

Comparative Aesthetics in Contemporary China

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I

Chinese comparative aesthetics germinated in Qing Dynasty. By the end of this Dynasty, Zou Yi Gui (1688-1777), in his work *Xiao Shan's Book of Model Paintings* (about 1740) and Sun Nian (about 1840-1910) in his work *On Paintings in Yi Garden* (about 1897) compared the aesthetic thoughts of Chinese paintings with those of the Western paintings. Nian said: "Painting of the West strictly seeks life-likeness, and is not different from the image of life." But Chinese painting looks for frames of pen and ink. In painting there is not only the image of life but also reflection of spirit. Since the Enlightenment movement of modern China, critics like Liang Qi Chou (1873-1929), Wang Guo Wei (1877-1927) and Lu Xiun (1880-1936) consciously discovered the respective characters and generalities between Chinese and the Western aesthetic cultures. Liang Qi Chou compared Chinese classical literature with the European Romantic and Realist literature, and found some essential differences between them. Wang Guo Wei put an end to the classical aesthetics of China, and opened an avenue for the contemporary aesthetics of China. Through introducing the contemporary aesthetics of the Occident and innovating Classic aesthetics of China, he became a representative in the turning point of history of aesthetics. He absorbed foreign ideas to reconstruct original materials of China (see Zheng Yin Liuo, Prologue of Wang Guo Wei's Posthumous). Drawing upon Kant and Schopenhauer, he analyzed and studied arts of China, and wrote several important monographs about Chinese literature and aesthetics. For instance: "Criticism of a Dream in Red Mansion;" "Textual Criticism on Chinese Opera and Drama in Sung Yuan Dynasties;" "Textual Research about the Words of Chinese Music in Tang and Sung Dynasties" and Ren Jian's Notes on Ci (a Chinese poetic genre). The foregoing researchers used the comparative method to combine Chinese aesthetics with the Western, and had important historic meanings in the turning point of developing from classical aesthetics to the contemporary one. Since then Mr. Zuong Bei Hua (1897-1986), Professor Zhu Guang Qian (1897-1986), Professor Qian Zhuong Shu, Mr. Den Yi Zhe had done much more precise comparative researches on arts and aesthetics of the West and China.

Mr. Zong Bei Hua in his work *Strolling in Aesthetic Realm* compared poetry and painting of China and the West. He said, "Since the Egyptian, Greek and the Western

painting and sculpture represented reality life-like, they can be compared on the basis of their sculptural and architectural genesis. But on contrary, the Chinese art does not represent reality mechanically as it consists of formal beauty of rhythm in gestures and postures so that both the plastic and architectural arts are as creative as poetry.” (Pp.100- 101) Professor Zhu Quang Qian had not only wide and deep knowledge of the traditional aesthetics of China, but also did special research on the Western aesthetics. He was the most important specialist who translated several aesthetic monographs of the West into Chinese. His translations include: Plato’s *Dialogue of Literature and Art*, *Laocoon* by Lessing and *Aesthetics* by Hegel (three volumes). In his interpretive works, such as *Psychology of Literature and Art* and *Psychology of Tragedy*, Prof. Zhu introduced the psychological aesthetics of the modern West to China. Especially, we should mention here that in 1930 Prof. Zhu had translated (with an introduction) Benedetto Croce’s *Principles of Aesthetics* into Chinese (Edited by Zhen Zhong in 1947).

His thoughts had been influenced greatly by Croce. In 1987, Prof. Zhu translated another Italian aesthetician Giambattista Vico’s work *New Science* into Chinese (People’s Literature Publishing House, 1987). But he introduced Vico to China much earlier than in 1987. In 1984, his book Vico’s *New Science and its influence on Aesthetics of China and the West* was published by Hong Kong Chinese University. Professor Zhu was the first to introduce Italian aesthetics to China. Based on this translation, his monograph on poetry compared Chinese poetry with the Western tradition. His book *Psychology of Tragedy* compared the Western tragedy with the Chinese tragedy.

During the last two decades, the comparative aesthetics of China had a prospective development. After having researched on aesthetics of China and the West systematically, Professor Zhu Lai Xiang published his essay “Theoretic Comparison of Aesthetics in China and the West” in 1980. This essay had many important specialties. Because, before this essay, the comparative research in China was always piece-meal, and partial. But it was for the first time that Prof. Zhou’s essay made a comprehensive comparison of the Chinese and the Western aesthetics. More important, before this essay, the comparative research paid attention to the differences only. But this essay pointed out the general laws that both sides had. Before this essay, some of the comparative researches regarded the West as better than China. Or conversely, some of the comparative researches affirmed China and denied the West. The aim of Prof. Zhou’s essay was not to determine superiority or inferiority of the either side, but to demonstrate the respective laws and the mutual complementation of the respective laws. Prof. Zhou delivered his ideas to the Tenth Annual Meeting of the International Society for Aesthetics, and his essay was collected in the proceedings published in Canada.

