THE BEAUTY OF HARMONY:

CLUES FROM CHINESE AESTHETICS FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AND ART EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Art education can be a wonderful discipline for teaching people how to see and shape the world and find aesthetic and humanistic meaning in life. In the past few decades, however, art education has failed to fulfill its best potential largely because of the polarized debate between the modernists and postmodernists, especially in regard to the question of how the artistic self relates to the spiritual self within the context of a community. In my dissertation, the theoretical and practical possibilities of contemporary art education are explored through comparative studies of Western and Chinese aesthetics and art education theories. Art educators are the agents for change in the field. Thus, my main aim in this dissertation is to examine possibilities, and map out directions that reflect meaning and value in art for the improvement of art teacher education.

There is much that Chinese aesthetic theory can contribute to the development of Western art. Similarly, there is much of value that China can learn from Western art. In this respect, an academic visit arranged by the Chinese art educator, Professor Guo, in which my Senior Supervisor Professor Richmond and I visited three national academies of fine art in China in 2003 has become a preliminary cross-cultural dialogue between Western and Chinese art educators. Additionally, ideas and questions which came up for discussion during the academic visit have become a source for my dissertation; one key question is what are the possible solutions for offsetting the impact of globalization on contemporary art and art education? Perhaps, the Chinese concept of 'wholeness' (a vital theme in

Chinese philosophy and aesthetics) and the approach of self-cultivation (a core theory in Chinese art and art education) would be potential prescriptions.

A positive outcome of the interchange of ideas between Western and Chinese cultural tradition might be to retain the explorative energy of Western art controlled by the internal discipline of Chinese aesthetics with the aim of *training* oneself to be a good human being by *tuning* the self to live harmoniously with other people and in harmony with the earth within the eternal cosmos.

Keywords:

Western and Chinese aesthetics

Contemporary art and art education

Impact of globalization

Cross-cultural dialogue

I would like to dedicate this dissertation with much love

to my husband,

Chung-shu Chan,

the one who pulls together with me (feng yu tong zhou).

Thanks for your sympathetic encouragement.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation with much love

to my lovely daughter,

Fiona Kwok-shan Chan,

Thanks for bringing joyfulness to my life.

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GLOSSARY

bie you	別有
Ch'an	禪
chi-hsing ho-i	知行合一
chong he	沖和
Chung-kuo i-shu ching-shen	中國藝術精神
Chung-yung	中庸
Chunqiu	春秋
ci qi bi fu	此起彼伏
Cook Ding	庖丁
dao	道
Daodejing	道德經
feng yu tong zhou	風雨同舟
gu fang zi shang	孤芳自賞
Guohua	國畫
hsin	心
hua-he	化合
hui yan	慧眼

jing hong yi pie	驚鴻一瞥
le-tian zhi-ming	樂天知命
lie	里
Liji	禮記
liu-i	六藝
mei zi zhing cang	美質中藏
mere	美
Peng	鵬
pingjing	平靜
Pre-Qin	先秦
qiao shou	巧手
qing chu yu lan, er sheng yu lan	青出於藍而勝于藍
qing jing jiao rong	情景交融
shan xin	善心
shen	神
shen	身
shenqing	神情
Shijing	詩經
shiyan meishu	實驗美術

Shujing	書經
sui yu er an	隨遇而安
t'ien-jen ho-yi	天人合一
taiji	太極
Tao	道
ta-pen	大本
wu	無
Wu-si yun-dong	五四運動
xiang yan	相沿
yan	陽
yen	人
Yijing (or I Ching)	易經
Yili	義禮
yin	陰
Yuejing	樂經
Zhoul i	周禮

Painting 1　　*Chan Chung-shu*, **The Gap # 1,** *watercolour on paper, 2001.*

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INTRODUCTION:
GLOBALIZATION AND ART EDUCATION

Thinkers in the early twentieth century were exercised by a problem which is still posed today: What is the place of the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful, in a world entirely determined mechanistically?

Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self

As I made the decision to shift my graduate program from the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program to the Ph.D. Program in Art Education, after I had finished all the course work of the former program, I spent a longer time finishing my graduate studies on contemporary art and art education. This was fortuitous because it gave me an opportunity to work with art educators from both China and Canada.

Arranged by Professor Guo (the previous president of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in China), Professor Richmond (my senior supervisor) and I visited and gave lectures to three national academies of fine arts in China. They were the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the Henan Academy of Fine Arts, and the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. That academic visit was a preliminary cross-cultural dialogue between Western and Chinese art educators. The ideas which were brought out by art educators from both sides, stimulated my thinking about several questions which have become good sources for my dissertation. My studies, then, are based on a sequence of questions: What are the impacts of cultural debates between modernity and postmodernity on contemporary art and art education? How do we counterbalance the prevailing influence of the contemporary

permissive culture? What are the clues from Western and Chinese aesthetics for examining

possible solutions for offsetting the impact of globalization on contemporary art and art

education? Thus, my main aim in this dissertation is to examine possibilities, and map out

directions that reflect meaning and value in art for the improvement of art teacher

education. And the theoretical and practical possibilities for contemporary art education

are explored through comparative studies of Western and Chinese aesthetics and art

education theories.

Cultural Debates on Art in the Twentieth Century

As an art educator, I regard art education as a wonderful discipline for teaching

people how to see and shape the world and find aesthetic and humanistic meaning in life. In

the past few decades, however, art education has failed to fulfill its best potential. I have

found that the main problem comes from the polarized debate between the modernists and

postmodernists, especially in regard to the question of how the artistic self relates to the

spiritual self within the context of a community.

During much of the twentieth-century, in the West, most artists felt themselves

caught up in the conflicts of "cultural truths"[1] where modernists defined art as "high art"

and postmodernists deconstructed art as "the traditions of a people" (Eagleton, 2000, 2).

Art movements during that time had been engaged in ideological conflicts, especially when

they attempted to answer the essential question "What is the purpose of art?" Surrounding

such a crucial question, one might ask, "Is art for the individual self or for collective

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[1] In his book *The Idea of Culture* Eagleton writes, "Cultural truths – whether high art or the traditions of a people – are sometimes sacred ones, to be protected and revered. Culture, then, inherits the imposing mantle of religious authority, but also has uneasy affinities with occupation and invasion; and it is between these two poles, positive and negative, that the concept is currently pitched. It is one of those rare ideas which have been as integral to the political left as they are vital to the political right, and its social history is thus exceptionally tangled and ambivalent" (2000, 2).

selves? Is art for the subjective expression of a person or for the objective imitation of nature in life? Is art for the perfection of the elite or for the experience of the mass public? Is art for spiritual cultivation or for ordinary life enhancement? If art is a good source for morality, then what is the moral significance of the 'Good', the 'True', and the 'Beautiful' in aesthetics?" In answering the above questions, there were a number of philosophical conflicts between these two poles of cultural traditions. More seriously, as they criticized and challenged each other, at the end of twentieth-century, these polarized debates had become cultural crises (Eagleton, 2000). However, rather than being separated from life, art needs to be integrated with life; and the artist's principle is to unify art and life as 'a complex whole'. Thus, in my view, art is dialectically for both the spiritual and the ordinary life, and my arguments are threefold.

First, regarding theory, one might agree that no single aesthetic theory could become a 'universal truth' because no theory at this point, neither modernist nor postmodernist theory, could escape from the fate of its own limitations. Let us take postmodernism as an example. As Eagleton observes:

> One reason why postmodernism looks persuasive is that it promises to avoid the worst features of both Culture and culture, while preserving their more attractive qualities. If it shares the cosmopolitanism of high culture, it rejects its elitism; if it has the populism of culture as form of life, it has no patience with its organicist nostalgia. Like high culture, postmodernism is much taken with the aesthetic, though more as style and pleasure than canonical artefact; but it is a kind of 'anthropological' culture too, including clubs, fashion-houses, architecture and shopping malls as well as texts and videos, Like culture as way of life, it celebrates the particular, though a particular which is provisional rather than rooted, hybrid rather than whole. However, since postmodernism affirms the demotic and vernacular wherever on the globe it happens to find them, it combines its particularism with a certain cavalier indifference to place. Its demotic sympathies spring more from a skepticism of hierarchies than, as with culture as solidarity, from a commitment to the dispossessed. Its egalitarianism is as much a product of the commodity as a resistance to it. (2000, 77)

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During the last few decades of the twentieth-century, the problem of the radical

postmodernists, I might suggest, was that their attitude was *too* pessimistic, their thinking

was *too* irrational, their theory was *too* sceptical, and their voice was *too* political, sexual,

and vulgar. Listen! Here is an example of the contemporary voices noted by Brandon

Taylor, in *Talking Failure: Mike Kelley talking to Julie Sylvester*:

> The Arts and Crafts Movement viewed mass-produced objects as being kitsch or poor. I don't think that's the way people view them now. I think they see the manufactured object, by virtue of its 'untouched' quality, as a perfect object. And it is the model for the craft object – rather than something that predated it – all craft objects become failures in respect to it. I'm interested in objects that play up that schism – between the idealized notion behind the object and the failure of the object to attain that. (Adolescence interests me in the same way because it is about enculturation, the point at which it becomes glaringly obvious that we are unnatural and that normalcy is an acquired state. Adolescents, in being 'unsuccessful adults' reveal the lie of normal adulthood)... I like to think that I make my work primarily for those who dislike it. I get pleasure from that idea... The museum can co-opt anything; any object that is put there becomes 'high' by virtue of the context. But I have a problem with the terms 'high' and 'low' – I prefer 'allowable' and 'repressed' as they refer to usage – that is, whether a power structure allows discussion – rather than to absolutes. The museum drains meaning out of things. It's inevitable. But somewhere in their failure is the indicator of success. (Parkett 31, 1992, 100-103; cited in Brandon Taylor, 2005, 183)

The expression about failure is somewhat appealing, however, the critical position,

the way an artist handles his/her art, is merely political – a position that is adopted just for

attacking modernity. Regarding contemporary art, as I turn over the leaves of Brandon

Taylor's book *Art Today*, I can not go along with some of the radical artists. One extreme

example is Gina Pane, who, in order to "test the limit of the body's own capacity for

self-presence,"... "used her body as the site of her art, cutting and otherwise torturing body

parts in front of an audience and the camera" (ibid., 41). Brandon Taylor cites her point of

view that, "to live one's body signifies discovering one's weakness, the tragic and pitiless

servitude of its limitations" (ibid.). After considering this case of a performance by a

female body artist and many other works shown in the book *Art Today*, I ask myself,

"Could anti-art really replace art?", and my answer is "No. It cannot". Not surprisingly, as

Richmond points out, "There is growing agreement these days" among scholars such as

Eagleton (2003)[2], Butler (2002)[3], Payne & Schad (2003) and himself that, "postmodern

theory is past its most fruitful stage" (Richmond, in press, par. 22).

At the same time, it would not be wise to evaluate a theory, in this case,

postmodernism, as Taylor argues "by a simple trade-off between advantages and costs"

(1991, 11)[4]. Rather than being an unproductive theory, postmodernism potentially has

something of significance to offer. For example, contemporary painter, Gerhard Richter,

says:

> Art... is a particular mode of our daily dealings with appearance, in which
> we recognise ourselves and everything that surrounds us. Thus, art is the
> desire in the manufacture of appearances that are comparable with those of
> reality, because they are more or less similar to them. Thus, art is a
> possibility of thinking about everything differently, of recognising
> appearance as fundamentally inadequate... because of that, art has an
> educative and therapeutic, comforting and enlightening, exploratory and

---

[2] In his book *After Theory*, Eagleton says, "With the launch of a new global narrative of capitalism, along
with the so-called war on terror, it may well be that the style of thinking known as postmodernism is now
approaching an end" (2003, 221).

[3] See Butler's book *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, he writes "In this book, I have tried to give
an account and a critique of postmodernism, because I believe that the period of its greatest influence is now
over" (2002, 127).

[4] In his book, *The Malaise of Modernity*, Taylor says, "Modernity has its boosters as well as its knockers.
Nothing is agreed here, and the debate continues. But in the course of this debate, the essential nature of the
developments, which are here being decried, there being praised, is often misunderstood. And as a result, the
real nature of the moral choice to be made is obscured. In particular, I will claim that the right path to take is
neither that recommended by straight boosters nor that favoured by outright knockers. Nor will a simple
trade-off between the advantages and costs of, say, individualism, technology, and bureaucratic management
provide the answer. The nature of modern culture is more subtle and complex than this. I want to claim that
both boosters and knockers are right, but in a way that can't be done justice to by a simple trade-off between
advantages and costs. There is in fact both much that is admirable and much that is debased and frightening in
all the developments... but to understand the relation between the two is to see that the issue is not how much
of a price in bad consequences you have to pay the positive fruits, but rather how to steer these developments
towards their greatest promise and avoid the slide into the debased forms" (Taylor, 1991, 11-12).

speculative function, thus, it is not just existential pleasure, but utopia. (Richter, 1991, 118; cited in Brandon Taylor, 2005, 89)

Going back to the issue of evaluation, I suggest that, perhaps, now is a suitable time for us to engage in reflections on both modernist and postmodernist theories without too many preconceptions.

My second point, regarding ideology, is that we should adopt a pluralistic perspective. Although high art and mass art coexist in the art world, as polar opposites, nevertheless, they are constructed within a complex whole. As Edward Said states, "... all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (Said, 1993, xxix, cited in Eagleton, 2000, 15). Regarding this, there is a need for working on different cultures' organic interactions – on engagement with the harmonies of different cultural traditions. On this point, communication is very important, but what makes communication between different cultures possible? The leadership role of individuals who can keep 'an open mind' is important. And Slavoj Žižek explains that locating a shared sense of purpose can facilitate communication "...the fact that the limit which prevents our full access to the Other is *ontological*, not merely epistemological" (ibid., 96). In this way, as Žižek puts it: "The dimension of the Universal thus emerges when the two lacks – mine and that of the Other – overlap ... What we and the inaccessible Other share is the empty signifier that stands for the X which eludes both positions" (Ann Arbor, 1997, 50-51, cited in Eagleton, 2000, 96-97). However, it is still important to think about these questions – "Can there be a common culture?" If so, then 'What is meant by a common culture?' and 'How do we work out the common culture?' Regarding the nature of art and culture, according to Eagleton, one may see that, although there are still distinctions between high art and mass culture,

they are not "inherently political at all" (2000, 122). They became politically constructed

only under specific historical conditions – "They [became] political only when they [were]

caught up in a process of domination and resistance" (ibid., 123). Thus, as he argues, we

shouldn't find any logical contradiction between them. Furthermore, regarding culture and

nature, a main point here is, as Eagleton argues that it is dangerous when "… culture is

grasped as *self*-culture… Nature now is not just the stuff of the world, but the dangerously

appetitive stuff of the self" (ibid., 5). In this regard, I will pay more attention to Eagleton's

discussions on the phenomenon of the middle class's "classless culture", the idea that

"consumerism is classless" in postmodernism, "which is to say that it cuts across class

divisions while driving a system of production which finds such division indispensable"

(ibid., 125). Thus consumerism seems to be producing a common culture. However, there

are still some different ideas about the status of the common culture, which are elucidated

by Eliot and Williams. Eliot's view is that

> [The] higher level of culture must be thought of both as valuable in itself,
> and as enriching of the lower levels: thus the movement of culture would
> proceed in a kind of cycle, each class nourishing the others. (Eliot, 1948, 37,
> cited in Eagleton, 2000, 118)

William's view, as summarized by Eagleton, is that

> … a common culture is one which is continuously remade and redefined by
> the collective practice of its members, not one in which values framed by
> the few are then take over and passively lived by the many. For this, he
> prefers the term 'culture in common'…. Williams's notion of a common
> culture is thus inseparable from radical socialist change. It requires an ethic
> of common responsibility, full democratic participation at all levels of
> social life, including material production, and egalitarian access to the
> culture-fashioning process. But the product of this conscious political
> activity is, ironically, a certain unconsciousness. (2000, 119)

However, in my view, we should cut art loose from politics, so that, in the nature of art, one can see that the value of either high art or mass art is perhaps, only the choice of the individual. Here, I think the idea of Wittgenstein's that "In order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world" (Notebooks 1914-1916, 75) which Tilghman cited in his book *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: the View from Eternity* is helpful. According to Tilghman:

> To be in agreement with the world, I take it, is to recognise that the world is just the totality of facts, that there is no value in it and that value, that is good and evil, enters only through my will; it is simply to accept the world as it is and to live in the knowledge that this is what it is. And this is the solution to the problem of life. (1991, 60)

Thus, from this perspective, one may only see:

> The situation of the world with respect to the self is analogous to a perspectively correct painting which is painted to be seen from a single point of view. The self represents the world as seen from a particular point of view. There is yet more to this than the spatial analogy of the painting allows; the metaphysical self just is the willing self and that means the point of view from which the world is seen is also an *ethical* one. (Tilghman,1991, 60)

On this point, I would suggest, the "common culture", a classless culture, could function as a bridge to connect both high art and the popular way of life. Or, from a Chinese perspective, a common culture should just be an open-ended continuum – transferring from one end to the other end of cultural traditions, and high art can also be regarded as the achievement of a different level of maturation (of both meaning and skills). Thus, the ground is constantly shifting – the relationship between high art and mass art is interactive, each drives the other in different ways. That is something like having to add a different amount of black gradually to turn light grey into charcoal and add white to turn charcoal

into light grey. In Chinese the saying is, 'something rising here and subsiding there' (*ci qi bi fu*).

Third, regarding practice, a main concern here is the debate on the idea of imagination. I will focus on the movement of Romanticism[5] and the practical concept of imagination. Romanticism was a great humanistic phase of Western art. Since the Romantic era, the idea of imagination – the abandonment of reason to express man's thinking and feeling in art, has become a central issue in artistic creativity. In his *Introduction* for the book *Art of the Western World*, Michael Wood notes that, according to Baudelaire, "The key to Romanticism is not science or even truth but feeling" (quoted in Wood et al., 1989, xviii). And as Wood points out: "Imagination and the self-determining will [have become] paramount" (ibid.). Thus, in the modern world, the romantic root of individualism has irrevocably changed the function of art from the imitation of nature to the expression of subjective experience. Romanticism has had both positive and negative influences on the modern art world. On its positive side, perhaps, its significance to artistic creativity is the idea about developing the spiritual self with the artist's personal passionate expressiveness in his/her creations. For instance, the Impressionists translated their subjective experience... "perception, optics, colour and light onto their shimmering canvases" (ibid., xix). But on the negative side, radical Romanticism has overestimated the capability of man, and paradoxically resulted in the alienation of man from nature. For

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[5] According to Cole and Gealt, "*Romanticism,* though a loose and imprecise term, reflects the movement of writers, musicians, painters, and sculptors away from rationalism toward the more subjective side of human experience. Feeling [in this era] became both the subject and object of art. Love, for instance, was seen as an overpowering emotion, beyond the control of reason and capable of inflicting death on its victims. Goethe's tale of Werther, who committed suicide for love, intoxicated Europe when it was published in 1774. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* became a powerful symbol of the era, with its portrayal of a highly sensitive, self-indulgent, passionate youth. Love had become a form of madness, and madness in its many manifestations became one of the central themes of Romantic art" (Wood et al., 1989, 214).

instance, as Wood puts it, "By the 1920s, abstraction in the arts had become the paramount mode, with man all but banished from the picture plane" (ibid.).[6] Consequently, the language in modern painting has changed radically from the dominant modes of representation to abstraction. Additionally, Tilghman argues:

> The typical artist of the twentieth century, we hardly need to remind ourselves, has not undertaken to paint representationally, or at any rate, representation has not been his primary aim. This century's move into abstract and non-representational art and its subsequent dominance of artist practice can be understood to call into question the role and importance of the human in art. (1991, 145)

However, from a historical perspective, I would agree with scholars like Wood (1989) and Spalding (2003) that, the pendulum of artistic creativity has swung inevitably between emotion and reason. In fact, man has to make a careful balance between emotion and reason. Perhaps here it would be helpful to understand the relationship between abstraction and representation from a Chinese perspective. Distinctively, the idea of abstraction in Chinese calligraphy or painting is, that is non-abstract in form, but abstract in meaning. One can find that there is no conflict between abstraction and representation in Chinese painting. An example of the non-abstract form yielding abstract meaning is found in a work by Huo Chunyang (see Painting 2).

