the dynamic performance of light and shadow allows the campus to continuously shift its unique temperament.

### **4.1. The Warmth and Nostalgia of the Golden Hour**

The “golden hour” recognized in the photography world refers to the hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset. At this time, the color temperature of the light is low, presenting a warm orange or golden hue, and the projection angle is gentle, which can outline the elongated shadows of objects. It is the light state with the strongest emotional appeal in campus photography. The lake under the setting sun, with its shimmering waves, where water surface and skylight create reciprocal interest, fill the picture with tension. The ancient city under the side light, with its rustic architecture, highlights the texture details through the strong contrast of light and shadow, evoking a sense of historical vicissitudes. At this moment, the campus seems to be shrouded in a golden veil, gentle and solemn. The creator needs to wait for this moment patiently, skillfully using the low-angle light to enhance the contour light of the subject, precisely outlining the edge lines of teaching

buildings and sculptures, achieving an effective separation of the subject from the background, and further enhancing the three-dimensional layers of the picture<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **4.2. Geometric Cutting of Overhead Light and Hard Light**

The direct characteristic of midday sunlight is often regarded by photographers as a “non-ideal time”, but college students have precisely captured the creative potential of this hard light. The intense light is like a precise cutting tool, deconstructing the campus space into black and white opposing geometric blocks, becoming an excellent carrier for exploring formal aesthetics. In front of the modernist-style campus buildings, the sharp shadows projected by the overhead light are extremely expressive. When the white walls and tree shadows interweave, it resembles the abstract splashing of ink brushstrokes, creating a subtle dialogue between concrete scenes and abstract composition. At this time, there is no need to be obsessed with the color layers; instead, focus on the pure composition of light and shadow. By using high contrast to enhance the structural tension of the picture, can better highlight the rational order of campus space. This cold and regular visual presentation not only fits the expression logic of minimalist photography but also aligns with the rigorous nature of the academic field, allowing the midday hard light to shed the label of “garbage time” and become a unique creative opportunity<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **4.3. The Serenity and Introspection of the Blue Hour**

The “blue hour” from sunset to darkness is the golden window for creating campus night scenes. At this time, the sky fades from the brightness of the day and settles into a deep blue, while artificial light sources on the ground gradually light up one after another. The collision of cold and warm color temperatures creates a natural visual tension. The cold blue of the sky and the warm yellow light from the building windows form a complementary color contrast, creating a serene and profound atmosphere while endowing the picture a strong sense of layering. When focusing on the library shooting, the bright window grids under the deep blue sky are like a luminous matrix. The contrast between blue and yellow is full of tension in color, while metaphorically representing the spiritual core of the lighthouse of knowledge. With long exposure techniques, passers-by in the campus can be blurred into flowing light and shadow trajectories, forming a dynamic contrast with the static building subjects, making the sense of time passing concrete in the picture. This language of light and shadow, interwoven with cold and warmth and generating movement from stillness, precisely fits the sensitive introspection of fine arts students, transforming campus space into a spiritual field carrying contemplation.

#### **4.4. The Delicate Texture under Diffused Light**

The diffused light scenarios(on cloudy or overcast days) present a completely different expression logic, where the light has no clear projection direction, acting like a softened all-round light source. Although it lacks the sharp tension of hard light, it becomes the optimal carrier for presenting delicate texture and rich details. Compared to the hard light that easily produces harsh shadows when shooting plants, macro landscapes, or close-ups of people, diffused light can evenly cover the subject, restoring its color saturation and layering details to the greatest extent. For example, the lotus leaves and flowers after the rain, under the diffused light, show a watercolor-like transparent texture. In the campus woods, the diffused light dissolves the interference of strong light spots, allowing the green tones to present a rich and delicate gradient layers. For creators, overcast weather is by no means an obstacle to shooting but should be used to explore the overlooked corners of the campus, conveying the warm and introverted nature of the space through the language of light and shadow<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **5. Color Aesthetics and Visual Psychology: The Emotional Encoding of Campus Scenery**

Color, as a core element of visual language, acts on viewers through emotional perception prior to form. In campus scenery

photography, color is not only the objective attribute of objects but also the concrete carrier of the creator's subjective emotions. Relying on the core of color psychology and art theory, colors can be precisely used to construct the tone of the picture and enhance the expression tension.