Later, Prof. Jiang Kun Yiang of Fu Dan University presented his paper: “Some Comparative Studies of Aesthetic Thoughts of China and the West” (see *Learning Monthly*, Volume 3. 1982). The essay made the comparison among four aspects: social history, tradition

of thinking, practice of literature and art, and language. Prof. Jiang said, "the main trend of aesthetic thought in the West from beginning to end was of the theory of imitation. But the main aesthetic thought ancient China was prone to is the theory of expression." This opinion was similar to that of Prof. Zhou's.

Since then, Zhou Lai Xiang has been publishing a series of essays on different aspects of comparative aesthetics, such as: "Chinese Painting in Poetry and the Western Poetry in Painting," "Comparison of Aesthetic Ideals of Classic Harmony between China and the West," "Expressive Aesthetics that China was Prone to and Reproductive Aesthetics that the West was Prone to," "The Developing Tendency of Expressive Aesthetics of China and Reproductive Aesthetics of the West," "The Combination of Goodness and Beauty that China was Prone to and the Unification of Beauty and Truth that the West was Prone to," "The Intuitive of Chinese Aesthetics and the Analytic of the Western Aesthetics," "Chinese Opera and Modern Drama of the West." Prof. Zhou and his co-author Chenx Yan published a monograph of comparative aesthetics: *Outline of Comparative Aesthetics: China and the West*, which was the first monograph on global comparative aesthetics in China. His ideas on comparative aesthetics had been summed up, commented and paid much attention to, by many learned journals and papers. And his ideas had become the current opinions in this field and been received widely.

Sichuan Publishing House published a collection of Essays on *Comparative Aesthetics and Literature*. Hubei Publishing House also published another collection of essays: *Comparative Aesthetics and the Arts*. In 1984 Chinese society for aesthetics started meeting and discussing comparative aesthetics Chinese and the Western. Researches on comparative aesthetics have been developing universally, and something concrete comes up.

II

Generally speaking, the purport of comparative aesthetics in the global research is to discover the regular patterns and the laws. The regular patterns show the common characters of the West and China and the respective laws make difference between them.

Candidly, in this aspect, the systematic studies, from which some essential ideas have emerged, are the series of essays by Professor Zhou Lai Xiang, and his monograph: *Outline of Comparison between the Western and Chinese Aesthetics* (in this monograph, Professor Zhou cooperated with his student Chen Yan). Of course, there are other studies and some different opinions on this field, but they are not systematic. However, while we mainly introduce Professor Zhou's opinions, we will narrate the latter's notions partially, and thus have some integrated ideas.

Outline of Comparison between the Western and Chinese Aesthetics includes Prologue and other four parts. The Prologue mainly deals with the meanings and methodology of comparative aesthetics. The other four parts separately discuss aesthetic formations, aesthetic nature, aesthetic ideas and characters of art etc. In every part, the

discussion is unfolded according to three phases: ancient time, modern time and contemporary period. In other words, authors make the synchronous comparisons about the same conceptions and the same themes in the Occident and China. The followings are main ideas in this book that have prevailed in China today.

In the comparative research on aesthetic formations, Prof. Zhou realized that ancient aesthetics of the West was prone to analysis, and had the character of dialectical reason. But aesthetic studies in ancient China were of the intuitive and experience formation, which implied the spirit of rationality. Thereafter, in modern time, the occidental aesthetics had preferred anti-rationality or irrationality, and become sensitive experience formation more and more. To the contrary, modern aesthetics of China has broken away from the experience formation of ancient aesthetics, and is stressing more and more the dialectical reason, and emphasizing the theoretic nature. Therefore, the authors forecast that aesthetic formation in the future will be the harmonious unification of dialectical reason and sensitive experience.

On this point there are different perspectives. In 1984, there was a symposium on comparative aesthetics basing on the Occident and China, the discussion focusing the definition of aesthetic formation of ancient China. There were three different opinions: The first, agreed Prof. Zhou, that ancient aesthetics of China was the expression of intuitive experience which included the spirit of rationality. The second, because the aesthetic consciousness of ancient China was purely intuitive experience, it could not be named aesthetics in terms of the modern vocabulary. The third considered that aesthetic studies of ancient China also reflected dialectical reason which had high level of theory.