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[6] As Wood says, "The central material facts of Western history over the last one hundred fifty years have been industrialization the population explosion, and the creation of a mass proletariat and liberal democracy. In terms of culture, the breakdown of the old value system, the decline of religion, and the emergence of a scientific view of the world distinguish this period from all others, and these factors have irrevocably changed the function of art. The roots of this world view can be sought in the West's long tradition of individualism; in the rise of Protestantism and capitalism in northwestern Europe in the Renaissance; in the separation of secular, rational, scientific philosophy from the spiritual life, which gains in pace from the Renaissance onward. These themes all converge in Romanticism. The values of this new age were not piety or virtue, as in the ancient world; not loyalty or constancy, the old Roman virtues; not religious faith or even scientific truth, but the capacity for experience.... The subjective experience of the world now became all-important, as the concept grew of the artist as an individual, with an independently creative will, freed from the traditional system of patron and his status as a technician. But other realities and ideas were also altering established Western beliefs about man and his place in the world and cosmos" (ibid., xviii).

Painting 2   *Huo Chunyang*
The Fragrance of the Flower Drifts from the Paper, *Chinese Ink, 2000.*

Huo writes in his poem:

The blue onion (her leaves and flowers) rests rather by a rock,

She doesn't want to contend in beauty with the others.

I paint her, the orchid(s), on a paper by the little window,

Her fragrance drifts from the paper.

A verbal message by Chunyang

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Obviously, we can get Huo's message from his painting that he praises the Orchid as a symbolic charming character, although she keeps herself aloof from the others (*gu fang zi shang*).

In the West, the practical concept of imagination in visual art, for example in a representational painting, according to Currie, encompasses two kinds of imagination: the "simulative" imagination and "nonsimulative" imagination (2001, 254). As he says, regarding visual experience, that experience might derive from the simulative imaginative event because "it cannot fully be described without reference to the kind of event of which [it] is a copy" (ibid.). However, creativity that "leads to the creation of something valuable in art [involves 'nonsimulative' imagination]" (ibid.). I agree with Currie that both kinds of imagination play an important role in a work of art, or, in some sense, one may say that the claim for great art belongs to both kinds of imagination. For instance, from the Chinese perspective, the idea of a great art is that it is a creation of an artist which both inherits from and transcends the master artist. In addition, I would suggest that perhaps the Chinese idea of practice corresponds more appropriately to the nature of creativity – the Chinese artists derive visual experience from simulating the master artist, however, they emphasize both inheritance and transcendence. The Chinese expression for this is 'to progress beyond the ability of one's mentor' (*qing chu yu lan, er sheng yu lan*). Chinese culture has evolved in this way.

The Impact of Globalization in Contemporary Culture and Art Education

To return to Taylor's question "What is the place of the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful, in a world entirely determined mechanistically?" (1989, 459) Redefining the

value of philosophical aesthetic education in the market culture is a great challenge to art educators. Initially, perhaps, there is no agreement on whether or not we need to work for a place for the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful. In another sense, this is also a question about rule following and morality. For some people, the moral goods are traditional rigid ethic rules, and very hard to reach. Furthermore, in the past few decades, such kinds of moral claims have become a weapon in the cultural wars between modernists and postmodernists. In the art world, avant-garde artists denied Kant's "disinterested" aesthetic judgment on beauty as the "monster sublime"[7] or the elite's "high art" (Wendy Steiner, 2001, 1-31). However, we might also worry about the ethical issue of some postmodernist pornographic art works. More seriously, as Eagleton argues, "The clash between Culture and culture, however, is no longer simply a battle of definitions, but a global conflict. It is a matter of actual politics, not just academic ones" (2000, 51). In short, nowadays, some people might tell you that it is futile to work on the idea of finding the place for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. For them, there should be no place in art education to seek for the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful, because the philosophy of artistic epiphany has already died. Perhaps it is true that in the contemporary art world these ideals have been exiled; but I believe they will come back again or perhaps they are already back.

Secondly, "What is the place of the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful, in a world entirely determined mechanistically?" (Taylor, 1989, 459) I think we should find the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful in the first place in our spiritual life; and then in the second place we can find them in our material human life.

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[7] For example, from the Frankenstein perspective, Kant's disinterested beauty was isolation from everyday life. As Wendy Steiner notes, "*Frankenstein*; or, the *Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley prophesied the modernist trouble with beauty with astonishing percipience. Her misguided scientist is a Kantian artist and the inevitable product of his dehumanizing creativity is a monster disjoined from any possibility of love, beauty, or connection to everyday existence. The scientist's 'art' destroys what we value in life" (2001, 3)

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Thirdly, we still have other challenging questions such as "How do we judge what is good? How do we select what to teach? What is the language used to teach?" In fact, these questions became part of the polarized cultural debate between modernity and postmodernity. A solution for T.S. Eliot, as Eagleton noted, was that the minority and the masses should share common values through different levels of consciousness. He says:

> [Eliot's] version of the Culture/culture problem... [is, he] cannot opt in [a] purely elitist manner for Culture as against culture, since he is shrewd enough to recognize that no minority culture will survive unless it sends down complex shoots into popular life. (Eagleton, 2000, 116)

Thus, on the one hand, I may share some ideas with Eliot, and my point here is that we as art educators need to work for a harmonious environment for the whole of society to share the common goodness, universal truth and satisfactory beauty at different levels. On the other hand, as Taylor argues:

> ... another obstacle rises... Much contemporary moral philosophy, particularly but not only in the English-speaking world, has given such a narrow focus to morality that some of the crucial connections I want to draw here are incomprehensible in its terms. This moral philosophy has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or, as Iris Murdoch portrayed it in her work, as the privileged focus of attention or will. This philosophy has accredited a cramped and truncated view of morality in a narrow sense, as well as of the whole range of issues involved in the attempt to live the best possible life, and this not only among professional philosophers, but with a wider public. (1989, 3)

Accordingly, the notion of good should also be recognized as "the object of [an individual's] love or allegiance" (ibid.). Thus, working to unify the moral good of both individuals and society has become one of the missions of education in art.

Conclusion

It is very important to investigate what lessons we can learn from the cultural wars of the twentieth century. Concerning the tensions about "the Beautiful" and the relationship between "the True" and "the Good", a main problem of the Western dichotomous approach is that, there is the danger that high art and mass culture are considered as mutually exclusive concepts rather than parts of a larger cultural context. One may find that this problem has been rooted in different traditional grounds of metaphysical philosophies.

In considering questions of how we should view the world, in particular, how we should regard the relationship between humanity and nature, self and society, and how we might create a good human life, there is a fundamentally different ground between Chinese and Western philosophical and aesthetical theories. According to Li Zehou, "Chinese aesthetics, like Chinese philosophy, stresses not cognition or imitation, but emotional communication" (1994, 48), thus, in defining the idea of 'self' as a human agent within the cosmic order, unlike the Western Romantic expressive self-discovery theory with its division between humanity and nature, and also unlike the Enlightenment utilitarian need to conquer nature, the Chinese approach is to hold a harmonious relationship with nature.

The question of how the artistic self relates to the spiritual self within a community context still remains as vital subject matter in art and aesthetics. In this sense, a healthy balance of the 'aesthetically true' and the 'morally good' in the realm of the 'artistically beautiful' is significant to the art educator's way of conceiving aesthetic attitude and experience. Thus, in comparing the Western with the Chinese philosophical aesthetic theories, one may find that perhaps the Chinese experiences are helpful in this way – by

pondering this question – Could the Chinese 'golden-mean'[8] provide an antidote to the Western 'extreme'?

Since China encountered the West – there have been many interactive dialogues between Western and Chinese art and culture. Most of them are worthwhile; however, one may not deny the cultural differences in metaphysical thinking. Thus, although it is difficult, a kind of Chinese -West intercultural study and understanding is necessary. For example, it is worthwhile for us to discuss the relationship between aesthetics and morality in Kant's philosophy by a comparative examination with Neo-Confucian "heart-mind" thought, and to define the meaning of Kant's philosophical aesthetic argument for beauty and freedom by a comparative examination with Chuang Tzu's aesthetic theme of transcendental freedom. In the modern period, in particular the twentieth-century, problems of aesthetics, art and culture have existed not only in the Western world; they have challenged the Chinese world as well. I propose that a potential prescription for these problems should encompass a mutual complement between the Western and Chinese approaches and between modernism and postmodernism as well. This may require a readjustment of our perspectives on our cultures. Just as we can adjust our visual perspective to include a broader context and thereby provide additional or new meaning to what we see, so also we can adjust our conceptual perspective to create a new synthesis of understanding. An example of this process would be to consider the painting of Chan Chung-shu, *The Gap# 1* (see Painting 1). One might initially focus on the narrow

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[8] The concept of "golden-mean" is constructed in *The Doctrine of the Mean (chung-yung)* which is a portion of the Chinese Confucian classic *Book of Rites*. The main focus in this text is an outline of Confucian virtue ethics which "stressing flexible response to changing contexts, and identifying human flourishing with complete development of the capacities present in one's nature *(hsing)*, which is given by Heaven *(t'ien)*" (Audi, 1999, 139).

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perspective of the oval rock in the centre of the picture and receive an overwhelming

impression of the force of the granite. However, by broadening one's perspective to

include the framing and restricting effect of the paper, one can perceive the complementary

balance control of the square shape of the paper.

In a similar manner, by examining the distinctive characteristics of Chinese and

Western aesthetic traditions and by keeping an 'open mind', we may be able to synthesize

new approaches to art education. Thus in this respect, the main purpose for my dissertation

is to investigate clues from both Western and Chinese aesthetics, and to map out

possibilities for contemporary art and art education.

Photo 1 *Stuart Richmond,* **Monsoon,** *photograph, 2001.*

CHAPTER ONE:
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES
FOR CONTEMPORARY ART EDUCATION:
A CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE
BETWEEN WESTERN AND CHINESE ART EDUCATORS

*Education for me is about empowering understanding and
the self in the context of a shared existence. Such capacities
make it possible for us to think about and strive for the kinds
of lives we would like to live, and hopefully, resist the
importunities of global capital.*

*Stuart Richmond,
On City Sights and Being an Artist:
Pondering Life and Education in a Market Economy*

*May the country be prosperous and the people be at peace
based on education.... In China, the development of our
nation's socialist civilization includes both material and
spiritual satisfaction; they motivate each other and
shouldn't be deflected... Since the 1980s, according to the
needs of developing a civilized society, we have brought
forward the 'four beauties' of social aesthetic education
such as: beautiful psyche, beautiful language, beautiful deed,
and beautiful environment. Of course, aesthetic education in
the school system should do much better.*

*Guo Shaogang,
Enhancing School Aesthetic Education:
Cultivation of Human Nature
(Translated by the Author)*

It was a sunny summer day in 2002 when, by my introduction, Professor Richmond

and Professor Guo met each other at a nice Western restaurant in Vancouver. That was an

important preliminary for our subsequent cross-cultural dialogues – Professor Guo helped

us to arrange academic visits and lectures to three academies of fine art in China in the

spring of 2003. Professor Guo is an oil painter and a Chinese aesthetics and art educator.

He was also the previous president and founder of the Fine Arts Education Department at

Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Professor Richmond is a photographer, a Canadian

aesthetic educator, and one of the founders of the Arts Education Program at Simon Fraser

University. At that time in 2002, I was taking his art education course for my Educational

Leadership Doctoral Program. Later, after I shifted to the Art Education Ph.D. Program, he

became my Senior Supervisor. I read some of his publications. I found that from a

cross-cultural perspective, if we could work together investigating the challenges of art

teacher education in today's global market culture, it should be meaningful. I later put this

idea as the main theme of my doctoral dissertation.

There are a number of issues and challenges for both Western and Chinese

contemporary art education. For example, I would suggest that a significant concern of

Western art educators about China is the negative effect of commerce and capitalist

modernization in China. Conversely, the main worry of Chinese art educators about the

West is the radical version of post-modernization. But it is so encouraging that there is a

consensus coming up -- working for a good balance between modernism and

postmodernism. In this chapter, I will focus on ideas and questions which have emerged for

discussion after the academic visit in China.

How Do Art Educators Respond to the Impact of Globalization on Contemporary Aesthetic and Art Education?

From different situations or cultural traditions, the response should not be the same.

Let us say that Canadian and Chinese art educators are in different circumstances, as the

previous citations of Professor Richmond and Professor Guo clearly demonstrate. I do

believe the differences in expectations and in pedagogy reveal only how complicated

contemporary art education can be. The main purpose of contemporary art education, in my view, to develop students' knowledge, skills, and understanding through art making, should be the same for all educators. Thus, reaching understanding through dialogue is helpful for mapping out the possibilities of art teacher education.

Beijing was the last city we visited on our 2003 trip. While we were there, I realized that, like many Western scholars, Professor Richmond was worried about the risk of China losing her uniqueness in the rapid growth of modernization. We brought up this question in our later discussions. Such concern, I think is necessary regarding some social issues in China nowadays; I am particularly worried about the ecological crises of urbanization. However, it is not wise to reject all the development of urbanization; we have to admit that there is a dilemma in choosing between material and spiritual satisfaction in modern China. In art education, we need ideas for solutions, rather than Chen Danqing's criticism (which I will discuss in chapter six). Despite the good points in his criticism, his ideas, which are similar to the extreme positions of some experimental artists, are too pessimistic. I would agree with Professor Guo that, perhaps the 'four beauties' of social aesthetic education may help to overcome the challenges (education is a long term task about a silent transforming influence on a student's character, thus, the reformation of Chinese contemporary art education would not be done well in the manner of Chen – to show off one's position and to criticize everything).

Purposeful Simplicity

It was the last day of our visit to Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts where Professor Richmond was appointed as the visiting professor by the academy. After the ceremony, Professor Jiang, the president of the academy, brought up a question for discussion. He

asked, "What is the role of an artist (and an art educator as well)... as a soldier, or as a person who trains himself?" There were debates between Professor Jiang and his colleagues. Later, Professor Richmond asked about my response. I assumed that an art educator should be both a self-cultivator and a disciple[9]. And to be a good disciple, an important feature of an art educator is to have high ideals which derive from good aesthetic judgments.

In the second half of the twentieth-century, China passed through serious spiritual crises. Ba Jin, a famous author in China observed that our spiritual morality was injured by the ten years of Cultural Revolution which harmed some human beings and persecuted others, in particular, the intellectuals. He asked "How could a human being become a beast in the Cultural Revolution?" (Chike, 1994, 3) Professor Chike, a professor of aesthetics, my enlightened mentor who taught me my first philosophy of art course in the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts explained the issue with his and many other Chinese intellectuals' painful experiences. In 1973, Professor Chike came to Beijing to visit his mentor Huang Chaowen from the 're-educated camp'. Huang says, "We were criticized and 'hit' (attacked) by our students. If we will teach again, we have to educate students who wouldn't hit (attack) us" (ibid.). According to Chike, "Passion is akin to knowledge, it can be distinguished by its superficiality or profundity, barbarism or nobility." Thus, he argues, "high ideals are cultivated by aesthetic education" (ibid., 4). At that time the problem of sentiment (in the 'new sensibility', beauty was recognized as a bourgeois sensibility) had become a major concern to Chinese intellectuals. China's economy grew rapidly over the last decade of the twentieth century. But in the meantime, many insightful scholars had

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[9] Here, rather than 'soldier', is 'disciple' perhaps the appropriate word?

new concerns that we were going to face another spiritual crisis. In his essay *Aesthetic Education: Pillar of Ethics* (1994), Chike writes, "in a competitive society, a person who puts effort into advantage and power games will lose aesthetic judgment" (ibid., 3). Thus, in his view, aesthetic education is indispensable; it is the pillar of ethical education. (ibid., 4)

According to Guo, all human beings reconstruct their living spaces with the logic of beauty. Thus, the only way to revive China is to enhance and popularize aesthetic education. He uses Lu Xun's words to conclude that the purpose and function of art is 'To manifest culture, to maintain ethics, and to assist economy'. He also defines aesthetic education as all cultivation about beauty which includes a wide range of art activities such as: ethical discipline, language, poetry, music, visual art, drama, movies, dance, photography, calligraphy, gymnastics and so forth. The main aim of aesthetic education is the cultivation of sensibilities: the beautiful psyche, language, line, rhythm, form, and texture, just to name a few. He asserts that the pursuit of beauty for human beings is eternal; a person who lacks of beauty will become selfish, narrow-minded, and unhealthy. Therefore, Guo emphasizes the relationships between ethical and aesthetic education. (Gu Senyi, 1992)

The rapid growth of globalization, according to Guo, can be either an opportunity or a danger. To avoid disaster, in his view it is necessary to promote the position of aesthetic and art education both in society and at school, and to educate the young generation with good values and judgment. Furthermore, in the struggle to conquer the negative effects of modernization in China, Guo stresses that we need to educate the young

generation to preserve and inherit the Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions. In
Guo's words:

> Today's aesthetic and art education must follow the footsteps of the new
> era, facing modernization, the global world, and the future. Modernized
> construction and economic development are all based on educational
> reformation, perfect intelligence, preserved superior national culture,
> revealing the historical and the new age's civilization... Aesthetic and art
> education are very hard tasks. We need to educate the young generation not
> only with knowledge about art but also to have insightful judgment, so that
> they are able to inspect the beauty of nature, to discover and to create new
> beautiful things, environment, and art. The most important is to be able to
> distinguish high or low, good or bad, real or unreal... our students have
> these abilities... based on the foundation of aesthetic and art education
> (Guo Shaogang, 1994, 1)

