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Seminar Memory

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Film Camera is Better Than Digital

"In teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions on what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe."¹ As Susan Sontag said, photography is a new method to record "an anthology of image"² in our daily life. Nowadays, more and more one uses digital cameras or their phones to take video. It is one of the most convenient and easiest ways. Nevertheless, a film camera is better than digital base on its better qualities, its value as an investment and because it improves a photographer's technique.

Firstly, a film camera has higher resolution of pictures, inclusiveness of light, and more vivid color. Before comparing the picture quality from two types of cameras, it is necessary to find out how these cameras work. When the light comes into a digital camera, "an electronic equipment light-detector chip (either a CCD (charge-coupled device) or an alternative technology called a CMOS chip)"³ changes the light into tiny color dots which is named pixels. However, the role of film is placed into a light-proof box. When the light comes into the box, the reaction of light-sensitive chemicals from the light develops a picture.⁴ In other words, the

¹ Susan Sontag, *On photography* (New York : Picador USA : Farrar, Straus and Giroux,2001),3.

² Susan Sontag, *On photography* (New York : Picador USA : Farrar, Straus and Giroux,2001),34.

³ Chris Woodford, "35mm Film Camera", Explainthatstuff, last modified Dec 10, 2018, access April 28,2017, <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/how-film-cameras-work.html>

⁴ "How does camera work?," Wonderopolis, access April 28, 2019, <https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/how-does-a-camera-work>

photos which are created by a film camera are composed of lines rather than pixels, so the picture which is created from a film camera can be enlarged infinitely. Moreover, the components of the picture from a film camera are a line, so the transition of light and color is smoother than the digital one. There must have an edge between every pixel. Therefore, if the digital image is enlarged, the picture will not be clear anymore. Moreover, a film camera has more vivid color and high contrast of color and light. Since the digital camera translates the picture though a light-detector chip to an electronic signal, during the process it will lose color and picture detail.⁵ For example, the picture of Eastern Sierra Nevada, the left photo is shot by Canon 6D, a digital camera, and the right one is shot by Velvia 50, a film camera. Both of them are used with the same lens, 50mm, in the same settings, 100 iso, and f/4 and without any photoshop, in the professional standard. There are extremely obvious differences between the two photos.⁶ The right photo's color is more vivid and has high contrast. It also has a "wider range of exposure latitude" which gives a film camera better qualifications for capturing dynamic detail than a digital one.



⁵Stephen Bottomore, "Introduction: Behind the Camera," *Film History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 255-59. doi:10.2979/filmhistory.24.3.255. Accessed May 02,2019

⁶ Trevor Lee, "Film vs Digital - A Photo Comparison," The Dark Room, last modified May 28, 2017, Accessed May 02,2019<https://thedarkroom.com/film-vs-digital-comparison/>

Secondly, a film camera has a higher value as an investment. The digital camera as a high technology item, is updated of them is really frequently quick which means that when a new item comes out, the price of the old one will decrease a lot. Moreover, the price of a second-hand digital camera is also much lower than the new one. In another world, as long as a customer owns a new digital camera, its price is decreasing. However, a film camera doesn't have this problem. Most film cameras are not produced any longer. The frequency of updating the film camera is much slower than the digital one. Moreover, most film cameras are second handed, if you preserve the film camera well, the price of it will not decrease. In some cases, the price may be increased. In addition, the price of a film camera is more affordable than a digital one. For instance, compared with the Nikon D3x digital camera, the Nikon F6 film camera is much less expensive, though, both are the signatures in digital and film cameras. In April 2010, the price of Nikon D3x is \$7,470 and Nikon F6 is \$2,500. The cost of the film camera is about \$4,970 less than a digital one. A roll of Fuji Velvia 50 film costs about \$6.86. It costs about \$20.61 to develop and scan a roll.⁷ (Chart 1) Therefore, \$4,970 can purchase about 241 rolls of film, it will be enough for the photographer to use for 5 years if he uses a roll per week. During that time, the new version of digital will come out, the price of D3x will decrease a lot compared to 2010. In fact, in April 2019, a Nikon D3X with 30mm lens cost just \$1,650.

	D3x	F6
Camera	\$7,470	\$2,500
Film (241 rolls)	\$0	\$1,653
Developing (241 rolls)	\$0	\$1,326
Scanning (241 rolls)	\$0	\$1,988
Total	\$7,470	\$7,467

⁷ Nathan Jones, "The Economics of Film vs Digital," Last motify April, 2010, Accessed April 29, 2019, <http://nathanjones.com/articles/the-economics-of-film-vs-digital>

Thirdly, photographers have more improvements by using a film camera. Compared with a film camera, a photographer can develop more photos by using a digital camera at the same time. However, photography is an art which cannot be measured by quantity. Every coin has two sides. The process of film camera developing requires more time.⁸ In addition, unlike digital camera, when photographers are shooting, he/she can not figure out what his/her final photos look like directly through the screen of a camera. Therefore, before shooting, photographers have to chew over the setting of light, shooting process and composition of a photo. During this process, a photographer can gather his/her own shooting experience and knowledge and learn more about the setting of a camera.⁹ In this case, a photographer could produce a better quality project.

All in all, today, life step becomes quicker and quicker, the digital camera plays an important role in our daily life. However, because of film cameras' complex producing process, this process can slow down photographers shooting step to encourage them to spend more time on thinking about what they want to express and the meaning behind the photos.¹⁰ Therefore, the most significant advantage of a film camera is promoting photographers staid spirits rather than its qualities or its value as an investment

⁸ Christopher Vaughan, "Flashback Photography," *Science News* 134, no. 14 (1988): 223. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3972898>.

⁹ "You Can Make Color Pictures with Your Roll-Film Camera," *The Science News-Letter* 40, no. 26 (1941): 405. doi:10.2307/3917744.

¹⁰ David Beckham and david Hirsch, "Photos to Go—Hold the Film: Digital Cameras Developing as Easy Way to Snap, Store and Send Pictures," *ABA Journal* 83, no. 3 (1997): 84. Accessed May 02, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27839473>.

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