In the context of aesthetic nature, Prof. Zhou and his students, think that, the aesthetics of ancient China inclined to be ethical whereas modern trend breaks away from the ancient Western aesthetics that tended to be religious. China gradually began to break away from the ethical mode, and had the anti-ethical tendency. Modern aesthetics of the West also began to break away from the religious trend, and both pursued an aesthetic freedom, gradually attaining self-discipline in contemporary ages. The Western aesthetics had turned from its noumenal to psychological character, and emphasized desire and instinct of mankind. "From Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud to Jung, antirational aestheticians of the West made great efforts to free aesthetics from rational category, and set it in the perceptual life" (*Outline*, p.110). Comparatively, contemporary aesthetics of China has broken through the limitations of traditional epistemology and absorbed social practice in order to explore the third realm of aesthetics between the rational knowledge of science and perceptual ethical practice. This kind of aesthetics does not separate aesthetics from scientific knowledge and perceptual practice, and looks like independent realm of total self-discipline. Moreover, it is not a mixture of scientific knowledge and perceptual practice to deny its independent perspectives as aesthetic realm.

How to understand a combination of Chinese aesthetics with the Western aesthetics in the future? The authors observe, "If the contemporary aesthetics of the West

foster sensationalism and psychologism more and more, to be sure, the aesthetics of contemporary China has fostered rationalism and socialism more and more. Both are confronted with the huge challenge of the historical questions, how to combine the historical genesis of aesthetics with individual aesthetic actions? That means, how can aesthetics change from the qualitative analysis to quantitative analysis, from abstract analysis to concrete analysis, from pure theory to guarding practice. To meet this challenge we have to work a lot that would encompass historical and social researches, as well as studies in individuality and psychology, also including researches in the issues of rationality and consciousness, studies in consciousness and irrationality, because aesthetic actions organically are made of contradictions of history and individual, rationality and irrationality, consciousness and unconsciousness. Therefore, while we study sociological aesthetics, we have to assimilate the achievements of the Western psychological aesthetics. Thus we can form our own theoretical superiority to solve the aesthetic mystery” (*Outline*, p. 110).

Considering the aesthetic ideals, Prof. Zhou pointed out that, ancient aesthetics of both the Occident and China regarded harmony as the ideal of beauty. Beauty and harmony were two concepts, which were used to express the same thing simultaneously. Even though, harmony as the ideal of beauty had different inclinations, aesthetic harmony of the ancient Occident emphasized physical and formal qualities. But the aesthetic harmony of ancient China tended to be subjective, psychological, and emotional.

In Greece, Pythagoras used mathematics to study music. Pythagoras discovered that beauty of music was nothing but the harmony and unification of antithetic factors. Beauty of music must develop multiplicity into unification, and transform inharmonic into coherence. Heraclitus still thought that beauty was nothing but the coherence of diverse things. And the most beautiful music was made of diverse tones. Aristotle said, a beautiful thing was that, whose different parts must have a given arrangement; its volume should have a given size, so that its integration could emerge. To Aristotle, the integration of things was the harmony of tone as represented in the human body and physical forms.

Conversely, in ancient China, Confucius was the first to pay attention to the balance and harmony between feeling and reason. His aesthetic ideal was: “Pleasure, not licentiousness, sentiment not tragedy.” Confucius looked for the golden medium of philosophy and thought that pleasure and sentiment should be controlled by reason in order to gain balance and harmony. Ancient Chinese poetics, developed by Confucius in a great work, *The Book of Songs (The Book of Odes)* maintained that a poem should be “soft and warm, honest and sincere.” Its purport was to attain a harmonious state of feelings. Moreover, Confucian school was prone to the coherence between feelings and reason, man and man. Taoism preferred the unity of things and human beings. Zhuang Zi (about 369-286 B.C.) said, “Divine pleasure is the sovereign pleasure.” For Zhuang Zi, heaven was a part of nature. Being harmonious with heaven meant being harmonious with nature. Zhuang Zi thought that the harmony could be up to the realm of aesthetic freedom in which “mind could travel and fly with every thing unlimitedly.”

In ancient times, the differences of aesthetic ideals rooted in the respective cultural background. The aesthetic ideal of the ancient Occident was shaped by its background of the Western religious culture. The harmony of form was related with Greek philosophy in which number was regarded as the noumenon of the universe. Therefore, the nature of beauty had the relationship with number. The concept of form-harmony still was the nature of universe and the nature of human thinking. Thereby, aesthetic harmony tended to be the formata, and had the meaning of metaphysical philosophy. In the Middle Ages, the aesthetic harmony was related with God, and was due to God. Thus the aesthetic harmony meant the coherence of God and human being. To the contrary, aesthetic harmony of ancient China was the harmony of feelings and reason. And its aim was of adjusting human psyche, man and nature, in addition to social relationship of man and man. Its tendency was not the harmony between God and human, but the harmony between man and man. Thus, if the ancient aesthetics of the Occident fostered relationship with the celestial (God), the ancient aesthetics of China was of the terrestrial and secular. This character was formed by the ancient culture of patriarchal clan system.