Guo's aesthetic and art education theories can be described in three dimensions.
First, he emphasized that art education included two categories, aesthetics and art. In
aesthetic education he advocated cultivating people's perception, taste and judgment from
kindergarten to elementary, middle, secondary and higher education through school,
family and society. Second, in order to develop student art teachers' teaching abilities, he
decided that, in the Art Teacher Education Department of Guangzhou Academy of Fine
Arts, all student art teachers must be 'professional in one and skilful in several artistic
media' and be able to teach not only various artistic subjects but also aesthetics. Third, in
Guo's view, an art educator shall be a self-cultivator – noble in character and skilful in art.
His arts reflect his unique personality. Chike used four words, "quality of [hidden] beauty"
(*mei zi zhong cang*), to summarize Guo's oil paintings. (1992, par. 2) He says that Guo is
an expert in "revealing the inner quality of his objects and keeping his fresh feeling" (ibid.,
par. 3). Besides this, he is also "an expert in Chinese arts tradition and especially in
Chinese calligraphy, of which his own style is strict and vigorous. With his knowledge
about Chinese traditional art and calligraphy; he fills his oil paintings with his own national

spirit" (ibid., par. 5). Discussing Guo's landscape oil paintings for example, Chike notes that his brushwork is plain and vigorous; his scene is spacious; and his colour is bright and subtle. In sum his taste in art is fresh and graceful "Though chiseled and embelished, it returns back to its natural simplicity" (ibid., par. 7). I would say that the four beauties: beautiful psyche, beautiful language, beautiful deed, and beautiful environment which he advocated are vivid in his art (see Painting 3).
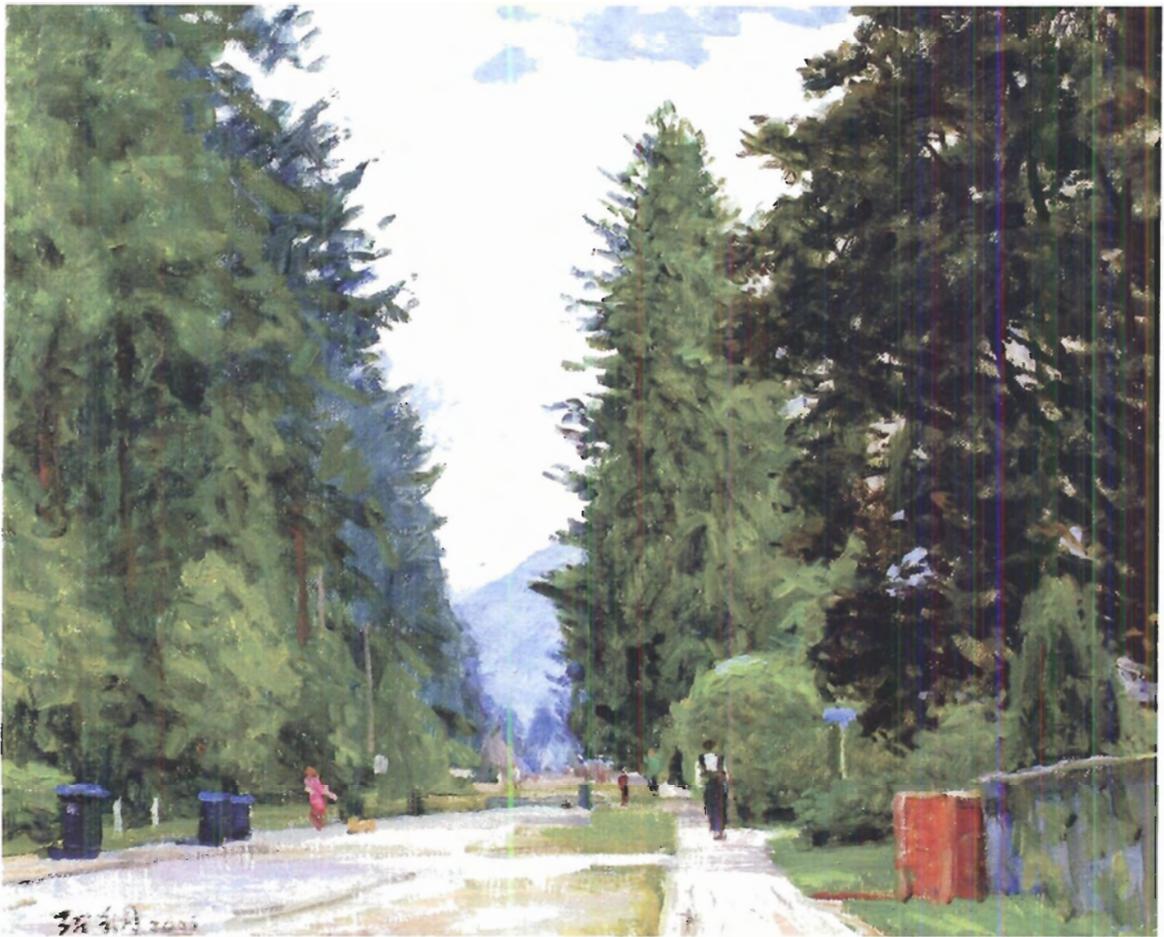
Painting 3   *Guo Shaogang,* **The Red Mound,** *oil on canvas, 2002.*

I am also influenced by my Western mentor Professor Richmond in a different way.

I like to read his journals and essays – which judge but do not sermonize. According to

him:

> Today's global market culture infects and distorts some of our deepest
> sympathies and instincts – the capacity for solitude, appreciation, an
> authentic self and voice, human relationships, the following of genuine
> interests on account of their intellectual or aesthetic fascination, for
> example, compassion and fellow feeling, or the human urge to lie fallow
> occasionally, and simply while away a bit of time. Life is constant,
> single-minded production, 24/7. You have always to be switched on,
> on-line, devoted to your work, quick off the mark, accessible, compliant, a
> believer in the company mission, cooperative, uncritical (despite the
> rhetoric), able to promote yourself, bring in the money, sell your ideas. In
> the face of the daily onslaught of media persuasion, business-speak,
> falsification of feeling, the stealing of our right to perceive, experience, and
> work things out for ourselves (anything of value is already taken and
> packaged for selling), and the technocratic mind-set, which forces thinking
> into skill and problem-solving talk (is life a problem to be solved?),
> taxonomies, theories, appeals to science, and measurement of results
> (accountability) whatever the situation, the resulting insensitivity to
> individuality and difference, the looting of the earth, constant engine noise,
> not to mention the many conflicts and injustices in the world. I am
> constantly asking myself how best to do my job (as an art educator), how
> best to live in today's world. (In press)

Not to be pessimistic, but these are the real conditions of our living. I also enjoy

viewing his photographs – they are characterized by simplicity but they are not coarse. One

of his interests in photography is medieval architecture. Hence, I was not surprised that

although we only stayed in Beijing five days, he spent three of these days taking

photographs in the *Summer Palace*. However, I prefer his photographs of Western

architecture, for example, his work *Beynac*. I like its composition: the light beyond a

square with a big X cross (a window?) in its shadow. I like the peaceful environment of his

other work, *Pear Tree,* with the pleasant sunlight on the pear tree and on the little hut (see

Photographs 2 and 3).

Photo 2 *Stuart Richmond,* **Beynac,** *photograph, 2004.*

Photo 3 *Stuart Richmond,* **Pear Tree,** *photograph, 2000.*

I have a copy of his picture *Monsoon* (see Photograph 1) which he let me choose

after the 2003 trip. I chose it because I like its tentative image. As Richmond says:

> I like Richter's idea about letting things come, not forcing, being tentative,
> open. Not forcing is a Zen precept. A premium is placed on spontaneity
> which requires confidence born of practice, and an acceptance of
> imperfection (Watts, 1989). Cartier-Bresson's pictures were seldom
> cropped or retouched. He believed in the one-shot approach. You take the
> picture and that's it – rather like a Chinese ink and calligraphy. The idea is
> to preserve the original human gesture. Excessive reworking can shift the
> balance of energy and dilute the expression in a work. Zen and Taoism are
> philosophies intended to moderate the conforming pressures of society and
> encourage peace of mind in the midst of elements beyond our power. They
> can be a kind of therapy. (Ibid. par. 17)

That's true, as he emphasizes that there are many uncertainties as well as

possibilities in life. I had this strong feeling while he showed us a photograph at his lecture

to the Chinese students. It was a sunny day in the photo. A young Russian woman was

cheerfully rowing a boat with her boy-friend. Nobody would know that Russia would be

attacked by Germany just a short while after this picture had been taken. Life is inconstant,

and our abilities are so limited. I like Richmond's idea about "therapy", he says, "Let's

hear more about these limitations; I'm fed up with the 'masters of the universe mentality'"

(Ibid. par. 7). In my view, it is important to perceive the limitations of man from a positive

perspective, let me take 'aging' as an example; from a Taoist point of view, the retirement

of a person gives him/her time to enjoy life. Furthermore, drawing attention to ideas about

not forcing and the acceptance of imperfection is also a good way to interpret the Chinese

conception of how Taoism is supplementary to Confucianism. Considering the limitations

for survival, we also have in Chinese the expression, 'to rest satisfied with one's life; to

take what comes' (*le tian zhi ming sui yu er an*).

Pondering "the question of how we might live as artists, educators and persons at large in a market economy", in his recent essay *"On City Sights and Being an Artist: Pondering Life and Education in a Market Economy"*, Richmond says, "There is a richness and complexity in the community once we slow down and look. There is no beauty in a life of haste" (in press, par. 15). Surely, that is the way he defines beauty in life with his aesthetical perception. Here is an example:

> *At the end of Professor Richmond's lecture that he gave to the students of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts; a student asked how to define beauty. I told him a story: Last night, while Professor Richmond and I were on our way back to the hotel; we passed by a Tibetan woman who was doing her selling on the street. She wanted us to buy something. Professor Richmond gave her some money but not for buying anything. I realized that was his compassion to contribute his blessing to her. "I found this is a way he appreciated beauty," I explained. And this was such a beautiful picture in my mind.*

I also share his idea of living naturally with my own experience. It is true that whenever I slow down my living speed then I can find beauty simply in daily life. Ten years ago, I moved to Vancouver from Hong Kong. Comparing the two different living styles, a simple life is lovely. It was a sunny weekend; I cut two huge bunches of roses from my backyard. I gathered almost a hundred roses and placed them in a big vase. Roses in Vancouver are big and pretty. Reading books and drinking coffee by the roses in the morning sun, I was touched with such a beautiful day. This kind of simple life in most of the city's residents' eyes is the wrong use of life, but for me it is a kind of quality of life. More important is that, as I slow down my living speed I have more time to care about other persons. During the semester break in 2001, I went back to Hong Kong to visit my mother, who was seriously sick. That was the night before my mother died, I didn't know why I had that feeling that I must stay overnight at Mum's bed in the hospital. Mum was so

ill; I was very worried about her. Could she leave the hospital this time? I could feel Mum was struggling with the 'Death God'. I could feel how frightened she was; I knew she needed someone to stay beside her; and I understood that she also cared about her dignity. Then, I helped her to clean her body, held her hands and told her "Mum, don't worry, I am with you" ...

The Impacts of Contemporary Culture

The passion of a 'modern man' is fragile and the desire of a 'modern man' is avaricious. Regarding the problem of psychology (in general passion and desire) in contemporary culture, many people worry about the problem of the prevalence of narcissism, sexual desire and violent inclination. The source of narcissism is, in Taylor's words, "the fruits of a permissive society" (1991, 4). With it, people alienated from community, "no longer have a sense of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for" (ibid.). Sexual desire and violent inclination are the consequence of fragile reason and distorted humanity, the critical postmodernist frameworks intended to counterbalance the declining culture. However, while "postmodern theory [has passed] its most fruitful stage" (Richmond, in press, par. 22); with its own limitation, I would suggest it failed to fulfill its best potential. In addition, in the last couple of decades of the twentieth-century, with the influence of the media and technology, we are experiencing a typically postmodernist phenomenon: "we live in a *society of image*" (Butler, 2002, 112) I am concerned that we are almost drowned by the culture of "simulacra" and "fictionalized information" (ibid., 111). Consequently, people living in such conditions hiding in their 'illusory nutshells', mind only their own feelings. They become indifferent to other people and things.

As the English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth in his poem, *The World Is Too Much With Us*, says:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away..."

(1802).

Having walked along the streets of downtown Vancouver so many times, in my

found poem, *Are They Nothing To Us*, I ask:

Antique
        centre
                Vancouver Antique Centre

Antique Shops on Vancouver Centre

22 Antique Shops on 422 Richards
                sellingbuyingfurniturestuffbookmagazinenewspapermapstamp
        Are they nothing to us?

An antique stake on 300 Hamilton

        Stoodonthefirstlandinthesilentsolitudeprimevalforestdroveawoodto
                measureanemptylandintothestreetofvancouver
        Are they nothing to us?

An antique monument on Main land

        inmemoryofthosewhogavetheirlivesintheserviceofourcountry
                theirnamelvethforevermoreallyethatpassby
        Are they nothing to us?

Numerous antique slums on Hastings Street
                thenestofcrimethebellyofhelltheparadiseofthewanderer

                alcoholdrugstobaccoweedpotgrasshempmarijuanacocaine
                        drunktrampspositouteslesbianhomosexual
                Are they nothing to us?

Are they nothing to us!

In art, I also worry about the kind of postmodernist irrational sensibility that informs the issue of Gunther Von's exhibition, *Culture of Death*, which I will discuss in chapter four.

Science seeks for the True; ethics seeks for the Good; and aesthetics seeks for the Beautiful. In education they bear different duties: science for knowledge, ethics for the will, and aesthetics for emotion. As an art educator, I believe that aesthetic education that aims for good taste, good judgment, and a healthy psyche can assist in offsetting ill feeling, and in reducing social tragedy.

A Blended Approach in Curriculum Theory

Before we left Guangzhou we saw students' class works of the Attached Secondary School of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. The works were some still life class exercises, skillful but lacking in personality. As Professor Guo points out, school art education in China is partial to artistic skill training. However, aesthetic education such as perception, sensibility, imagination and judgment has been neglected. Concerned about this phenomenon, a researcher in the Art Teacher Education Department of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts Fan Kaixi in his essay "Philosophy of Art Education and Ideology of Contemporary Art Education" notes:

> Traditional art educators lay stress upon training students' observing skills and drawing skills – to let them reproduce a plaster-bust, an actual object, a scene, or a model. However, art education theory especially children's art education theory in the twentieth-century has shifted to its opposite: rather than skill training, contemporary art education stresses imagination, experience, and creativity; rather than result, it stresses upon process. The role of an art teacher is concentrated on stimulating students' spontaneous interest in creation, exploration, and art making... Even though the teacher doesn't teach much, students can still create wonderful artworks. This

signifies that instead of passive mechanical skills training, the art teacher needs to stimulate students' spontaneous intuitive creativity. (1994, 30)

Professor Richmond told the Chinese students at his lecture that as a student he was told by his art instructor to experiment with the art material on his own; very little attention was given to the traditional skills training. However, he mentions that in art colleges:

Today, art curricula are more balanced. They incorporate serious attention to learning the skills and languages of different art disciplines such as drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, ceramics, mixed media sculpture and digital visual arts. Seminars in art history, cultural theory, sociology, science, humanities, and literature serve as foundational studies as well as elements of a broader education. Art making is put into context. (Richmond, unpublished essay, par. 12)

Compared to Western art education, Chinese art teachers are too involved in deciding what to draw and teaching how to draw. However, regarding the questions of "What to teach?" and "How to teach?" and "Which is better – traditional or contemporary approach?" as Fan Kaixi says, "There couldn't be any single answer to these questions" (1994, 30).

About art and education, Professor Richmond also thinks that there is no "single, carefully constructed linear perspective [that] can do justice to the complexity of the situation" (in press, par. 4). However, it is quite clear that in his teaching he values both traditional and contemporary approaches to visual arts education. He says that "Contemporary art offers many possibilities for student work, but 'traditional' methods are also important" (ibid. par. 21). I audited and did research in one of his master's degree courses: "Curriculum Theory and Art Education". In his course outline he notes:

Art exists today as a visual and conceptual practice absorbing ideas from the past, and more recently from modernist, postmodernist and many different cultural and political perspectives. Education also, is coping with rapidly changing demands brought about by technology, the media, global

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economics, community and individual needs, human rights, environmental, ethical and life-style challenges, socio-cultural fragmentation, vocational needs, religious and national conflicts, and other contemporary pressures. How, given such a disparity of philosophical, historical, ethical, social, economic, and aesthetic ideas impacting upon art education can particular orientations to the art curriculum be articulated and justified? What can art do to prepare students to fulfill their potential as creative, understanding individuals and to take their place as responsible members of the world? This course explores traditional and contemporary approaches to visual arts education – focusing on a range of aims and philosophies; various conceptions of art and art-making; art history; critical (interpretation/understanding) and social (gender, sexuality, culture) dimensions of art; student needs and learning in art; art teaching; and evaluation of artistic learning; in short – curriculum development – in order to support, effectively, the practice of art education. (2005, Course Outline)

There are three features in his teaching approach. Firstly, according to Richmond, "Art is a beacon of identity; it speaks of who we are. Art as a bearer of meaning helps us to understand the themes and contexts of our lives" (2003, par. 6). Thus, he stresses teaching and learning art through life experience. In the curriculum course he required students to complete two projects which should include an art making component and a written component. For example, three students presented him with their group project about identities – three large blocks which were collaged with individual characteristic photos of all of the classmates. A student (who teaches grade 11 and 12 art in a high school) chose domestic objects -- 'shoes and boots' – as the project topic; for her those are symbols of culture. The project included her own drawing and painting on cowboy boots and her students' ceramic shoes. Secondly, in Richmond's view, art education, in particular art teacher education, is about empowering. In the course, he assigned students to write a reading log and an academic paper. With the reading log he encouraged students to give their own critical reflections; with the academic paper he gave confidence to students to show their own 'voice' to use 'I' reasonably. (Richmond, 2005, Assignments) Thirdly,

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Richmond stressed that in the West, considering the relationship between teaching and learning, one should emphasize the teacher's role as a facilitator of learning rather than an authority figure; the teacher's main task is to bring out students' own unique, expressive and creative personalities. Usually, students have to provide their proposal to the teacher for discussion and approval; students' creations or projects are based on experience, so that the evaluations are focussed on the processes rather than the results. (Richmond, 2003)

I would say that traditional and contemporary approaches each have their strengths and limitations. In my personal teaching experiences, I have benefited from a 'blended' approach. I learned fine art in a traditional academy of fine arts in Hong Kong for three years in my mid-twenties. This gave me a solid foundation in Western fine arts – I learned drawing and painting with pencil, charcoal, pastel, watercolours and oils. I learned how to draw and paint still life, plaster-bust, figure, and outdoor life drawing with different mediums. I needed to present a series of creations for graduation. Usually, students at that time (I learned art in the late 1970s) would relate the theme of their creation to their life experiences. We did so by learning from our teachers. With my experiences, I understand that we have to learn some basic skill which is a vehicle that can free us to achieve our creation. I have no problem with traditional skills training as I take it as a vehicle rather than as a goal. I taught art both in a high school and in my studio to all ages (from children to adults) in Hong Kong. After I moved to Canada I continued to teach in my studio and teach an educational art program in a community cultural centre to school students. I use a blended approach – teaching the artistic skill of drawing and painting, and doing expressive and creative projects. Usually, I suggest or my students propose their own themes or project topics for creation. I emphasize both meaning and expression, ideas and

skills, process and final ends. In 1990, I did a project about self identity with my students in Hong Kong. I encouraged students to choose a topic which relates to their life experience, having their own voice in doing their creation. In 2005, I did a workshop *Toys and Games* with families at the Evergreen Cultural Centre in Greater Vancouver. Compared with the favourite game of boys, 'fighting', I was moved by a seven-year-old boy's kind heart – he played with his puppets and cared for them as his babies – actually, he was so kind to everybody (see Photograph 4).