### **5.1. The Spatial Shaping of Cold and Warm Contrast**

In the campus space, cold tones are often attached to carriers such as the sky, water surface, and shadows, while red brick buildings, autumn leaves, and artificial lights often present warm tones. This natural color division provides core materials for cold-warm contrast in photography. By using this color principle, not only can the spatial depth of the picture be enhanced, but also the visual impact can be increased: in winter campus shooting, a large area of cold-toned snow serves as the base, while red brick bell towers or students in bright down jackets as warm-toned accents. The subject immediately stands out in the color contrast, forming a strong visual tension. From the perspective of color psychology, cold colors inherently carry the perception attributes of receding, contracting, and tranquility, while warm colors convey the emotional signals of advancing, expanding, and enthusiasm. By adjusting the area ratio of cold and warm color blocks in the picture, the tension of the picture can be precisely regulated. A large area of cold tones surrounding a small area of warm tones can create a lonely yet resolute atmosphere. On the contrary, it endows the picture with abundant vitality and passion.

### **5.2. Creating an Atmosphere with Harmonious Tones**

Color harmony is also an important aesthetic principle in campus photography. This harmony is highly unity in the campus of a specific season. The all-encompassing green of early summer and the golden yellow of late autumn are both natural sources of harmonious tones for creation. When shooting a "green campus", it is necessary to actively exclude the interference of other colors during the framing stage, and pay attention to the elements of different shades and depths of green. Through the subtle gradation of green tones, it conveys the dual emotions of vitality and tranquility. This monochromatic processing method is in line with the "tone limitation" concept in painting creation. It strips away the interference of redundant colors, forcing the viewer to focus on the layers of light and shadow and the structure of the form itself. It is not only an effective means to enhance the expressiveness of the picture but also a core path to showcase an elegant artistic taste.

### **5.3. Abstract and elevated black, white, and gray**

Even in a colorful life, black and white photography still holds an irreplaceable position with its unique aesthetic tension. It strips away the interference of colors, forcing the viewer to focus on the rhythm of light and shadow, the structure of lines, and the texture of layers. When shooting historical buildings on campus, the expressive power of black and white tones is particularly prominent. The red brick walls transform into rich gray-scale transitions, and the mottled textures are intensified, naturally revealing a sense of historical weight. As student creators, attention should be paid to the natural connection of black, white, and gray tones during post-processing, avoiding the stiffness of "dead black" and "dead white". Through high light suppression, retention of dark details, and simulation of silver salt graininess, it can endow campus landscapes with a classic quality that transcends time, and precipitate a visual expression that combines artistic texture and philosophical meaning.

## **6. Creative perspectives and unconventional composition, breaking the conventional way of viewing**

### **6.1. The God's-eye view of drone aerial photography**

The popularization of drone technology has opened up a brand-new high-altitude perspective for campus photography. From above, the familiar campus space is deconstructed into an unfamiliar abstract form. The concentric circles of the sports field track, the geometric arrangement of the teaching building complex, and the radial lines of the tree-lined avenue

all present a strong sense of composition and pattern aesthetics. Creators can capture the symmetrical order that is difficult to reach with the naked eye through aerial photography, and even use the projections of people as compositional elements to create interesting interactions on the ground. There are also unique perspectives, such as the umbrellas of people on a rainy day, each round umbrella moving among the symmetrical buildings. The core of aerial photography is not the height advantage, but the discovery of formal associations that are not revealed from the ground perspective. By reconstructing the spatial proportions and scales, it offers new possibilities for campus photography.

## 6.2. The mirror maze of reflection and refraction

Rain puddles, glass facades, and even sunglasses on campus are all excellent reflective media. By using reflection composition techniques, a surreal visual effect of coexistence of reality and illusion can be quickly created. The library reflected in the rainwater after the rain, with the real and illusory images juxtaposed, blurs the boundary between reality and dreams. By framing through the glass facade of the teaching building, taking advantage of its reflective and transparent properties, the images of two spaces can be superimposed, creating a visual tension like a collage. This single-frame multiple-image presentation has a postmodern deconstruction connotation and significantly enhances the information density and artistic expressiveness of the picture.

## 7. Conclusion

Campus scenery photography is a threefold symphony of technical application, observational ability, and emotional projection. For college students, the camera is not only a recording medium but also a visual brush and an extension of perception. Light and shadow infuse the picture with a spiritual core, while composition builds a visual order. The two support each other and jointly shape the visual imagery of the campus. Only by flexibly mastering the rules of composition and deeply deconstructing the language of light and shadow can one break away from surface-level recording and explore the formal beauty and humanistic depth of campus scenes.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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