In short, ancient aesthetic harmony as the ideal of beauty was consistent with the belief that sense and reason, body and soul could not be disintegrated, as also with the coherence between man and nature, man and society. Simultaneously that kind of aesthetic harmony was shaped by methods of simple dialectical thinking. Emphasis upon motion, relationship and unification of diverse factors was the mode of thinking in Greece. On the other hand, emphasis upon moderation, supplementation and complementation was the character of ancient philosophy of China. Therefore, ancient China could balance and adjust diverse factors into a stable, orderly harmonious and organic integration.

However, in modern times, following the establishment of capitalism, accompanied by the drastic contradiction between individual and society, following the awakening of human being and liberation of individual character as modern metaphysics stressed the disintegration and antithesis so also modern aesthetics broke through peaceful classic harmony, and emphasized subjectivity, contradiction, and antithesis. Therefore, sublime as a new concept of aesthetics replaced the aesthetic ideal of the ancient harmony. This was a general historical trend in both modern China and the modern West.

In the modern West, one who first talked about sublime was Edmund Burke. Although before Burke, in Roman Empire, there was Longinus to talk of it. But sublimity in Longinus did not go beyond the limitation of harmonious tone. Even though sublime in Longinus also was characteristic of expressing strong feeling, with astonishing power. But it still was only to please people. It concentrated on harmony, not antithesis. Burke separated beauty and sublimity, and established the principle of distinguishing them. Burke thought that beauty and sublimity rooted in two diverse desires of human being, one was "communication in society," and the other was "self-protection." The pleasure produced by the former was active without pain. When pleasure is caused by the harmonious response between aesthetic object and subject, without secular desires, this pure pleasure is aesthetic

pleasure. When pleasure is caused by conflict and antithesis between aesthetic object and subject, the conflict and antithesis cannot damage subject; the pleasure with pain is sublimity and the object is sublime. After Burke, Immanuel Kant has distinguished between beauty and sublimity from the point of view of philosophical aesthetics. He observes that, from the point of view of object, beauty is due to harmony of objective form, which produces pleasure. To the contrary, sublime object is “amorphous,” and its measurelessness of quantity and limitlessness of power cannot make the subject take hold of its form. From the point of view of the subject, aesthetic pleasure is direct, and comes from the harmonious responsive motion between imagination and intelligence (reason) and harmonious form of object. But sublimity is indirect. When imagination and intelligence forced by amorphous object become impotential, the subject had to awake power of ethical reason. By virtue of the ethical rationality, subject overcomes the limitation of perceptual ego extricates from dire state of imagination and intelligence (reason), so that subject could defeat the oppression of natural object and change pain to pleasure. If sublimity in Kant mainly expresses conflicts between man and nature, sublimity in Hegel, in his theory of tragedy, discovers conflict and antithesis between man and society. Hegel was the first to bring conflict into the theory of tragedy. But the realization of the ideal of one side damages the ideal of the other side. The damage is the prerequisite for the realization of every side, so that both sides have their one-sidedness. Thus the conflict, which damages both sides causes tragedy.

In China sublimity as aesthetic tendency appeared in the middle period of Ming Dynasty. Xu Wei (1521-1593), Li Zhi (1527-1602) and Tu Lun, three famous writers during that time, first showed that they preferred sublimity. In their opinion, the real astonishing aesthetic perception was accompanied by pain, all of them appreciating the aesthetic state including magnificence and joyfulness. But, in aesthetic history of China, one who first hit on the concepts of sublimity and tragedy was Wang Gou Wei, a genuine scholar. Mr. Wang was influenced by Kant and Schopenhauer, and distinguished between “magnificent beauty” and “fine beauty.” But his magnificent beauty still did not break away from the aesthetic ideal of classical harmony between sense and reason, object and subject. He considered the magnificent beauty, as the result of disintegration of existent will. Thereby, the spirit of his magnificent beauty had stressed the disintegration and antithesis and has been characteristic of sublimity in modern aesthetics. Then Cai Yuan Pei (1968-1980) advocated “splendid beauty.” He thought highly of the love tragedy of *A Dream in Red Mansions*, a famous novel written by Cou Xua Qing. Lu Xian, a great writer in modern China, still advocated “great beauty,” “heroic beauty,” and “majestic beauty,” etc. He had the greatest esteem for the Romantic Movement. In his several essays, for instance, “On the fall of Lei Feng Tower,” “On the fall of Lei Feng Tower Once Again,” Lu Xian sharply criticized classical harmony as an aesthetic ideal, and advocated “a tragedy in which a beloved thing is destroyed.” Accordingly Zhou Lei Xiang asserted that tragedy and sublimity as aesthetic ideal had become predominant trend in the aesthetic consciousness of modern China.