Photo 4   *Toys and Games: A Seven-year-old Boy's Favourite Toys*, 2005.

Concerning the impact of contemporary prevailing culture, here I had another experience:

> *One day, when I looked at a seven-year-old boy's drawing, I was shocked by his impression of 'something funny or happiness' (that was a topic for my student in a drawing class) which was interpreted by a drawing about 9/11 – he found the explosion was something 'interesting'. "Why don't teacher?" he asked, "It's funny and it's as exciting as my TV games!"*

Of course, I couldn't agree with him that this was something funny. However, this was as example of how, as Butler puts it. "even horrifying immediate events, which cause

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unimaginable suffering to individuals, like the Vietnam and Gulf wars, had become in

some way just a 'dramatized media event' which 'take[s] place on 'TV' in scenes" (2002,

110). To be 'entertained' by this new power of global imagination industries, we are

inevitably forced to share the suffering of "hypermodernism" [10] which is "distinguished by

its hyperreality, hyperactivity, and hyperintelligence" (Borgmann, 1992, 6).

Meanwhile, concerning the dark side of modernity, Taylor argues that "a centring

on the self" (1991, 4), the "primacy of instrumental reason" (ibid., 5), the "dominance of

technology" (ibid., 6), and "a great loss of freedom, on both individuals and the group"

(ibid., 9) might cause us a loss of meaning in life and a fading of moral horizons. My point

here is not to focus only on what we need to worry about, but also to examine the features

of contemporary Western culture, and for the public good of our global societies, to

investigate potential solutions from a comprehensive philosophical perspective.

Thus, the goal of art education to me is to develop and cultivate every unique

individual who has mental perception (*hui yan*), a kind heart (*shan xin*), and a pair of artful

hands (*qiao shou*) and who lives a healthy life with other human beings and living creatures

in the global village.

Conclusion

During the last three years, I have continued to do my research on a comparative

study of Western and Chinese art and art education. I find the following ideas are

worthwhile for investigation: understanding (through dialogues), respect (based on mutual

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[10] According to Borgmann, the hypermodernism is "the direct descendant of modern technology" (1992, 6).

recognition and acceptance), and collaboration (for mapping out possibilities of the future art education).

The West and China have followed different paths in the development of art and the philosophy of art education; they have had their own unique identities and both the West and the Chinese have had their strengths and limitations in their philosophical and practical art and art education theories. For instance, while pondering on the conception of imagination, in my presentation paper *The Tao of Releasing the Imagination in Art and Art Teaching*, I wrote:

> *The understanding of imagination in aesthetic and artistic experience, in particular the romantic idea of imagination in creativity, is different between West and East. In considering creativity, the Westerner demonstrates innovative ideas, while the Chinese emphasizes dependable transformation. I understand that the latter will easily confuse the Western readers. I will explore here the ideas of releasing the imagination from a cross-cultural perspective. Perhaps, Wu Guanzhong's idea can help a little to explain the meaning of the Chinese concept of imaginative creativity. "The line connecting the artist with the objective reality is a kite-string that must never be broken" says Wu when he talked about his creations (Sullivan, 1992, p. 22). I assume that his experience is also true for releasing imaginative creativity. Although imaginative free play is the core of artistic creation, it can not be rootless. It is because imaginative creativity is dependent not only on personal sensibility and perception, but also on knowledge and judgment. In Chinese philosophy, the relationship between uniqueness and commonness dialectically becomes "wholeness" for releasing the imagination. The Chinese regard creativity as transcending innovation, for this instance, a Chinese expression notes 'blue is extracted from the indigo plant but is bluer than the latter, to have excelled one's master'. Thus, in the Chinese concept of art education, teaching skill and spontaneity through learning from the masters and experience in art making are necessary. At the same time, I agree with Richmond that blind rule-following and mechanical imitation should be critiqued. And at this point, as he insists "the teacher's imagination and judgment are considered vital" (2004, 109-118). I believe that, as with art making, this is the Tao of releasing the imagination – a good balance between rule-following and free play. (2004, Unpublished)*

My understanding of the conception 'free play', in this instance, involves a

proportion in imagination – free play is the subjective proportion and rule-following, in

this sense, is the objective proportion. Thus, the Tao of releasing the imagination in art and

art education is derived from the harmony of subjectivity and objectivity via the process to

the end. Here is another experience in guiding children's group creation (see painting 4):

> *I was one of the three instructors in a group creation project called 'A*
> *Peaceful Journey' in which a thousand children were to participate, and*
> *the leadership team was formed by my students. There were two different*
> *ideas suggested by me and other one of the instructors. His idea was to just*
> *let the participants be free to draw whatever and wherever they liked to. In*
> *his view, he thought that this was the concept of imagination from the West,*
> *that child and artist should not be taught. However, in my view, imagination*
> *should be the harmony of rule-following and free play. Thus, I suggested*
> *that there should be some ideas about what and how to draw which would*
> *be discussed by the leadership team. For example, they suggested that they*
> *draw a basic landscape with an underground part for burying the weapons;*
> *then some children would be riding on a big dove and flying towards a*
> *peaceful symbol, which was a concept to 'motivate' the rest of the*
> *participants' creations. We ended up with my idea...*

Painting 4   A Peaceful Journey
(A Thousand Children's Group Creation, 5' x 33'), *1992.*

Moreover, considering process and result in art teaching, for example, conducting

my workshops which I had organized for the Evergreen Cultural Centre, I didn't think that

it was a good idea just to offer 'a just for fun' environment for children to engage (hands-on)

merely. Thus, in my workshops, I emphasized both the process and the result. For instance,

in the '*Year 2000 Millennium Bridge: A New Community Art Education Project for*

Families' project, we made a beautiful 40 foot dragon costume, and performed a *Dragon Dance* to celebrate the 'team spirit' (see Photographs 5 and 6). The reason for doing so is because, from a Chinese perspective, I believe that the perfection of human nature is derived from the act of doing something 'fine and well'.

© 2000, by author

Photo 5   Dragon, *2000.*

© 2000, by author

Photo 6   Dragon Dance, *2000.*

In light of the above discussions, I believe that, by espousing the ideas of understanding, respect, and collaboration, our further ongoing cross-cultural dialogues between Western and Chinese art educators should make a significant contribution to contemporary art education.
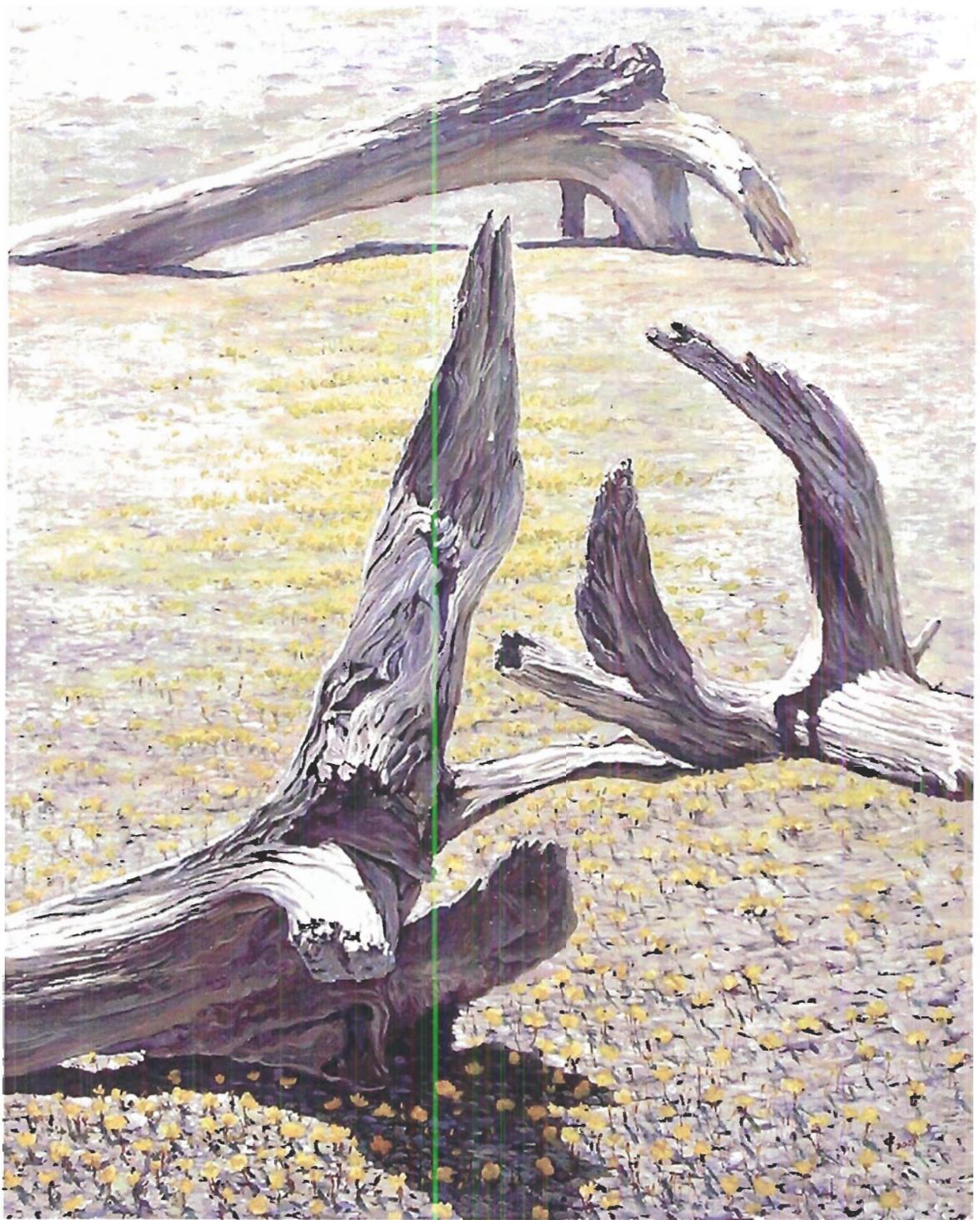
Painting 5   *Chan Chung-shu,* **Life Cycle,** *oil on canvas, 1999.*

CHAPTER TWO:
LANDSCAPES OF THE SELF
WITHIN DIFFERENT CULTURAL TRADITIONS

*Not only is man empowered by his intellect, but he is
endowed with the gift of emotion. Both qualities set him
apart from all other of nature's species, for which reason the
Greeks attempted to find, in their art, harmony in the
conflict of the rational and irrational. During the "classical
moment" of the fifth century B.C. the main themes of
Western art to come were defined: reason and freedom;
human autonomy; the idealization of the individual human
body; realism; pantheistic humanism; and the tragic vision
of life.*

<div align="right">

Michael Wood,
Introduction for Art of the Western World

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*In his Chung-kuo i-shu ching-shen (Spirit of Chinese
aesthetics), HsűFu-kuan states that Confucians and Taoists
share the belief that self-cultivation is basic to artistic
creativity... Art, in this sense, becomes not only a technique
to be mastered but also an articulation of a deepened
subjectivity. It moves and touches us because it comes from
a source of inspiration which humanity shares with heaven,
earth, and the myriad things. Proponents of this view assert
that the manifestation of true subjectivity depends on a
complete transformation of the self, which they attempt to
achieve by various methods: the establishing of the will, the
emptying of the mind, the fasting of the heart, and the
nourishing of the great body. Deepened subjectivity centers
upon the "great foundation" (ta-pen) of the cosmos. As a
result, it harmonizes different forms of life and brings
humanity into tune with nature, so that the distinction
between subject and object is dissolved. Hsű Fu-kuan adds
that a root idea in Chinese aesthetics is precisely this
insistence that the dichotomies of subject/object, and
man/nature are unreal and thus transformable. True
subjectivity opens up the privatized ego so that the self can
enter into fruitful communion with others. The ultimate joy
of this communicability allows us, in Chuang Tzu's phrase,
to roam around with the Creator. Since even the gap*

between Creator and creature is bridgeable, when human
beings create art they participate "in the transforming and
nourishing process of heaven and earth.
<div align="right">

Tu Wei-ming,
Confucian Thought:
Selfhood as Creative Transformation
</div>

The definition of the self is different within different cultural traditions. As shown

by the above two references, one can tell the difference in character between the West and

the Chinese when they come to define the relationship between reason and emotion in art.

As Tu Wei-Ming notes, the Chinese emphasis is on bringing "humanity into tune with

nature" (1985, 93). A significant difference is, perhaps, that the Chinese approach is more

rational than the West. Furthermore, when considering the question of how to define the

self in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, Chinese aesthetics demonstrates art

as "self-cultivation" (ibid.) while the West strives for personal exploration in its art. Thus, a

major theme of this chapter is to examine the ideas about the 'self' within those different

cultural traditions. And a key question I intend to bring out for study is "In what situation

can the artistic self be suitably located in the spiritual self?" I will narrow down the above

discussions by examining the relationships between the inner sense of the self and the

outside force of moral issues, the conflicts between private desire and the public good, and

the tensions between subjective will and objective reason. In addition, there are two issues

which I think require reflection in depth. The first one is the issue of modernist autonomy;

I would suggest that a problem was created when the radical Romantics liberated the self

from reason.[11] The second one is regarding the irrational theory of postmodernist

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[11] In some Romantics' views, they resist Platonic moral philosophy of reason as "rational hegemony, rational control, [that reason] may stifle, desiccate, repress us; that rational self-mastery may be self-domination or enslavement... [Thus, the Romantics] stand in need of liberation from reason" (see Taylor, 1989, 116).

deconstruction; I would suggest that a problem was created by "the extraordinary dominance of the work of academics over that of artists" (Butler, 2002, 7). Finally, I will try to answer the key question which I have asked on the above which is "In what situation can the artistic self be suitably located in the spiritual self?"

Defining the Self within Different Cultural Traditions

As I have outlined in the *Introduction* that, in defining the idea of 'self' as a human agent within the cosmic order, unlike several approaches in the West, in particular, the Romantic expressive self-discovery theory with its adulation of emotion over reason, and the Enlightenment, which aimed to conquer nature, and the modernist approach of instrumental reason which puts economical concerns above all else, and hedonistic utilitarianism which maximizes sensual pleasure, the Chinese approach is to hold a harmonious relationship with nature and society, and with reason and emotion. In contrast to these Western theories, which conceive of the self as the position of identity, Chinese aesthetics views "self-cultivation [as] basic to artistic creativity" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 93). Furthermore, the concept of attuning the self with nature and society is conceived as central to traditional Chinese philosophy.

In the modern age, when the expression of modern art moved from outer to inner , it was undeniable that affirming the identity of 'individuality' had become a main theme in artistic activity. Radical artists claimed that art was for self-expression merely. Rather than staying connected with nature and life, they "affirmed the rights of the individual, of the imagination, and of feeling" in their art (Taylor, 1989, 368). For example, the typical artists of the early twentieth century like "Kandinksy, Mondrian anf Kazimir Malevich" (Jane Turner, 2000, 3) moved art into the abstract and non-representational. More seriously,

during the second half of the twentieth century, the tension between reason and emotion

had become a source of the cultural wars between modernist and postmodernist artists in

the Western art world. I would suggest, perhaps, that by the end of the twentieth century,

the West had put its art in crisis and has paid a high price for it. Perhaps in looking at the

Chinese traditional aesthetic theory we may see that, although these conflicts are

unavoidable, they may be resolved through reflection.

From the traditional Chinese cultural perspective, artistic activity is essentially for

creative self transformation – the perfection of oneself. Thus, Chinese aesthetics, even in

the 'Era of Dragons and Phoenixes', has had an understanding of art, that perceives the

practicing of art as akin to the following of a rite. As Li Zehou says:

> Poetry is speaking the mind; song is expressing the voice; dancing is
> moving the body. All three, originating in the heart, produce music (*Yue
> Xiang*). These activities were also the product of spiritual production, as
> compared to their material production; they were not only primitive songs
> and dances, but also magic and ritual. (1994, 11)

In Confucian tradition, practicing art is viewed as the moral source for deepening

subjectivity in the material life. Meanwhile, the idea of aesthetics in Chuang Tzu's text was

perceived as the epitome of aesthetic subjectivity in the spiritual life. (Tu Wei-ming, 1985,

93-111) However, rationalism and the "mutual and complementary roles played by

Confucianism and Taoism are an important thread that has run through all [traditional]

Chinese aesthetic thinking for the past 2,000 years" (Li Zehou, 1994, 45). As Li says:

> The Confucians stressed the normal gratification and expression of the
> senses and feelings, the practical utility of art in the service of the social
> order and politics. The Taoists, on the other hand, stressed a *laissez-faire*
> relationship between humanity and the external world that transcended
> utility. They focused on an aesthetic relationship, on inner, spiritual, and
> substantive beauty, on the non-cognitive laws of artistic creation. If the
> influence of the Confucians on the later literature and art lay mainly in the

theme and content, that of the Taoists lay mainly in the laws of creativity –
in aesthetics. And the importance of art as a unique form of ideology lies
precisely in its aesthetic laws. (Ibid., 51)

Thus, from the Chinese point of view, 'true subjectivity' depends on "a complete

transformation of the self... As a result, it harmonizes different forms of life and brings

humanity into tune with nature, so that the distinction between subject and object is

dissolved" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 93). For example, in the artist statement of his works,

Chan Chung-shu says:

> No matter how high, how far and how deep we go, we can't detangle from
> things which bind our hearts – a metropolitan dreams of encountering
> mother nature, and the ecstatic bond towards the place of home. Those
> overwhelming mountains with ancient villages and modern building sites
> went through careful trimming. Such an image doesn't reflect the journey
> of life which cares not about the outer environment but rather the inner
> peace. Within this deep darkness, we can find a sparkling light.... That
> penetrating light. (Chan Chung-shu, *Light in Shadow Series,* Watercolor on
> paper, 1991, Exhibition Catalogue: Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Art Centre,
> private collection)

However, as a result of the modernization of China, many of the Chinese cultural

traditions have been exiled in the modern world of China. This is the reason why Chinese

art educators like Professor Guo stress that we need to educate the young generation to

preserve and inherit the Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions. (Guo, 1994; Fan,

1994) In addition, I would suggest, perhaps, that in the West, too, there is a need for

education to redefine the value of some traditional culture.