Currently, mainstream aesthetics in the West has diverted its attention from sublimity to ugliness. Mainstream aesthetics in today China has developed from disintegration of sublimity to revert the classic harmony. In essence, ugliness as an important factor of aesthetics never appeared until the contemporary time. Ugliness in ancient arts was not regarded as aesthetic essence. As Aristotle said, "It was harmless." Ugliness in ancient arts was subordinate and had no independent position. It also barely appeared in ancient arts. Just up to the contemporary time, following more and more drastic social contradictions with the rising of metaphysical thinking, ugliness as a factor of aesthetics climbed on the historical stage. Ugliness as disharmony, anti-harmony and extreme opponent of harmony appeared in aesthetic field. However, its appearance broke through the classic tranquility, through the classic harmonious cycle, and led to engender sublimity in contemporary time. In fact, the decisive element, which developed from unity and harmony, stable and static aesthetics of ancient time to modern aesthetic categories, such as sublimity, funniness and tragedy, is ugliness. It is ugliness that expedited several aesthetic categories in the contemporary period. As Bosanquet said, if there was not ugliness, the concrete changes of aesthetics in modern ages would not have engendered. Victor Hugo also expressed the same at the beginning of nineteenth century. He said, beauty was only a type, but ugliness could change unlimitedly. In modern thoughts, funniness, ugliness, and absurdity have prevalent influence on human lives. They are omni-existent. On the one hand, they created abnormality and fearfulness. On the other hand, they engendered laughter and funniness (See Victor Hugo: *Prologue of Cromwell*).

In China, ugliness as an important factor of aesthetics appeared after Ming Dynasty. At the end of Ming Dynasty, two famous poets, Yuan Hong Dao (1568-1610) and Yuan Zhong Dao (1570-1625) clearly pointed out that the best poem was one in which ugly parts and beautiful parts existed simultaneously. And they liked the ugly parts especially. This was the symbol of aesthetic change, and predicted the disintegration of classic harmony and the importance of ugliness. But up to the beginning of 20th century, ugliness just got its independent status. Xu Zhi Me (1896-1931) a modern poet, said: "My voice is like the sharp yell of owl in a graveyard, because the whole harmony of man had been killed thoroughly," (Xu Zhi Me, *On The Inner Criticism and My Attitude About Poetry*, Guang Hua Publishing House, 1925). Although the appearance of ugliness in contemporary time was the same in both the Occident and China, functions, positions and developing track of ugliness were different in both sides, because of the essential differences in social systems, cultures, and modes of thinking. Based on the antithesis principle, the Western culture reinforced disharmonious factors. Day after day, it had developed toward anti-harmony. Thereby, harmonious factors in its sublimity as aesthetic ideal had been lesser and lesser, whereas, ugliness and anti-harmonious factors have grown stronger. At last, beauty and sublimity have been neglected. Only ugliness has been spared, and become predominant. This is the important change from modern ages to contemporary time. In modern ages, ugliness was an active factor. It broke through and negated the classic harmony, but it

could not negate harmony itself. It was effective as a limited subsidiary factor. On the other hand, sublimity in modern aesthetics always changed from antithesis, conflicts and disharmony to new harmony at least. But when ugliness gained predominant position, and took hold of the crown of contemporary arts, it became an independent formation of aesthetics, instead of beauty and sublimity. Historically, in Auguste Rodin's sculptures, we find tight combination of beauty and ugliness, and we also find that beauty always wins in this combination at last. But in Charle Baudelaire's poems, in Franz Kafka's novels, and in absurd dramas, we do not find the tight combination of beauty and ugliness. Ugliness has played a predominant role in those works. Baudelaire wanted to find beauty in evil or sin, and wrote *Flowers of Evil*. In the *Metamorphosis*, Kafka absurdly described evils and sin in contemporary society, in which evil and sin predominated everything. Thereupon, when it is not incredible Jean-Paul Sartre said, "reality never is beautiful, beauty only belongs to a fictitious value." In his essay, "On the Genesis of Art," he said, "the mission of art was to discover darkness and preserve it from disappearance." We can regard Sartre's opinion as artistic theory of ugliness and aesthetics of ugliness. Generally speaking, the development of ugliness in contemporary aesthetics enlarges the domain of aesthetics. But it also brings in some unwanted by-products.

Different from the Western tendency that led to ugliness, contemporary arts of China, by virtue of the development of sublimity, broke through the cycle of classic harmony. Contemporary arts reinforced and absorbed ugliness and disharmonious elements, and emphasized essential antithesis. But meanwhile, importantly, its development has been guarded by dialectical harmonious ideal, and considered dialectical harmony as a home to return. Thus, it never makes ugliness extreme. Despite its upset what the classic harmonious cycle will realize is not extreme ugliness but a new kind of beauty of dialectical harmony. Of course, it will be a long historical process to realize this aim.