Cultivating the 'Self'

In a way, to cultivate the self is to articulate the relationship between ethics and

aesthetics. Plato and Kant were the two great philosophers of traditional philosophical

culture in the West. Plato was an important influence on the development of Western

ethical thought; however, it is important to emphasize Kant's contribution to the traditional

art world. Kant revealed the inner nature of aesthetic judgment. As Taylor notes, "Kant

offers one form of modern internalization, that is, a way of finding the good in our inner

motivation," (1989, 368) which is vital for artistic creativity. Of course, there is no theory

which can avoid limitations, not even the theories of Plato and Kant in the West, or

Confucianism and Taoism in China. For instance, in terms of aesthetic judgment – manner,

pleasure and taste, Kant insisted that beauty and goodness are largely part of the same

structure. In aesthetic judgment of taste, Kant concluded that whether or not something is

beautiful is based on "disinterested" (Kant: *CJ*, §2, trans. by Cerf, 1963, 5) [12]and

"universal" pleasure (ibid., *CJ*, §6, 13),[13] and this "pleasure is represented in a judgment of

taste as only subjective" (ibid., *CJ*, §8, 15). Furthermore, as Crawford notes, Kant

maintains "that to take an *immediate interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have

taste in judging it) is always the mark of a good soul" (2001, 62). Undeniably, relating

moral goodness (ethics) with aesthetical judgment of taste was Kant's great contribution.

According to Kant:

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[12] As Walter Cerf in the footnote of his translation points out that, "A judgment on an object of pleasure can be quite *disinterested* and yet very *interesting*. In other words, it is not based on an interest, but it produces one; such are all moral judgments. But the judgments of taste, by themselves, are not even grounds for an interest" (see Cerf translated, Kant, 1963, 6).

[13] Regarding the concept of "universal pleasure" Kant states that, "Anyone who is conscious that his pleasure in an object is entirely disinterested cannot but consider that object as one that must contain a ground of pleasure for all men. For this pleasure does not rest on any inclination of the judgment subject (nor on any other, rationally directed interest). On the contrary, the judge feels himself completely *free* in regard to pleasure with which he favors the object. Thus he finds no private condition as exclusively personal reasons for his pleasure. He must therefore regard his pleasure as grounded on what he may also presuppose in everyone else. Consequently, he must believe that he is entitled to expect a similar pleasure from everybody. Hence, though the judgment of taste is indeed only esthetic and contains merely a relation of the representation of the object to the subject, he will yet speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a quality of the object and the judgment logical (giving knowledge of an object through concepts of it).For the judgment of taste has still this similarity with the logical judgment, that it is legitimately presupposed to be valid for everyone. But this is a universality which cannot spring from concepts" (ibid. 13).

Both the pleasurable and the good have a relation to the appetitive faculty…
it is a judgment which is indifferent as to the existence of an object and only
confronts the looks of the object with the feeling of pleasure and
displeasure. But neither is this contemplation itself directed to concepts; for
the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (neither a theoretical nor a
practical one), and thus neither *grounded* on nor *aiming* at concepts. (Kant:
CJ, §5, trans. by Cerf, 1963, 10-11)

In Kant's view, in the comparison of the three specifically different kinds of

pleasure: the pleasurable, the beautiful, and the good,[14] the pleasure of taste in a beautiful

thing, which means the value of the good of an object, needs to be *"approved"* by the

"disinterested and *free*" plays of the subject self (ibid., 11). I would have no problem with

Kant's approach of relating aesthetics with morality. Kant viewed beauty as "the symbol of

morality" (Kant: *CJ*, §59, trans. by Guyer, & Matthews, 2000, 225-228)[15] and "the

methodology of taste" (Kant: *CJ*, §60, 228-230)[16] in his *Third Critique*, but, if we return

back to his position of intersubjective validity, I still worry about how 'successfully' he

handled the delicate balance between feeling and reason. Here, I would suggest that a

problem of "What is the relationship between 'will' and 'reason'?" will be created when

the value of the self is located upon a kind of "privileged access to inner events" (Murdoch,

2003, 32). My concern is from two aspects:

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[14] As Kant says, "the appropriate verbs which signify the actual feeling of pleasure taken in the pleasurable, the beautiful, and the good, respectively, are in fact different. *Pleasurable* is what a man ENJOYS and RELISHES; *beautiful* what simply PLEASES him; *good* what is VALUED, *approved*, that is, on which he sets an objective value" (Kant: §5, trans. by Cerf, 1963, 11).

[15] As Kant notes, "… the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and also that only in this respect (that of a relation that is natural to everyone, and that is also expected of everyone else as a duty) does it please with a claim to the assent of everyone else, in which the mind is at the same time aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions, and also esteems the value of others in accordance with a similar maxim of their power of judgment" (Kant: CJ, §59, trans. by Guyer, & Matthews, 2000, 227).

[16] The concern here, is, as Kant claims, "… since taste is at bottom a faculty for the judging of the sensible rendering of moral ideas… from which, as well as from the greater receptivity for the feeling resulting from the latter (which is called the moral feeling) that is to be grounded upon it, is derived that pleasure which taste declares to be valid for mankind in general, not merely for the private feeling of each, it is evident that the true propaedeutic for the grounding of taste is the development of moral ideas and the cultivation of the moral feeling; for only when sensibility is brought into accord with this can genuine taste assume a determinate, unalterable form" (ibid., Kant: CJ, §59, 230).

First, what concerns me here is a kind of extreme individualism which, as Taylor notes, "involves a centring on the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness, of the great issues or concerns that transcend the self... As a consequence, life is narrowed or flattened." (1991, 14)There should be a great challenge to the judgment of "What is a 'good taste'?" with such an 'isolated' self. On this view, the pleasure of this type of 'lonely will' is fragile if the relationship between the judgment of good and the feeling of taste is based on narrow-minded ego which, in Taylor's terms, is guided by, "the hold of moral subjectivism", (1991, 18) by which he means that the "moral positions are not in any way grounded in reason or the nature of things but are ultimately just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them. On this view, reason can't adjudicate moral disputes" (ibid.).

Second, according to Murdoch, in considering human nature, the idea of the Kantian "puritan" (Murdoch, 2003, 80) would create a challenge to the "ordinary man" (ibid., 81). As she points out, Kant's reason does not belong to an "ordinary language" (2003, 30). For instance, usually people do not think about the reason for which they have to do this or that, they just "follow" some conventions "naturally" (ibid., 41). From this point of view, Murdoch is right to emphasize that we should not lose sight of moral force, since "human beings are naturally selfish" (ibid., 76), and our "freedom of choice is not usually very great" (ibid., 77). In deepening her notions of virtues, Murdoch introduces us to a framework which is constructed out of "relationship and hierarchy" (ibid., 93). Unlike the post-Kantian type of virtue that perceives "the notion of the will as the creator of value" (ibid., 78), Murdoch has suggested to us the will of a Platonic "humble man" (ibid., 101)

who loves and serves others; who "follows" the rule but does not necessarily "create" the rule. Murdoch says:

> I have spoken of efforts of attention directed upon individuals and of obedience to reality as an exercise of love, and have suggested that 'reality' and 'individual' present themselves to us in moral contexts as ideal end-points or Ideas of Reason. This surely is the place where the concept of good lives. (Ibid, 41)

Thus she insists:

> There is a place both inside and outside religion for a sort of contemplation of the Good, not just by dedicated experts but by ordinary people: an attention which is not just the planning of particular good actions but an attempt to look right away from self towards a distant transcendent perfection, a source of uncontaminated energy, a source of *new* and quite undreamt-of virtue. This attempt, which is a turning of attention away from the particular, may be the thing that helps most when difficulties seem insoluble, and especially when feelings of guilt keep attracting the gaze back towards the self. This is the true mysticism which is morality, a kind of undogmatic prayer which is real and important, though perhaps also difficult and easily corrupted.... I want now to speak of what is perhaps the most obvious as well as the most ancient and traditional claimant, though one which is rarely mentioned by our contemporary philosophers, and that is Love. Of course Good is sovereign over Love, as it is sovereign over other concepts, because Love can name something bad.... Love is the tension between the imperfect soul and the magnetic perfection which is conceived of as lying beyond it.... However I want in conclusion to make just one more move.... The good man is humble.... The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are. He sees the pointlessness of virtue and its unique value and the endless extent of its demand. (Ibid.99-101)

As Murdoch states, "'Good': 'Real': 'Love'. These words are closely connected" (ibid.). I think here, the traditional Chinese Confucian concept of 'following the ritual to act' is consistent with Murdoch.

Like Kant, Murdoch also relates aesthetics to morality. However, her approach to the consciousness of the moral good, is to connect the private will with virtue "in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism" (ibid., 82). For example, a common

saying is that 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder', and people will choose their lovers based on an initial, spontaneous gaze. In the artist's perception or appreciation, how does 'beauty' make sense to an artist? It may be "an occasion for 'unselfing'... [in other words,] we take a self-forgetful pleasure..." (Murdoch, 2003, 82-83), and then some artistic creation may just result in the object which the artist appreciates, such as Guo's painting, *The Red Mound* (see Painting 3), and Richmond's photograph, *Pear Tree* (see Photograph 3). Or, for some artists, besides appreciation, the object may have to be meaningful, like Chan's painting, *Life Cycle* (see Painting 5); Chan admires the dignity of those forms of driftwood in which the larger theme of the natural cycle of life and death is expressed.

Taking into account the complexity of life, Murdoch might be right; perhaps good can only be achieved by an 'ordinary' transformation which involves adhering to the everyday conventions of civility. My supplement to Murdoch's idea is that rather than putting this stage as an end; we should keep this just as a starting point. I will continue this discussion in more depth with the Chinese idea of a good man. Briefly, I would suggest that Murdoch's approach might embrace some positive ideas which contribute to a feasible way to reach the "Good" within general human nature.

Regarding ideas of self, will, love, knowledge, rule, freedom, creativity and ideas of human perfectibility, the Chinese have had a fundamentally different background. To Chinese thought, the above ideas are regarded from a point of view that is "neither animism" nor "anthropocentrism but ... a transcending perspective which seeks the ultimate meaning of life in ordinary human existence".[17] (Tu Wei-Ming, 1985, 23) As a

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[17] According to Tu Wei-ming, the main idea that human beings are perfectible through "self-effort in ordinary daily existence.... Is far from being a quest for pure morality or spirituality [; it] necessarily involves the biological, psychological, and sociological realities of human life" (1985, 19).

complement to the Western project, in his book *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*, Li Zehou has suggested a Chinese 'good person' project:

> In dealing with opposites, [for example, self and other in human nature,] the stress was on blending and harmony more than on conflict. Regarding the question of realism, the expression of an intrinsic interest in life was seen as more important than exact imitation and faithful reproduction. In effect, the stress was on the integration of emotion and reason and on the intuitive wisdom of emotions that could achieve harmony and satisfaction in life, rather than on irrational fantasies or supernatural beliefs. (Li Zehou, 1994, 48-49)

It is possible that the Chinese ontological philosophy of human nature in some sense has the best potential for overcoming the limitations of both Romanticism and Existentialism.[18]

What does a good person look like in Chinese moral philosophy? It is complex, since there are three pictures sketched out by the Three Teachings,[19] they are: the Confucian ideal "sage"/"great man"; the Taoist "true person"; and the Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist "original minded" being. Although the concepts are different, they all accept that "human beings are perfectible through self-effort in ordinary daily existence" (Tu Wei-Ming, 1985, 19). And for the argumentation of mapping out a viable framework of being "a good human" in Chinese cultural traditions, I would insist that only a complementary framework which has integrated the wisdom of the Three Teachings could be possible.

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[18] The Chinese model of the world, unlike the romantic and existential visions, to view the cosmos as "a spontaneously self-generating life process exhibits three basic motifs: continuity, wholeness, and dynamism" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 40). To Chinese thinkers, "human beings are not the rulers of creation" (ibid., 44). A uniqueness of being human is that people could "purposely belittle [themselves]" to form a "trinity with heaven and earth" (ibid., 46).

[19] The so-called "Three Teachings" are Confucianism, Taoism, and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism.

In contrasting Kant's man-god with the Confucian sage/great man, I think a comparison with the Neo-Confucian – the *idealistic Neo-Confucianist* model, in particular the ideal model of Wang Yang-ming[20] is worthwhile. Why Neo-Confucian and Wang Yang-ming? It is because "[he] is said to have combined the wisdom of Ch'an Buddhism and the aesthetic sensitivity of Taoism with the humanist concerns of Confucianism"[21] (ibid., 28). How is the ontological status of human nature accordingly defined in Neo-Confucian thought, then?

In the Neo-Confucian's view a sage/great man is necessarily benevolent, sensitive, truthful, courageous, firm, intelligent and creative. The main way that a person becomes great is by being benevolent and sensitive, or, in other words, knowing how to love. In his book *Inquiry on the Great Learning*, Wang Yang-ming insists that to be benevolent and sensitive, in his term, having the "humanity of the heart" (ibid., 29), is an ontological claim of a human. As Tu Wei-ming interprets:

> The reason that the great man can manifest his empathic and sympathetic feelings toward another (human being, animal, plant, or stone) in a genuine and spontaneous manner is thought to be in the structure of the heart (*hsin*) itself. (1985, 29)

However, this is in conflict with another feature of human nature, i.e. selfishness or self-centeredness. Obviously, following not only Mencius's saying that to be benevolent and sensitive is an "inborn capacity" (ibid.), Yang-ming also confirmed that the central

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[20] Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), Neo-Confucian philosopher known as a metaphysical idealist for his doctrines of the "unity of knowledge and action (*chih-hsing ho-i*) and *liang-chih* (innate knowledge of the good)" (Robert Audi, 1999, 967).

[21] As Tu Wei-ming pointed out, it should be noted that "Wang Yang-ming, hailed as a most original and influential thinker in premodern China, was a distinguished scholar-official who consciously and conscientiously put into practice his metaphysical vision and demonstrated through his own personal spiritual development the beliefs he held" (1985, 28). Wang Yang-ming's thought is embodied in three categories: (1) The great man regards heaven, earth, and the myriad things as one body; (2) the preservation of the heavenly principle and the elimination of human desires; and (3) the full realization of primordial awareness.

concern of Confucian ethics is built upon "a shareable commonality accessible to every member of the human community" (ibid., 26). In other words, sharing and caring for others with 'love' are sources which are vitally important in becoming a "good [person]". Here, the notion of love is akin to Murdoch's concept of love, which "is knowledge of the individual" (2003, 27). Murdoch also states that "the idea of *attention*, or looking" (ibid., 35) to the 'reality' is "the effort to counteract... states of illusion" (ibid., 36). In the tradition of the "Doctrine of the Mean" (*Chung-yung*), it is necessary for a person to have a "concomitant realization of the other" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 30). It seems to be the 'principle' in the cosmos. But in practice, selfishness can be found easily in human nature. Thus, Wang Yang-ming insisted that a person could become great through the effort of self-development. This (in Yang-ming's term to "enhance and refine the heart" (*hsin*), in Kant's term "to assert reason") (ibid., 29-30) had become not only the social beings' right but also their duty to be moral" (ibid.,29). Although Wang Yang-ming's metaphysical vision of the "humanity of the heart" (ibid., 30) was in accord with Kant's "universal pleasure" they were different in two dimensions: first, with Kant, reason and feeling were "biologically irrelevant", but Wang Yang-ming's "appeal to the universality of moral feeling... [was] biologically based" (ibid., 30); second, unlike Kant, who placed the self as an "isolated and enclosed individual", Wang Yang-ming's self had been attached to human relationships. At this point I think about Schiller. Like him, I have the same struggle with Kant's aesthetics as he puts "freedom" as an end of his human subjectivity. We may find others problems such as human nature, negating the possibility of ethical perfection in Kant's moral law of subjective reason. However, in his *Kallias Letters,* Schiller provides a practical reason, "love", for his own search for beauty. Henrich notes:

> In beauty in general reason sees sensibility fulfilling its demand and, to its own surprise, one of its own ideas confronts it in appearance. This unexpected harmony awakens a feeling of joyous approbation, and an attraction to the sensible object must result. We call this attraction benevolence – love. (1982, 248)

With the concept of love, Schiller saw that the structure of morality was mirrored in beauty. As Henrich notes:

> In his famous criticism of Kant's ethics Schiller sets up an ideal of morality on which the concrete self need not persist in insoluble conflict with the Kantian law of reason. The truly moral character becomes a unity of duty and inclination; it does not do its duty only under compulsion, but with a "noble affect," and it enjoys that harmony with itself which puts the seal on the perfection of human nature... It is moral freedom in this sense of inner harmony, the perfected harmony of a moral being, that is objectified in the beautiful. (ibid., 252)

Here I found that Schiller's solution to the limitation of Kant's human subjectivity, that is, to find the ideal "in one's own bosom" (Murdoch, 2003, 30) was in some sense in accord with Wang Yang-ming's "humanity of the heart" for self-realization. But their differences were not hard to define; obviously, Wang Yang-ming's model is more focused on the "commonality" and "sharability" of human experience. For instance, one can understand the meaning of Wang's ideas in a negative form by the interpretation of the Confucian Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you", as the "psychology essential for the peaceful coexistence of different and even conflicting beliefs" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 26).

Furthermore, Murdoch's Platonic form connecting aesthetics with virtue, is in some structures akin to the Chinese aesthetics and ethics theories. In Murdoch's view:

> Art is a human product and virtues as well as talents are required of the artist. The good artist, in relation to his art, is brave, truthful, patient, humble; and even in non-representational art we may receive intuitions of theses qualities. One may also suggest, more cautiously, that

non-representational art does seem to express more positively something which is to do with virtue. The spiritual role of music has often been acknowledged, though theorists have been chary of analysing it. However that may be, the representational arts, which more evidently hold the mirror up to nature, seem to be concerned with morality in a way which is not simply an effect of our intuition of the artist's discipline. (2003, 84)

Murdoch points out that

These arts, especially literature and painting, show us the peculiar sense in which the concept of virtue is tied on to the human condition. They show us the absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance; the enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. The pointlessness of art is not the pointlessness of a game; it is the pointlessness of human life itself, and form in art is properly the simulation of the self-contained aimlessness of the universe... The realism of a great artist is not a photographic realism, it is essentially both pity and justice.... However, human life is chancy and incomplete. It is the role of tragedy, and also of comedy, and of painting to show us suffering without a thrill and death without a consolation... (Ibid., 84-85)

Thus, Murdoch insists that

Art then is not a diversion or a side-issue, it is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*...An understanding of any art involves a recognition of hierarchy and authority... Good art, unlike bad art, unlike 'happenings', is something pre-eminently outside us and resistant to our consciousness. We surrender ourselves to its *authority* with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish... (Ibid., 85-86)

Wang has emphasized understanding as well as self-realization and self-cultivation. But this does not mean that the Neo-Confucian moral theories are therefore without any criticism, in particular of any of the following Neo-Kantian questions on morality, such as: "What can I know?" "What ought I do?" "What may I hope?" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 154)[22] Or, the fourth question suggested by Heidegger

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[22] It was Heidegger, who depicted Kant as in fear that "the will might not of itself be in complete accord with reason, stipulates the categorical imperative, an objective principle which acts as a command of reason.... [Thus, with] this background in mind Kant introduces the principle of *autonomy of the will* and the concept of a *realm of ends*" (see Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 155).

"What is man?" (ibid., 165). Or, in the realm of the Neo-Confucians' self-identity, "How can I really know my true self?" (ibid.) Obviously, to any of the preceding questions, the points of view are neither from a Neo-Confucian's nor from a Kantian perspective, they are not directly responsive to each other. In particular, to the metaphysics of morals, since they are grounded in two different foundations: The former's morality is rooted within the human nature; the latter is based on the concept of a pure moral philosophy. But this type of comparative discussion I think is worthwhile. As Mou Tsung-san argues:

> The issue involved is not merely a mapping out of similarity and difference
> in a kind of typological analysis of philosophical systems. Rather, the task
> is to see how a real 'confrontation' of two fundamentally different modes of
> questioning can deepen our awareness of the limits as well as the strengths
> of our own chosen approach to ontology. (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 157)

Let me start the comparative discussion with the "indefinite" question "What is man?"

The Tension about the True, the Good, and the Beautiful

In regard to what is the main characteristic of Western metaphysical thinking about "being", Cheng Chung-ying's description is helpful:

> The Parmenidean metaphysics of being caused Western metaphysical
> thinking to seek for being in a closed system of concepts, and thus caused
> the loss of a natural sense of reality and open creativity. Being becomes the
> foundation of Western dualistic metaphysics, set against change and
> non-being. Being also becomes the origin of Western science. It brings out
> the human power of human thinking. It defines the rationality of knowledge
> and methodology. But it also impoverishes the life and lifeworld of man and
> nature, and hence traps man in an imbalance of metaphysical individualism
> with a solipsism and an agnosticism of pure reason which conflicts with and
> suppresses the natural cravings of original man, and force[s] him to find rest
> and comfort in the form of transcendental religion. (Cheng Chung-ying,
> 1989, 204)

In light of the above description, one might find Kant's problematic human subjectivity has shared a common ground with this heritage. I have no doubts that man is distinguished from nature (especially from the animal); however, I might not agree to place man as the creator of the world; nor to Kant's "denying knowledge in order to make room for faith" (Robert Audi, 1999, 461). I will deepen the discussion of metaphysical thinking about "being" in comparing Kant's theory with Neo-Confucian thought, and I may make reflections on Kant's logical moral law and his problem in metaphysics in light of the Taoist philosophy of aesthetics which is represented by Chuang Tzu.

In the West, Kant's aesthetic tenets, in particular his *Critique of Judgement* is regarded as the foundational treatise in modern philosophical aesthetics. He was the one who valued individual uniqueness; claimed for the existence of universal moral laws; and attempted to connect aesthetics and ethics. In other words, as Munro pointed out, Kant's idea about this was that "the moral man should express his uniqueness in his life in a manner akin to the original artist in his creative act" (1985, 3). Here, a sequence of issues might come out, such as: the tension between the "True" and the "Good"; the conflict between creativity and rule-governed order; and the possibility of harmony between individualism and holism. Obviously, the history of the past two hundred years tells us that we are still heavily involved with these issues. Thus, redefining the meaning of Kant's theory as well as overcoming its limitations has been (at least I have) regarded as a possibility towards achieving a good life in our future.

In contrast, China also has had a long history of holding individual uniqueness as a positive value, but differences between the West and China can be distinguished clearly: "This contrast should highlight the difference between the metaphysical orientation of the

Greek quest for ontological being and the metaphysical orientation of the Chinese search for cosmological becoming" (Cheng Chung-Ying, 1989, 167). As such, the Neo-Confucians argued that "being to the higher self should imply fairly similar goals on everyone's part" (Munro, 1985, 4). One might also find the above differences when considering Kant's universality thesis. The major difference here was that, unlike Kant's claim that, to discover oneself, pleasure will be found only under the condition of individual subjectivity, the Neo-Confucians "completed the process of self-realization in a communal setting" (ibid., 6). In the Confucian case, "subjectivity and communal life are complementary, not opposed." They "can make a place for subjectivity in self-development without treating uniqueness as something to be preserved or enhanced" (ibid., 7). At this point, like the existentialist, one might ask, "What is (the identity of) a person?" Or like the Romantics, one might be concerned that the individual's unique personality (being a "true" person) will be absent in the Neo-Confucian's rational framework for being a "good" man. But, I suggest that perhaps this combination of subjectivity and communal life will give way to being a "natural" good person. It is because the goal of settling the self is still vitally important.

According to Cheng Chung-ying, in the *Yijing* (the *Book of Changes*) philosophy, the self has been situated in three phases of metaphysical thinking: (1) the existential phase where a person as a being comes to experience his or her being as a part of the whole world; (2) the cosmological phase where all things in the world are interrelated, and all things change and transform according to the principle of universal change (their relationships to each other, their positions in the world, and their relationships to the whole world); (3) the practical phase where a person recognizes that he or she can achieve his or her life *goals*

(the practicality of knowledge) through cultivating and developing his or her nature. The above three phases are essential for the Confucians in formulating their holistic thinking about the relationships between human beings and the world. Here, I may suggest that this approach of the Chinese searching for cosmological becoming shows their wisdom. I may assume that the Chinese know "how to settle the self" in a suitable situation so that they find themselves at home in relationship networking, as Cheng Chung-ying notes:

> A human person in such a network finds that he is related to other persons and things in the world, to nature (heaven and earth) and to the world as a *whole* (including things he may not understand), and furthermore, that he is related to things in the past as well as to things in the future. The difference between past events and future events is that he may not change things in the past, but he may act to change the future; he can have control of some part[s] of things in the world and in time, whereas he is controlled by other parts of things in the world and in time. He also finds that his own self-understanding and understanding of the purposes of life sometimes make a difference to his life. He finds that his life has potentiality and that he can cultivate himself to fulfil this potentiality. On the other hand, the human person has many limitations, some of which he may overcome, but some of which he can only accept. In other words, man in his primordial existential situation can establish an understanding of his existential situation containing elements of chance, open possibilities, and restrictions. (1989, 169-170)

In light of the above analysis, one may recognize that in Chinese cosmos-ontological experience both individualism and holism have been valued in an inseparable interactive framework. This is in accord with Kant's ethics that neither holism nor individualism should be absent (Kant emphasized that the choice of the individual "will" must be disinterested and universally valid). On the other hand, unlike Kant, the Confucians do not deny practical knowledge. For them, knowledge, in particular "self-knowledge", is centred on "the harmonization of self and world" which Wang Yang-ming calls an inquiry into "the unity of knowledge and action" (ibid., 172). Here, if we return to Murdoch's Platonic "humble man", we can still find differences between

Plato's "reason" which is based on "obedience" and the Neo-Confucian's attainment of self-knowledge and self-perfection through self-transformation which is based on learning and understanding. The main reason for the Confucians to stress self-cultivation so much is that they believe that "to know oneself is simultaneously to perfect oneself" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 20). In other words, the goal of learning to be human in the original Confucian sense means "becoming aesthetically refined, morally excellent and religiously profound" (ibid., 52). In sum, "sagehood" (one's self perfection) in the philosophical locus of Neo-Confucianism has been treated as "the highest and the profoundest manifestation of humanity" (ibid., 150). To the question "Why perfect oneself?" and to the idea that one can become a sage through self-cultivation, I may assume these as a positive framework of Neo-Confucians from which to consider the "achievement of modern civilization". At this point, it is equally important to point out that, firstly, the Confucians, in particular the Neo-Confucians, did not abandon the diversity of personalities. They "recognized that there must be many paths to sagehood because of the wide variety of individual personalities" (Munro, 1985, 4); secondly, sagehood in the Neo-Confucian sense is not just as an inquiry of a personality-ideal which remains only at the psychology and ethics levels, but is an attainment through the unity of knowledge and action; and finally, sagehood is not "an inaccessible ideal" but is "a realizable state of existence". Perhaps, we can understand the metaphysical grounding of sagehood through Chou Tun-i's (the possible founder of the Neo-Confucian heritage) explanation:

Can one become a sage through learning?

Yes.

Is there any essential way?

Yes.

Please explain it to me.

The essential way is to [concentrate on] one thing. By [concentrating on] one thing is meant having no desire. Having no desire, one is vacuous hence penetrating. Being straightforward while active, one becomes impartial and hence all-embracing. Being intelligent, penetrating, impartial, and all-embracing, one is almost a sage. (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 151)

Of course, "the sage" is an idea alien to most modernists, and talking about perfection is of little interest to today's generation, but this remains as an arguable point for those concerned about individual autonomy in ethical philosophy.

Now, the modern period, I think, is an appropriate time to talk about ideas of "rule": whether to be governed by rule or to break the rule. Rule, in Confucianism is something like order, social norms and rites that we need to "follow"; but from Chuang Tzu's viewpoint, in order to permit the "true self", one must break the rule (social norms). In Kant's thought, following the rule is linked with reason, value and autonomy. The discussions concerning rule are in danger of becoming an "inarticulate debate" (Taylor, 1991, 13-23).

Many people have had worries about today's educated youth culture. In Taylor's terms youth culture is characterized by the "individualism of self-fulfilment" (ibid., 14). The main feature of this culture as Taylor notes is that "[in the youth's view,] everybody has his or her own 'values,' and about these it is impossible to argue" (1991, 13). Inevitably, the rules of the Confucians such as order and social norms are not accepted by them. Since the 1960s, this culture has flourished in Western societies, and as a consequence of individualism involving a centring on the self, we see that even Kant's

reason which is subjectively valid is not workable. Many people have shared Taylor's experience that the youth always say that if they really don't care for causes that transcend the self, then others can't say anything about them. As Taylor pointed out, "the culture of self-fulfilment has led many people to lose sight of" moral force and to lapse into "narcissism", "hedonism" and "self-indulgence" – this is "a kind of egoism" working behind notions like self-fulfilment (ibid., 14-16). Life is narrowed or flattened consequently. If this kind of moral subjectivism in the Western culture is a case in point, I wouldn't challenge Taylor's claim that the culture of "self-fulfilment" widely espoused today is a "profound mistake" (ibid., 15). As a remedy, Taylor suggests that what we can do is retrieve the moral ideal of a higher standard of life. By this means, the meaningful content of self-fulfilment should include a sense of a higher purpose – this, in the Neo-Confucian heritage, is seeking perfection of life. Furthermore, the self-fulfilment needs to be supported by a powerful "moral ideal" (ibid., 19). This "moral ideal" according to Taylor, means that a better or higher mode of life is not defined by desire or need of 'the self', but is offered by a standard of the 'public good' – this in Kant's terms is connecting the personal will choice with ethical reason. (ibid., 13-23)

On this last point, I will turn to discussions on movements of 'romantic liberalism'. As I noted earlier, regarding relationships between rule (in terms of reason and obligation) and freedom (in terms of free will and true self), any of the three philosophies (the Confucian, the Taoist and the Kantian) is different to each of the others. Confucianism and Taoism appear at first glance to be diametrically opposed; as Li Zehou notes, Confucianism showed:

> ... respect for the individuality of the members of a clan – [in his view, human growth is a process of "ritualization"] ... But it also led directly to

[Chuang Tzu's] idea of independent individuals who abandon the world and isolate themselves from secular concerns: 'vacillating beyond the dust and dirt of the world; free and unfettered in inactivity.' (1994, 49)

At this point, one might find Kant's denial of knowledge is in accord with Chuang Tzu's objection to Confucian's "ritualism", however, Kant and Chuang Tzu had different heritage roots: although he negated Confucian's objective instrumental framework, Chuang Tzu insisted that the harmony of subjectivity and objectivity is the Way (*Tao*) – the nature of human life. Kant as well, in his mature theory, implicitly admitted that concepts will have some irreducible role to play in the judgment about works of art. (Cohen & Guyer, 1982, 8) Nevertheless, it is very important to preserve individual uniqueness in a healthy balance with wholeness.

Let us go back to the Chinese metaphysical thinking about being. The Chinese philosophical tradition is represented by the "mutual and complementary roles played by Confucianism and Taoism" (Li Zehou, 1994, 45). Thus, in defining the Chinese metaphysical theories, we can refer both to *Yijing* metaphysics (as being- and becoming-oriented) and *Daodejing* metaphysics (as non-being- and becoming-oriented):

> This framework is where the Daoist philosophy of dao has its continuity with the *Yijing*. But this framework also provides a basis for innovation and insight into reality which leads to the Daoist philosophy of the *dao*. This innovation and insight consist in introducing the notion of void or non-being (*wu*) into metaphysical thinking on reality and life. In the light of this innovation and insight, the *Yijing* philosophy of *dao* as *taiji* becomes the Daoist philosophy of *dao* and *wu*. Hence the metaphysical thinking initiated or presupposed by the *Yijing* (which is polaristic and yet integratively single-source oriented) developed into the metaphysical thinking of the *Laozi* which embraces polarities and yet transcends them in reformulating the concept of ultimate source. (Cheng Chung-ying, 1989, 192)

With the above explanation, perhaps, we can understand in what way the two traditions maintain a mutual and complementary relationship with each other. We need to emphasize the wisdom of Taoist thought, here, especially the idea of "polarity".[23] The most significant notion here is that while the Existentialists celebrate the "power" of human beings, Cheng Chung-ying reminds us that "the human person has many limitations, some of which he may overcome, but some of which he can only accept" (ibid.,170).

Conclusion

Facing this undeniable reality of "being", what is the best way to combine aesthetics and ethics? It should be possible to work out a complementary framework which will integrate the wisdom of both Chinese and the Western metaphysical approaches. For example, on one side, we may that find the traditional Chinese "with reason holding emotion in check" (Li Zehou, 1994, 47) framework can more readily succeed in reconciling the tension between feeling and reason.

On the other side, we may also find Kant's "universal intersubjective validity" (Cohen & Guyer, 1982, 3) more comprehensible. This notion, denoting, perhaps, that people are only 'volunteering' to be 'rule-governed' is the moral condition of a free society, forming the scaffolding of the moral ideal.

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[23] "Polarity" is the underlying principle in Taoist philosophy. For instance, in *Using Polarity* Lao Tzu says: "When all the world knows beauty as beauty, There is ugliness. When they know good as good, There there is evil. In this way Existence and nonexistence produce each other. Difficult and easy complete each other. Long and short contrast each other. High and low attract each other. Pitch and tone harmonize each other. Future and Past follow each other. Therefore, Evolved Individuals Hold their position without effort, Are a part of All Things and overlook nothing. They produce but do not possess, Act without expectation, Succeed without taking credit. Since, indeed, they take no credit, it remains with them." (See R.L. Wing, *The Tao Of Power* (New York: Boubleday, 1996).

Obviously, any of the other approaches to combining ethics and aesthetics should have the complementary framework's strengths and weakness; thus, what is 'good' to do is to regard the Chinese and Western metaphysical approaches as mutual complements.
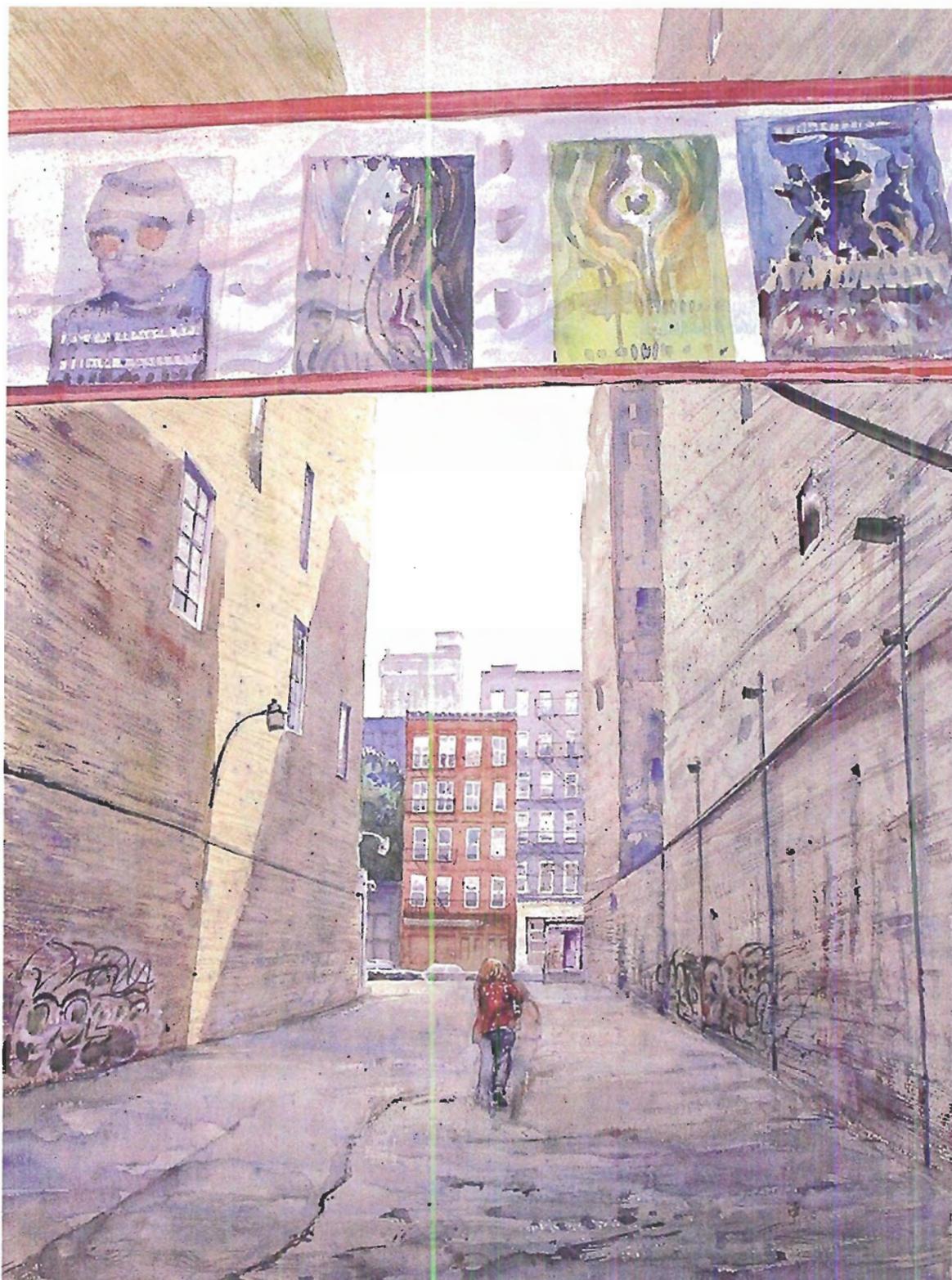
Painting 6 *Chan Chung-shu,*
On the Street # 3, *watercolour on paper, 1999.*

CHAPTER THREE:
TO WHAT SHOULD THE ARTIST RESPOND
IN TODAY'S ART WORLD?