Frankly speaking, there are several aesthetic scholars who disagree with Zhou Lai Xiang. They point out that, beauty, sublimity and ugliness as aesthetic categories are juxtaposed. In every historical period, they existed abreast, and they had the given connotations, which never change with the development of history. Both ancient and contemporary periods talk of beauty, sublime and ugliness. But in Zhou's opinion, beauty, sublimity and ugliness as aesthetic categories emerged from different periods of history. Ancient time was a world of beauty without sublimity and ugliness. In modern ages, by virtue of the development of ugliness, sublimity, tragedy and comedy in a strict manner appeared on historical stage. In the contemporary West, ugliness had been predominant. But in contemporary China, ideal of beauty had changed from classic harmony, through sublimity to dialectical harmony. There are two sharp different opinions in today's China about comparative aesthetics Occidental and Chinese.

On the nature of art, Zhou says, there are different views of art in different times. Ancient art, whether in ancient China, or in the ancient West, was art of beauty, or was harmonious art, or in other words, was art of classicism. It orderly sought for unification

between imitation and expression, reality and ideal, emotion and rationality, connotation and form. Nevertheless, it also looked for harmony, balance and orderly unity between factors of expressive form. Zhou thinks that classicism has two meanings. In a narrow sense classicism is Neo Classicism of the seventeenth century Europe. In a broad sense, classicism is used by Zhou, to refer to all the arts of ancient times before modern industrialization. In other words, classicism considers harmonious beauty as the aesthetic ideal. This notion is different from that of other scholars. Generally speaking, in China, many aestheticians and literary theorists think that “realism” and “romanticism” occurred in ancient time, and both of them had run through modern ages. They date the genesis of realism and romanticism to the epics and tragedies in ancient Greek, and *The Book of Songs* and *Chu Poem* in ancient China.

According to Zhou, although ancient arts in both the traditions were classicist, yet every side had its particular stress. Classic arts in ancient China were prone to subjective expression, ideal, feelings and poetry. In the ancient Occident classic arts were prone to imitation, reproduction, reality, intelligence (reason) and plasticity. Ancient China was poetic. And its poetry, musical dance and calligraphy got splendid achievements. Conversely, the West was hometown of painting, and its sculpture, painting, epic and drama bore excellent fruits. Comparatively, in the West, sculpture laid particular stress on anatomy of human body; painting was particularity about focal perspective and regarded reproducing objects as its main mission. In ancient China sculpture without anatomy of human body, painting without perspectives, paid much attention to describe the spirit and the meaning of object, and to permit the focal perspective to emphasize the interests of colour and touches. Their aim was to express the subjective emotions. In the ancient West, drama mainly was made of dialogues, and paid much attention to narrate plot and events. In the Western drama imitation was dominant. But in ancient China, drama mainly was made up of songs, laid particular stress on stylized performance and skills. In Chinese drama, subjective expression was predominant. Calligraphy becomes a fine art, because China had expressive tradition. Line and colour could be used to express subjective feelings. But in the West, the imitation of art could not develop calligraphy. Generally, subjective arts of ancient China sought for the union of subject and object. Thus, artistic theory of China developed a maxim: “poetry expresses will.” It asserted that “poetry should create poetic conception.” Conversely, based on objectivity, art in ancient West went in quest for union of individuality and generality. Thus, it developed “imitation theory,” “genre-character” and “personally typical character.” It is important to repeat the following: both the Occidental and Chinese arts in ancient time had some particular stresses, but both of them still belonged to classicism. Of course, the particular stresses were within the limits of harmony, of expression and imitation, of emotion and reason. For example, the Western art considered painting as its representative: “There is painting in poetry,” whereas ancient Chinese art regarded poetry as its representative: “There is poetry in painting.” These characteristics were sharply and essentially dissimilar in modern and contemporary

conditions. In modern and contemporary ages particular stress is laid on antitheses of expression to reproduction (imitation), of reality to ideal. This antithesis led to different movements such as "Realism" and "Romanticism." Consequently, what classic art sought for was beauty, harmony, not antithesis and sublimity. It is Classicism, neither Realism nor Romanticism that defines the ancient art.

It is inevitable that other aestheticians have different ideas in China. Some of them think that ancient arts of China had only expression without any kind of imitation, without painting and that the ancient arts of the West had only reproduction without any kind of expression, without poetry. Some think that "expression" and "reproduction" are not the concepts in terms of which the ancient Western art and ancient Chinese art could be distinguished.

In modern and contemporary society, following the change of aesthetic ideals of sublimity to ugliness, Realism developed into Naturalism, then into Surrealism and photo-realism. Romanticism had developed into Concrete-Expressionism, then to Abstract-Expressionism. To the contrary, in China, accompanied by the change of the aesthetic ideal from classic harmony to sublimity, then to beauty of dialectical harmony, changed from Realism and Romanticism to disintegration of Modernism. It will create a monastical art which will really get dialectical unity of expression and reproduction, ideal and reality.

Whether in the modern West or in contemporary China, artists were not satisfied with the ideal of harmony and principle that "poetry and painting have common principles." They looked for the integration and antithesis between reality and ideal, imitation and expression, emotion and reason. Thus they also made the antithesis between poetry and painting the arts that developed independently of each other. This also encouraged the development of the theory of artistic type, and the creation of character changed from the genre-character to the individualized typical-character.

In the modern West, Lessing was the first to shake the traditional ideal, which believed that poetry, and paintings have common principles. In *Laocoon*, Lessing pointed out that poetry and painting were antithetic to one another. In Ming dynasty of China, Zhang Dai, a prose writer, also doubted the tradition of "ut pictura poesis." He said, "If poets follow the principles of painting, then the poetry they write is precarious; so also if the painters follow the principles of poetry, then their painting is a failure." (*Collection of Lang Huan*, "A Letter to Bao Yan Je"). Rejection of the principle that "poetry and painting have common laws" clearly discovered the disintegration and antithesis between poetry and painting, expression and imitation, ideal and reality. Those integrations and antitheses had developed into two kinds of artistic tendencies. The first was Realism, which faced the exterior objective world and portrayed blood and flesh of life. The second was Romanticism, which confronted the interior world and expressed emotion and will in one's deep heart. Therefore, in order to make imitation more concrete, more precise and more true to life the Realist artists made much effort to avoid expressing their subjective feelings and attitudes. They let plot, heroes or events in work express themselves, and let their own subjective

feelings and attitudes of minds naturally permeate in plot, heroes and events. To the contrary, for the sake of expressing the interior subjective world incisively and vividly, Romanticism created or imaged figures and heroes to display their ideals and individuality. In one word, Realism imitated the full and complicated individualized typical character. Romanticism vividly expressed the surging mind of the individual world.

After the end of nineteenth century, especially in the twentieth century, modernist arts developed into pluralistic period without entry to mainstream. There were many-isms in this period, such as: Naturalism, Decadent, Aestheticism, Impressionism, Imagism, Formalism, Futurism, Expressionism, Existentialism, Structuralism, Neo-Realism, Surrealism, Magic Realism, Photo-Realism, Stream of Consciousness, Drama of the Absurd, and Black Humor. But seeing through those schools, we still could find two basic tendencies of arts. One came from Realism, through Naturalism, and developed into Surrealism and Photo-Realism. The other came from Romanticism, through Concrete-Expressionism, and changed into the Abstract Expressionism. Both of them were the results of the extreme development of modern Realism and Romanticism. Despite the fact that Naturalism had the same doctrine as that of Realism and looked for describing subjective reality, it made the artistic functions of imitation and reproduction extremized and absolutized. On the one hand, it wanted to mirror every thing in reality including ugly, dirty, evil, and intolerable things. Because everything in reality could be represented in arts. Thus, it enlarged the descriptive domain of art. On the other hand, it wanted to avoid any emotional or subjective expression, and to make description absolutely objective. In order to keep the original feature of descriptive objects from being obstructed and being whitewashed, Naturalism sacrificed Realist principle of creating artistic type. Thus, it developed from the individualized typical character into the extreme non-type and antitype. It changed the Realist attitude that an artist could not express his subjective feelings directly, into another extreme which rejected to show any subjective tendency of politics and thoughts. But more extremely, Photo-Realism thought that art must be as lifelike as photograph, and the artist should be as objective as a camera. Thereby, Photo-Realism went farther away than Naturalism. Evolving from Romanticism, Expressionism logically led to another extreme of expressive arts. Hence Martiss, a founder of Fauvism, pointing out the principles of Expressionism, announced that, what he sought for was "expression." The whole arrangement of his paintings were to express the emotional world of the artist. Although Cubism and Pablo Picasso's arts did not cast off the influence of objective things, it made them out of shape or used geometric forms. Therefore, we can call Cubism "Concrete Expressionism." But in Wassily Kandinsky, who developed abstract art, paintings became symphony made up of points, lines, colours, and had entirely lost any objective figure. In Kandinsky's hands, paintings tended to become musical. Kandinsky took painting toward extreme point to create Abstract Expressionism. Comparatively, the Abstract Expressionism went farther away from Romanticism. In fact, Romanticism had not cast off objectivity. It tried to express the interior world and ideal through abstracting and exaggerating life images. But Expressionism had cast off all life images and rationality, and its expressions concentrated on the unconscious.