The instrumental concerns of our day-to-day lives, such as
making a living, the humdrum business of economics, and
the practical matters of politics, provide for our needs as
biological organisms. Simply put, they keep us alive. But
why live at all? For what reason do we exert our minds and
bodies so that we may be sustained? One answer lies not in
the instrumentalities of our bodily existence but in the
affective realm of our minds. We live to perpetuate our own
spiritual existence and the lives of our loved ones; we live
because of the symbolic value we attach to life itself; and we
live to experience the joys and passions of today and
tomorrow. Life's gratifications range from the private to the
public, the idiosyncratic to the societal, and the sensuous to
the intellectual. It is unclear where practical activities leave
off and expressive culture begins, but it is clear that the
Muse makes a very important contribution to the latter. In a
word, art can make life worthwhile... [However], the
alienation that plagues the modern Western world can only
benefit from a renewed interest in the blessed Muse.

Richard L. Anderson
Calliope's Sisters:
A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art

The Issues

Clearly, in the twentieth century Western art world, both the modernists and

postmodernists did not depict each other faithfully particularly when it came to the

philosophy of art and aesthetics. In the past few decades, with the rise of academic

postmodernism and the growing influence of the political attitudes of the post-war

experimental avant-garde, they were antithetical to each other. The storm of

postmodernism crashed across all aesthetic and artistic domains; as Butler notes:

> Many would now say that for committed postmodernists, interpretive implications were always (and disastrously) 'privileged' over the enjoyable artistic embodiment and formal sophistication which so many had learned to appreciate in modernist art. (2002, 6)

Not surprisingly, if we match up this statement with the postmodernist art

movement and its impact on the contemporary art from the 1960s to the late twentieth

century, we can see that postmodernist doctrines drew upon a great deal of philosophical,

political, and sociological thought which disseminated itself into the artistic avant-garde,

particularly in the visual arts. Thus, as Butler notes, "the postmodernist period is one of the

extraordinary dominance of the work of academics over that of artists" (ibid., 7).

Postmodernist theory arose from a suspected reliance upon "bourgeois" certainties

concerning the world order. Many postmodernists thought that this would have simply

reproduced a bourgeois view of the world aimed at an unjustifiable universal acceptance.

The confidence with which such claims were made was influenced by Derrida's

'deconstructive' attitude. "The central argument for deconstruction depends on relativism

[which] views truth itself as always relative to the differing standpoints and predisposing

intellectual frameworks of the judging subject" (ibid., 16). In the visual art field,

postmodernist art echoes the deconstruction doctrines. As Butler says:

> [Postmodernist art] resists the master narrative of modernism, and the authority of "high" art... it worries about its own language... [postmodernist culture] is seen as anti-elitist, anti-hierarchical, and dissenting... Much postmodernist art pays attention to hitherto marginalized forms of identity and behaviour. (Ibid. 64)

From today's perspective, although their wars were crisscrossed by philosophical and cultural conflicts, the two factions often made trouble with each other just for political and emotional rather than rational reasons.

Globalization is another great challenge to artists in today's highly informative technological era. The impact of globalization on the contemporary art world is remarkable and complex with both benefits and losses; "some people foresee a new and exciting age of dynamic interaction that will bring sweeping benefits to humankind as a whole; others decry the loss of local distinctiveness and self-determination" (Anderson, 2004, 266). However, the logic of consumerism – at a rapid rate of change – has presented problems for both the human and the natural environment. In the art world as well, not a few artists are struggling with the global culture which is taking on "the gloss of Western consumer culture often at the expense of the local and unique" (Richmond, 2002, 3). I may assume with the authors cited above that first, "both sides of debate are in some measure correct" (Anderson, 2004, 266), and any "rigorous democratic debate" about globalization is taken very seriously (Richmond, 2002, 3); second, the losses due to globalization are not only in cultural issues but also in quality of life (ibid.). Above all, what is important to note is that, as Richmond says, "globalization in its present form is not inevitable and that it can be shaped more towards the public good through education, and in particular, aesthetic education" (ibid., 1). From a Taoist perspective, our global world is constructed by diverse local and unique societies that are both interconnected and interdependent; I assume that a healthy "unity" as Anderson suggests, "is [to be] shared by art throughout the world, with artists everywhere using their special skills to imbue sensuous media with potent meaning" (2004, 255).

Over the past two decades, Chinese contemporary art has gradually become the focal point of China's modernist cultural development. "It is not only an active genre in the domestic art circle but also a vibrant participant in the international art community" (Wang Feng, "Chinese Contemporary Art: Between Local and Global Dynamics", No. 4, Vol.66, ¶1; available from http://www.ZWWHJL.com.cn). A renowned art critic and international exhibit organizer, Fan Di'an, analyses the development of Chinese contemporary art and divides it into four major stages. Each of the four stages has its unique characteristic features, but obviously, in the first three stages, the development of Chinese contemporary art was in some measure a miniature of the Western contemporary art world. For instance, in the first stage (from the end of the 'Cultural Revolution' to the mid-1980s), which called for freedom and individuality, Chinese artists broke themselves free from the shackles of outdated ideologies and expressed their concern over human rights, truth, and democracy. (Wang Feng, No. 4, Vol.66) In the second stage (from the mid-1980s to 1989), Chinese artists, especially the younger ones, formed many groups by themselves (the major one was known as the New Wave Art '85 with some 80 groups); in a very short time they copied almost all schools of Western modernism: liberalism, existentialism and individualism uncritically and they produced "Cultural Revolution-styled" movements: Cynical Realism, Gaudy Art, Chinese Pop, but most of them were just "short-lived flurries". (A.i.A., Sept. '03) In the third stage of Chinese art (from the early 1990s to the mid-1990s), when the market economy was introduced in China many young artists shifted their focus from the grand approach (to express the collective thinking of the whole society) to personal styles (concerned more about personal feelings and experiences) and rather than creating new styles or forms, they turned historical, political, commercial and cultural symbols into a

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compositional artistic language. So we can call this stage an 'era of symbols' which was quite similar to the Western post-modernism period. The last stage (from the mid-1990s until now) has been a turning point in the development of Chinese contemporary art. In this stage new directions of Chinese contemporary art are driven by three impetuses: first, an artistic vision of urban design has been driven by urbanization; second, inspired by pop culture, conceptual and sensual art has become popular; third, the impact of globalization on China has brought both challenges and opportunities. (Wang Feng, No. 4, Vol.66)

Chinese contemporary art reflects the realities of China's modern society and cultural issues; it gives the outside world not only a picture of modern China but also some profound clues about the development of Chinese contemporary art theories. The development of Chinese contemporary art as a case is worthy of investigation. Thus, a comparative study of Western and Chinese experiences of contemporary art is the main focus of this chapter.

Contemporary Art: Artists and Their Works

With regard to identity, a number of questions have been raised: What is the role of an artist? What should an artist be, a disciple or a truth seeker? What should an artist respond to in today's art? What criteria do we use to judge a good artist? Does the creation of art need an artist? I will try to respond to these questions by discussing the last question first.

With the challenges from postmodernist philosophers, the role of the professional artist has been devalued. A movement called 'the death of the artist', which is parallel to

"the death of the author" movement (Butler, 2002 23),[24] has broken out since the second

half of twentieth-century. As Spalding claims, "The evidence for this is staring us in the

face: where is our new Picasso or Matisse of 'conceptual art?" (2003, 11). The issue is that

many of the postmodernist artists, rather than doing artistic creation, played a

language-game, namely, free play of imagination with questionable results. As Spalding

says:

> No one ever came up to me, their eyes glowing with pleasure, telling me I
> just *must* see, say, the new wall drawings by Sol Lewitt in the 1970s, or the
> smashed plate paintings by Julian Schnable in the 1980s, or the life-size,
> glazed porcelain figures by Jeff Koons in the 1990s. (Ibid., 9)

However, when we talk about what we mean by art, in a key sense, as Spalding

notes, Gombrich is right to argue that "there was no such thing as art, only artists" (2003,

11). Of course I don't mean that one can define the meaning of art so simply, but, as

Spalding says:

> Art is essentially a means of visual communication, though that does not
> mean to say that all visual communications are works of art. To qualify for
> such an elevated status they must convey content of lasting value. Street
> signs and maps, comics and advertisements are not art, though you will find
> many masquerading as such in the art galleries of today. We reserve the
> word 'art' for those rare visual creations that stir our emotions and stimulate
> our thoughts profoundly and elusively, which we find difficult to express
> through other means, but which we nevertheless feel to be true to our
> experiences. As such, this definition adequately, if mundanely, embraces
> the sensations we get from looking at a Matisse or a Picasso, even though
> the experiences these two artists communicate are as different from each
> other as Raphael's was from Michelangelo's. We can look at both,

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[24] As Butler states, "Deconstruction (particularly as practised by literary critics) was culturally most
influential when it refused to allow an intellectual activity, or a literary text, or its interpretation, to be
organized by any customary hierarchy of concepts... In performing these tasks deconstruction disrupted the
text's organization, and contested what it saw as merely 'arbitrary' delimitations of its meanings.... The
language and conventions of texts (and pictures and music) became something to play with – they were not
committed to delimited arguments or narratives. They were the mere *disseminators* of 'meanings'.... There
thus arose a new notion of the text, as a 'free play of signs within language'. This proclamation of "The Death
of the Author', notably by Barthes and Foucault, also had the political advantage of doing away with him or
her as the bourgeois, capitalist, owner and marketer of his or her meanings" (2002, 21-23).

however, and judge each to be in its own way true. Art, in the end, is not an illusion but a revelation. The more profoundly it reveals the nature of our existence, the greater art it is. Those accepting such a definition must be discontented with most of the art they see in public galleries today. (Ibid., 12)

From a pluralist perspective, if art to some extent cannot be distinguished from life it will lose its intrinsic status. On the other hand, if art is alienated from life it will lose its meaning in life. In Spalding's case, one couldn't deny that the artist (the one who has the ability to create artworks of lasting value) is the spirit of artistic creations. Certainly it would be a problem if there were no professional artists in the creation of art.

In contrast, the postmodernist avant-garde has conceived the ideologies of art and artist very differently – a discourse which brings incredulity towards metanarratives in order to accelerate the modernist decadence. In *Drift-works* Lyotard asks artist:

> Adopt the perspective of active nihilism, exceed the mere recognition – be it depressive or admiring – of the deconstruction of all values. Become more and more incredulous. Push decadence further still and accept, for instance, to destroy the belief in truth under all its forms. (*The Re-enchantment of Art*, cited in Suzi Gablik, 1919, 16)

Indeed, as Butler notes, many postmodernist art critics "see the true function of the avant-garde as being critical in the postmodernist sense" (2002, 64). He states that, in Lyotard's view, deconstructive postmodernist artists "should attack the bourgeois institutions of art and therefore be directed to a (better?) future" (ibid.). However, we would question whether a deconstructive postmodernist art revolution can lead the art world to a better future. Really, although there are "good liberal reasons" (ibid., 14)[25] to attack the bourgeois institutions of art, the plausible deconstructive postmodernist

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[25] In Lyotard's view, the 'grand narratives' "do not allow for disputes about value, and often enough lead to totalitarian persecution" (see Butler, 2002, 14).

approach is dangerous as "there is a deep irrationalism at the heart of deconstructive postmodernism" (ibid., 11) and a great deal of deconstructive theory depends on a sceptical attitude. In the art world, art nowadays has become an inconsequential exercise, a reflection of the cultural phenomenon, and a battlefield of "social, sexual, and political conflict" (Sandler, 1996, 412).

There is another concern about limitations in 'self-qualification' – "People lost the broader vision because they focussed on their individual lives," says Taylor (1991, 2). As he argues, "This individualism involves a centring on the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political, historical. As a consequence, life is narrowed or flattened" (ibid., 14) . One may argue that 'free play' needs justification and interpretation needs norms. (Butler, 1984) For instance, regarding the relationship of arts to truth, postmodernist artists attack bourgeois authority and reliability. They criticize the kind of art (objects) that can represent the real. Since the 1960s the Pop art movement has broken down the certainties of the modernist system of classification by giving art "a *deconstructive* dimension" (Butler, 2002, 81) – the 'perpetual present'. The Conceptual art movement has attacked the modernist authority by playing both the 'indeterminate free play games'[26] and the 'political power game'[27] Although postmodernism is routinely expressed differently in

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[26] The 'indeterminate free play game' can be defined as the perpetual play of linguistic differences.

[27] As Butler notes, "There was a growing politicization of the postmodernist avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s. Most artists knew some version of the Foucauldian relationship between discourse and power, and this often took the form of an awareness of the ways in which the 'messages' or the semiotics of works of art fitted or not within the institution designed to promote them. This led to a critique of the dependence of art on 'the museum-gallery complex' (as if it were rather like the 'military-industrial complex'). The notion is that

specific disciplines, it tracks three basic concepts common to all postmodernist theories: poststructuralism, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Clark, 1998). To demonstrate the limitations of postmodernism, we should focus on analyzing the problems of deconstruction theories.

Perpetual Present

For many deconstructive postmodernists, to ask "What is the real presence?" might be their activity. According to George Steiner, this means:

> [The deconstruction theory] aims to tease out the act of reading or of perceiving and interpreting the painting from the innocent or self-deluding carapace of discourse... [And at] the same time, deconstruction queries the tradition hierarchical distinctions drawn between theory and act, between critique and so-called creation" (1989, 116-117).

According to the nihilistic logic of the deconstructivists, for deconstruction there can be no foundational speech-act, no saying immune from un-saying, thus, their logic argues that "There is no purity in *poiesis*. Metaphysical, political, social interests and concealments are at work throughout. Deconstruction will show that theory, visible or spectral, dynamic or vestigial, haunts the would-be innocence of immediacy" (ibid., 117). This is the crux of deconstructionist theory.

Thus, much deconstructive postmodernist art is about stripping away the ideological myths that held modernism together, particularly the mastering position, the

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the museum, as a kind of secular temple, 'legitimizes' the work through the discourse of a pseudo-clergy of curators and their dependent critic-reviewers. But it is the way in which they pick the team of artists, and write the catalogues, that really counts, and their willingness in this period to allow the enemy of critique within depended a good deal upon the intellectual shield of academic theory" (see Butler, 2002, 92).

hegemonic, masculine authority that has been vested in Western European culture and its

institutions. As Gablic notes:

> One way it does this is to simulate mastery – to undermine the fixation with originality – which still dominates our ideas of cultural production. Finding one's art ready-made is, of course, an old Duchampian formula for undermining the notion of originality. (Ibid., 17)

As Appignanesi, et al. note:

> Duchamp's installation of the ready-made, had the effect of radically upgrading the power of display... Under Warhol's treatment, aesthetics turns into anaesthetics... Warhol's reproductions are not producing art or even the artist, but the Ultimate Commodity. (1995, 38-40)

Furthermore, there were concerns that the wide range of post-Minimal work

(including Conceptualism, Performance and Body Art, just to name a few) threw out the

aesthetic process altogether, and manifested itself in the 1990s with 'anti-art' scandals.

(Appignanesi et al., 1995)

In a 1981 article in *October*, Crimp announced that postmodernist art is "the end of

painting"; Sandler writes that:

> Crimp [is] contemptuous of the myth of man and the ideology of humanism which it supports... Because [Crimp believes that] they are all notions that sustain the dominant bourgeois culture. They are the very hallmarks of bourgeois ideology... [In his views], painting and, particularly, neoexpressionist painting, had to be purged because it was the aesthetic counterpart of political neoconservatism (1996, 224)

Thus,

> Deconstruction became central to postmodern theory... Mechanical reproduction took art out of the realm of 'tradition' and placed it in the arena of 'politics'... Photography lent itself to such a mission because it could be widely and cheaply disseminated to the masses... (Ibid., 340-49)

In this way, art vanished in the high-velocity quest for originality. As Appignanesi, et al. argue, "Art [could] only progress towards its own self-annihilation" that art finally meant "no art" (1995, 45).

In contrast, George Steiner discusses this question from the modernist relative perspective. In his account, the "real presence" is subtle, we can only infer the necessary possibility of this "real presence" from "the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form" (1991, 3). He notes:

> There is priority in time. The poem comes before the commentary. The construct precedes the deconstruction. Temporality is a metaphysically and existentially resistant category. It has been sharply relativized in the world-view of modern science. Time can be bent into contingency and accident. There have been instances, though few, though suspect in their artifice, in which a picture, a literary text, a musical composition, have been realized in calculated response to some theoretical, critical, programmatic expectation... "Being and time", says the philosopher. The two are indissoluble. (Ibid., 150)

According to George Steiner this means that to axiomatize Western theology and the metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics as fundamental and pre-eminent there must be the concept of a "presence":

> It can be that of God (ultimately, it must be); of Platonic 'Ideas'; of Aristotelian and Thomist essence. It can be that of Cartesian self-consciousness; of Kant's transcendent logic or of Heidegger's 'Being'. It is to these pivots that the spokes of meaning finally lead. (Ibid., 121)

Of course there is ground for negation (by criticizing the concept of logocentricity), however, many people are ambivalent. On the one hand, it is good for us to ask if "there is no longer any privileged judge, interpreter or explicator who can determine and communicate the truth, the true intent of the matter?" (Ibid., 127) The answer shall be

"Today we stand orphaned but free in the place of the *a-Logos*" (ibid.).[28] On the other

hand, it is also good for us to ask:

> What would happen if we had to pay our debts towards theology and the metaphysics of presence? What if the loans of belief in transcendence, made to us since Plato and Augustine in reference to signifying form, were called in? What if we had to make explicit and concrete the assumption that all serious art and literature, and not only music to which Nietzsche applies the term, is an *opus metaphysicum*? (Ibid., 134)

The above questions cannot be answered. But I can say at least that should the

Zeitgeist be different from deconstruction, then the world of essences would turn out to be

dominated by *spiritual thought*, and the world would be more *meaningful*.