Whereas Modernist arts of the contemporary West was tending to be dualistic, China, in the 1980s hit on the improvement rush. Almost all of aesthetic thoughts and artistic schools of the West unprecedentedly were introduced and translated to Chinese, and had great influence on aesthetic theories and creation of arts. In the last decade, artistic schools emerged in large numbers, such as: "Obscure Poetry," The "Third Generation's Poetry," "New Trend Novel," "New Trend Painting," "Sentimental Literature," "Vanguardian Literature," "New Realism," and "Documentary Literature." These schools in several aspects were similar to the modern arts of the West. They had an idea that subject and object develop into extreme opposition consciously or unconsciously. For instance, "New Trend Painting," "New Trend Novel," and the "Third Generation's Poetry" were similar to Expressionism. To the contrary, "New Realism," "Documentary Literature" relatively were similar to Naturalism and Photo-Realism. But some artists swung between two poles. Famous film director, Zhaung Yi Mu, for example, eagerly expressed subjective world in his films, such as: *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raising Red Lanterns*. He used strong passion, ridiculous imaginations and swift scenes to exhibit an idealized reality. Then in his recent film, *Qiou Ju Went To Count*, the Zhang turned from subjective world to pure objective world and created the documentary style. It seemed that there were no special performance, no actors. Everything in the film was natural and belonged to life itself. Zhang Yi Mu said, *Qiou Ju Went To Count* was a turn in the course of his venture. It took care of man, took care of perceptual and plentiful man and man's fate. It was compensation for his former films, which were too idealized, too ideologized and too emotional. Its aim was to mix or combine idea, image, passion sensation and reality together. In a few words, the dualistic development of arts in contemporary China, the antithesis of subject to object has attained some one-sided achievements, and has prepared prerequisite conditions for a higher dialectical synthesis.

Moreover, in today China, besides Zhou and his co-author who did comparative researches with 'an international dimension, there are many other kinds of comparative studies. Some are monographs. Some are essays. The topics include: aesthetic categories and concepts in the Western and Chinese traditions, concrete comparative studies of painting, music, novel, drama and poetry in both. For example: Hu Tao's, "Zhu Guang Qian and Aesthetics of Benedetto Croce" (*Journal of Su Zhou University*, Issue 2, 1985); Wen Ru Ming's, "Lu Xiun's Aesthetic Thoughts in His Early Days and Japanese Aesthetics;" Qiao De Wen's "Differences of Tragedy in China and the West" (*Drama Art*, Issue 1, 1982); Yu Chen Kun, "Comparison of Comedy in China and The West" (*Journal of Jin Yang*, Issue 3, 1984); Cao Shun Qing's "Theory of Feeling Object and Theory of Imitating Object," "Research-Notes of Aesthetic thought in China and the West" (*Study of Literature and Arts*, Issue 4, 1983). All the essays mentioned above studied concrete problems of comparative aesthetics, and had unique achievements. Their analyses have been very subtle and precise.

III

Chinese comparative aesthetics has made great achievements. With the further development of China, improvement in the further correlation between the Western and Chinese aesthetics will deepen and enlarge the important spheres of conceptual issues in the philosophy and praxis of art and art criticism.

The development of Chinese comparative aesthetics must pay attention to two important points. First of all, the mission of Chinese comparative aesthetics is to find out the general laws that both sides have and the respective laws that one side has, but not to study the issue of inferiority and superiority on the either side. We need neither Westernization, nor rejection of the influence of the West. The mission of Chinese comparative aesthetics is to absorb all superior benefits of the Western aesthetic culture, and through correlation with one another develop the traditional aesthetic culture of China into a high level. Meanwhile, we should introduce the aesthetic culture of China to the whole world. Another most important point, we have neglected so far, is to pay attention to our South-East Asian brotherhood. Aesthetic culture in the Indian subcontinent as early as the 7th c. B.C., in the writings of Yaska the lexicographer, influenced Friedrich Max Müller's ideas on comparative mythology. Bharata's dramaturgy is almost simultaneous to Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Indian aesthetic culture of two millennia and a half should immediately be taken into account by the Chinese scholars. Professor Ananta Sukla's noble efforts in starting publication of the first journal in comparative aesthetics, first in the Indian subcontinent, *The Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (inception 1978) has not yet been sufficiently noticed by the Chinese aestheticians who must come forward for comparing the Chinese and Indian ideas on the vital issues of aesthetics in general with a view to developing an aesthetic brotherhood in cultivating their age-old cultural relationship and founding a trend in Indo-Chinese aesthetic culture. Only one Chinese aesthetician, Zhou Lai Xiang has published in this Indian journal of comparative aesthetics. The journal needs an urgent collaboration by the Chinese scholars for a healthy tie of aesthetic activities in the Oriental culture. China should look to the Orient as well, only the Occident cannot enrich its aesthetic culture.

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