Free Play

Derrida's prescription for artists is a free play of signs within language. As Butler

notes:

> Derrida's work in this field parallels the proclamation of "The Death of the Author" by Barthes, who emphasizes that "we must give up our former certainties about meaning and the thematics of the text which made our attitude that of the consumer who, in accepting art as a mirror of reality, asks for more of what he knows or finds to his taste, and subjects it (or thematizes it) according to his own preferred "transcendental signified'....
> The process is thus a very self-conscious one. (1984, 77-79)

And the text, as really constructed by the viewer, is thereby liberated and

democratized for the free play of the imagination. Here are some questions I have in mind:

firstly, if the meanings become the property of the interpreter, who is, deconstructively, to

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[28] As George Steiner explains, the Greek word 'a-logos", in English 'a surd' "is an algebraic toot which cannot be expressed in finite terms. It lies outside the commensurable and the decidable. Etymologically, 'surd' carries the earlier meaning 'voiceless'. He argues that, "At this point, it shades into the unspoken and the mute, into the opaque zone of 'surdity', which means 'deafness' and 'absurdity'. Each of these areas of definition and of connotation is pertinent. The donstructions which I have summarized are those that challenge both intelligibility and vocation (the answering act). Play and silence draw near to each other. As they do in the music of Cage" (1989, 127).

play freely (indeterminably) with imagination, should it be a problem to claim from this a

kind of 'rootless' imagination? Here, with Butler, I would argue that we need norms for

interpretation. Butler explains:

> We are concerned in interpretation with the logic and justification of
> the institutional practice of putting into circulation critical interpretative
> paraphrases of texts instead of the text, for certain purposes which will
> always deviate to some degree from those of the text. This is because
> interpretation will always, for Derridans and non-Derridans, favour some
> implication of the text, which it is thought *useful* for the reader to know...
> The problem then becomes, for Derridans and non-Derridans alike, whether
> within this perpetual interpretative play of difference and paraphrase, even
> when it is governed by plausible implication... there are any grounds which
> can place any acceptable limitations upon what can be said. We wish to
> know the norms whereby some choices of implication may seem
> to be more worthwhile than others. (Ibid., 88)

Thus, Butler argues that "a form of contextual relativism" is needed. For example,

in his view, "the institutional context in which literature is interpreted, then 'the reaction of

others to an interpretation becomes a test of its value" (ibid., 89).

Power and Identity

There was a growing politicization of the postmodernist avant-garde in the 1970s

and 1980s. This led to a critique of the bad faith of 'aim-for-grant'[29] art, and the

dependence of art on "the museum-gallery-complex" (Butler, 2002, 92).[30] For instance, as

Michael Archer noted, what complicated the matter was that by that time a number of

artists had begun to use language itself as a material. Conceptualism is often identified as a

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[29] As Butler states, "There was a growing politicization of the postmodernist avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s. Most artists knew some version of the Foucauldian relationship between discourse and power, and this often took the form of an awareness of the ways in which the 'messages' or the semiotics of works of art fitted or not within the institutions designed to promote them" (2002, 92)

[30] According to Butler, The notion [of 'the museum-gallery-complex'] is that the museum, as a kind of secular temple, 'legitimize' the work through the discourse of a pseudo-clergy of curators and their dependent critic-reviewers. But it is the way in which they pick the team of artists, and write the catalogues, that really counts, and their willingness in this period to allow the enemy of critique within depended a good deal upon the intellectual shield of academic theory" (Ibid.).

period during which art became insubstantial. Where there had once been paintings and sculptures, there were now items of documentation, maps, photographs, lists of instructions and bits of information that had been demonstrated in the artworks in different ways. Interested in experimentation with art forms and media other than painting and sculpture, conceptual artists used photographs, words, the medium of artists' books, and so forth, to dematerialize the art object in favour of emphasizing the ideas it represented, even though what was there to be seen in a gallery would be nothing more than a text naming substances and/or objects and what might be done with them. Effectively, the art works could be presented just in language, and the options given to the viewer were important because art is always a presentation. With 'art' in the conceptual form rather than as the expression of an idea or emotion belonging to the artist, it was now more appropriate for the 'receiver' to consider in what ways the information given could be meaningful. Here, Archer gives an example:

> [The French-based artist Daniel] Buren, who adopted the candy stripe as a sign of art's presence, quoted and emphasized the French writer Maurice Blanchot's phrase – 'a work of art of which nothing can be said, except that it is'.... His constant use of the stripe began with his 1966 agreement with Niele Toroni (b.1937) and Olivier Mosset (b. 1944) that each would make one painting over and over again, whatever the situation... [With his] concern with the question of art's presentation.... In March 1970, Buren had a blue and white striped poster included in the upper right hand corner of the Arts & Entertainments advertising panel in over 130 stations of the Paris Metro. Although done on the occasion of the '18 Paris IV 70' exhibition, 'these pasted pieces of striped paper'... 'were and still being considered as part of a work which began, was carried on and is still in process outside and beyond the place and the time of this particular proposal'. Furthermore, the posters provided the 'pretext' for a set of photographs, published as the book *Legend I*, which itself could only be "a partial representation of what is (only) a fragment of a work in progress. (Archer, 1997, 72)

Of course, "works of art should call into question" (Butler, 2002, 105), but they need to do so in far more complex and enduring ways than we find in most recent postmodernist art. Butler's contributions in analyzing these problems are helpful. Initially, for the discussions on postmodernist political art., as Butler notes, Robert Hughes is right to point out that

> [The] problem with much of such political art is that its ideas aren't actually much good – they are often banal and naïve, and they put no one through any very unusual or sophisticated thought process. (Ibid.., 103)

And one consequence of this conceptualism was "the loss of a feeling for complexity in art... The result of this anti-modernist turn could be a deliberate shallowness" (ibid., 81). For instance, as Butler argues, how could conceptual artist Michael Craig-Matin name his artwork arbitrarily: with a glass of water on an ordinary bathroom glass shelf, nine feet high on the wall; the artist called it *An Oak Tree*. What did this artwork mean? "All deeply self-conscious, quasi-intellectual, shallow, surface-oriented, and 'questioning'. But that's it" (ibid., 83).

Additionally, concerning issues of discourse and power, the arguments here are two: firstly, not *everything* of the visual arts is textually constructed, and this would leave out a good part of our non-linguistic responses to previous art, and this textualizing view often took the form of an awareness of the ways in which the "messages" or the "semiotics" (ibid., 92) of those 'aim-for-grant' artworks try to fit within the institution (museum) designed for legitimizing or promoting the artworks. Secondly, more significantly in this case, the 'text' – the art work, is dominated by the legitimacy or interpretation of some highly authoritarian, idiosyncratic, and well-paid cultural

critic-reviewers and curator. It is ironic enough that the postmodernist critics and curators have been in more important positions than art or artists. For instance, there is the Hong Kong debate on whether the work of the self called 'Kowloon Emperor', Tsang Tsou-choi, a street graffiti calligrapher, should be considered 'art'? The issue was about how a "mental" old man" became billed as "the world's oldest living graffiti artist" when his works (which were rejected by a local art museum) sold at a Sotheby's auction, and afterwards his work was invited to appear at the prestigious 50th annual Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition in 2003. The confirmation of Tsang's place as a legitimate artist was just the "merit" of a Hong Kong critic Lau Kin-wai – ironically, Tsang didn't know he was actually making art. (*CBC Arts*, Nov.'o4 http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/11/01/Arts/graffitiartauction041101.htm/) As Butler says, perhaps the production of art criticism is logically "ripe for deconstruction" (Butler, 2002, 93).

Feminist art, of course, was undoubtedly an element of the political arts of postmodernism. As Edward Lucie-Smith suggested, feminist art has been one of the most powerful forces for change within the contemporary art world since the early 1970s. The progress of feminist art, in particular the deconstructive attitude, has not been free of controversy. First, influenced by Foucault's ethical argument of the relationship between discourse and power, feminist artists adopted the victim's position, and took women as standard examples of the 'other'. They put the subject matter – 'female beauty' – into question in order to attack the modernist authority of men. As Butler comments:

> Much feminist thought therefore has in common with postmodernism
> that it attacks the legitimating metadiscourse used by males, designed
> to keep them in power, and it seeks an individual empowerment against
> this. (2002, 57)

I agree with Butler that "the postmodernist deconstructive attitude has been extraordinarily effective in combating restrictive ideologies in this way" (ibid., 58). However, such discourses of power do not just contribute to the decentring and deconstruction of the self, they also serve to marginalize those people who do not partake in them. I think Butler is right that "the incompatibility of postmodernist attitudes to a commitment to any settled philosophical position is a grave problem for them" (ibid.). Thus, Butler argues, "a good Derridean would then deconstruct [them]" (ibid., 58). He also suggests:

> It may indeed be better to follow a rational (Enlightenment) egalitarian project of progressive emancipation, as opposed to a postmodernist route, which so often ends up in a radical separatism. For although postmodernist arguments have helped many to *define* the roots of their difference from the majority, or 'those in power', effective political action needs something more than this rather preliminary sense of a dissentient identity. (Ibid., 58)

Butler is not alone; even Jürgen Habermas, one of the most eloquent of leftist critics, also points out that it is very dangerous, indeed, "to take the postmodernist turn, and abandon the ideal of communicative or indeed consensual rationality, which he sees as the best antidote to the political abuse of power" (ibid., 61). The polarized debates on the *nature of self* were a challenge to individualist rationalism, and particularly when artists were having "trouble with beauty". As Wendy Steiner points out, "Beauty is certainly a magnet for the cultural anxieties of our days… The turn away from beauty in twentieth-century art, in such a case, has been alienating us from our deepest nature" (2001, XVIII). It is true, as Steiner claims, for both feminist and modernist reasons, that it is impossible to return to the old stereotypes of women in the arts. Nevertheless, I really worry that we have paid too great a cost for "[cutting] off from any central harmonizing

ideology" (Butler, 2002, 60). Perhaps Wendy Steiner is right, too, that "the task that awaits us is nothing less than the reimagination of the female subject as an equal partner in aesthetic pleasure" (2001, XIX).

Art and Technology

From the sociological perspective, we can also say that postmodernist art is the surrender of culture to technology in the consumerist new phase of capitalism. In an essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin raised a very good question, "Is it the end of original art?" He argues that the mechanical reproducibility of original art must inevitably have a disintegrating effect on "original" itself. As Appignanesi, et al. (1995) point out, some art historians have argued, to an extent correctly, that the invention of photography ended the authority of painting to reproduce reality. Painting pictures of 'reality' had simply become obsolete. Technological innovation in the infrastructure had outstripped the superstructural traditions of visual art. Mass production (photography) replaced hand-crafted originality (art).

Much of the art of the 1980s could be characterized by one technique – appropriation; it became so central in the art of the 1980s. Artists of the 1980s used appropriation to interpret consumer society. For example, John Baldessari and Richard Prince were the first to make pictures from mass-media pictures. The rephotography that Prince introduced became a popular technique in the 1980s, as well, Baldessari was of greater influence on leading media-minded photographers and painters. Also in the US, David Salle's paintings fitted more neatly into the notion of appropriation. Salle's frequent use of softporn imagery was read as an example of a feminist backlash. As Sandler writes, in 1976, in *October*, Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens argue:

It promoted the *Pictures* aesthetic as part of a campaign it waged against formalism and modernism using as its weapons postmodernist ideas and approaches culled from the writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, and other French intellectuals. (Sandler, 1996, 321-2)

The context of postmodernist art was as much social and political as it was formal; thus its trouble is that "there are no longer any rulers or categories by which to judge the experimentally unfamiliar" (ibid., 50) and also that the "different ways of seeing made it difficult for modernists and postmodernists to talk to each other: They were using different language (ibid., 5).

Deconstruction, as academic and self-involved as it mostly was, supported a general move towards relativist principles in postmodernist culture. Akin to postmodernism, if we put deconstruction within the bigger cyclical picture in philosophy, then we can find its strength as well as its limitation. Nevertheless, as Butler notes, according to Derrida, philosophy can be seen as an infinitely extensible line of texts, thus, it is worthwhile for him to point out that "There never can be a single over-all theory of anything, and hermeneutics, in looking critically at the language in which such arguments are framed..." (1984, 60) However, for this definition, we have already paid a great cost.

Globalization: Local and Unique Culture

A Case Study on the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art

As Fan Di'an's brief introduction to the development of Chinese contemporary art shows, in the first three stages, the development of Chinese contemporary art was a miniature of the development of the Western contemporary art world. At this point, I would suggest that what Chinese artists have 'learned' from the West includes both its

virtues and its weaknesses. The main virtue is that art is more related to defining the

meaning of social life – the sense of social responsibility, but I would argue not necessarily

in the same forms and languages. The main weakness is that Chinese artists have

encountered the same problems as Western postmodernist deconstructive avant-gardes

have encountered. Accordingly, the main focus here will be on examining the problems of

postmodernist deconstruction art theories and creations by analyzing the problems of

deconstruction art theories in the Chinese context. I will examine three dimensions: subject

matter, style and language.

Is it necessary for Chinese avant-gardes to 'copy' contemporary Western art forms,

mediums and theories? Some of them might view this as a 'passport' – a sharing of

language – for participating in the international art communities. It is hard to say,

nevertheless, one must admit that some individual Chinese avant-gardes have obtained

'advantages' from their political status. However, the challenges between local values and

global values have still remained as a cultural dilemma to them.

In the mid-1990s, as the market economy flourished, modernization and

urbanization were growing fast in China. As a result, remarkable changes took place in the

people's way of life as well as in the development of contemporary Chinese art. Changes

were driven by three features: (1) modernization and urbanization; (2) highly informative

technologies; and (3) globalization and consumerism. All these present to China both

challenges and opportunities. The outside world seems quite worried about the direction in

which China will be driven and the processes by which contemporary Chinese art will be developed.[31]

The Cases of "Experimental Art" [32]

From a re-interpretative view, the decade from 1990 to 2000 "represented a crucial stage in the development of Chinese experimental art. Thoroughly internationalized, this art also responded to tremendous changes in Chinese society" (Information: The First Guangzhou Triennial, 2003, ¶1). In the last decade, Chinese artists began to respond to the contemporary Western art world critically. The development of Chinese contemporary art was driven by the forces of reconstruction and deconstruction. In order to revitalize Chinese cultural traditions, reconstructive artists rediscovered and re-applied indigenous philosophy and values, especially the way Chinese understand the world, into their artistic creation. (Wang Feng, No. 4, Vol.66) Simultaneously, deconstructive artists continued to practice Western political 'anti-art' scandals. Here in this chapter I will focus on examining

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[31] As Wu Hung describes, "Generally speaking, China in 2000 is no longer a socialist monolith, but a huge mixture of old and new, feudal and postmodern, excitement and anxiety. The country's future depends on the outcome of the negotiation between conflicting social forces" (2000, 21).

[32] See Wu Hung, he notes: "Chinese artists and art critics have been increasingly using the term "experiment art" (shiyan meishu) for its looser and broader implications. They have found terms like "unofficial art" and "avant-garde art" misleading: the former exaggerates the political orientation of this art and the latter exaggerates its artistic radicalism. An artistic experiment, in their view, can be about almost anything related to art and can be something major or something minor. In fact, experimental art is not associated with any particular artistic style, subject matter, or political orientation, but is defined by its relationship with four other major traditions in contemporary Chinese art, namely, (1) a highly politicized official art directly under the sponsorship of the party, (2) an academic art that struggles to separate itself from political propaganda by emphasizing technical training and higher aesthetic standards, (3) a popular urban visual culture that eagerly absorbs fashionable images from Hong Kong, Japan, and the West, and (4) an "international" commercial art, that though often initially part of experimental art, eventually caters to an international art market. An art experiment in China is always motivated by the desire to break away from the visual modes and vocabulary of these four traditions, though the focus of experimentation may be an art medium or style, new ways of presenting art to the audience, or even the identity and social function of the artist him/herself. During the twenty years since its emergence, the content of Chinese experimental art has been constantly changing as its relationship with these other art traditions changes. Generally speaking, this art has shown three consistent characteristics: a penchant for new art forms and materials, an interest in reinventing the language of artistic expression, and the self-positioning of the artist outside, or on the border of, official and academic art. (See Wu Hung, 2000, 11)

the movements of the 'experimental art' groups. For instance, issues of 'cancelled show'[33] were in the centre of the movement. What were the problems? Mainly, I would suggest, they were highlighted by the problem of self-qualification – with their political reasons some artists imagined that they would have the 'right' to do whatever they thought that was 'correct'. Among least twelve cases, I will analyze three including: (1) the case of Tang Song and Xiao Lu's 'shooting performance' on the first day of the *China/Avant-garde* exhibition; (2) the case of selling Zhu Yu's *Basics of Total Knowledge*, a bottled paste made of dead people's brains in the *Supermarket* exhibition; (3) the case of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's 'bodies connected performance' conducted during the *Infatuated with Injury* open studio exhibition. First of all, I need to point out that many of these artists 'welcomed' the cancellation. Not surprisingly, rather than doing art, they were playing 'power games'. The reason was that they were just using art as their political tool. For instance, in order to get attention they 'transformed' the National Art Gallery on the opening day of the *China/Avant-garde* exhibition by: first, putting down long black carpets from the street to the entrance of the exhibition hall and, putting up the emblem of the exhibition – a 'No U-Turn' traffic sign signalling 'There is no turning back'; and second, arranging a premeditated shooting performance. These types of dramatic activism and sense of happening were a kind of political orientation more than an art exhibition. Likewise, the

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[33] Regarded on their subject matter, style and political orientation, there were a number of experimental art exhibitions cancelled. There were at least twelve cases, they included: (1) *The First Academic Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Art 96-97;* (2) *Wildlife:* An Experimental Art Project Held Outside Conventional Exhibition Spaces and Devoid Conventional Exhibition Forms, Commencing Jingzhe Day, 1997, One of the Twenty-Four Divisions in China's Traditional Calendar, which Marks the Moment in a Year When Animals Wake Up from Hibernation and When All Creatures Revive; (3)*Trace of Existence:* A Private Showing of Contemporary Chinese Art '98; (4)*Persistent Deviation / Corruptionists*; (5) *It's Me:* An Aspect of Chinese Contemporary Art in the 90s; (6) *Post-Sense Sensibility:* Distorted Bodies and Delusion; (7) *Supermarket*; (8) *Departing from China*: An Exhibition of Chinese New Art; (9) *Contemporary Chinese Architecture Exhibition*: "Experimental" Section; (10) *Food As Art*; (11) *Home?*: Contemporary Art Proposals; and (12) *Infatuated with Injury*: Open Studio Exhibition No. 2 (For all the details, see Wu Hung, 2000, 131-208).

action of selling 'art' – such as the bottled human brains in a supermarket; and those 'art

projects' which used human corpses or animals were just intended to challenge social

rules. (Wu Hung, 2000) Furthermore, concerning 'postmodernist sensibilities', although

there were good liberal reasons for experimental artists to question the objective and

material world, there were profound dangers in such political 'anti-art' scandals. I believe

that postmodern art in those forms, styles and languages by meeting with problems of

endlessly suspect reliance where one can never because of the motives, objectives, or

behaviour of these artists and perpetual present with its lack of reference to past or future

will lose its essential intrinsic meaning in its natural sense: of the beautiful and the good,

though I acknowledge its undeniable force of the ugly and the ill.

By contrast, among experimental artists as a whole, those reconstructive

academic[34] and 'new generation academic'[35] experimental artists have played an

important role in shaping a domestic visual culture in Mainland China. The reconstructive

academic experimental artists according to Wu Hung:

> ... have developed a deep sense of social responsibility and share the
> rebellious spirit of experimental artists outside academies. On the other
> hand, they also are conscious of their responsibilities within the academy.
> They believe in the importance of technical training and formal perfection,
> and they often view themselves as modern interpreters – not rebels – of
> classical art traditions. (1999, 76)

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[34] The term "academic" for experimental art has a specific meaning which is different from its standard use in English. Here "academic" means "a research-oriented project, or a general notion of seriousness in art, criticism, or curatorship" (Wu Hung, 2000, 135).

[35] For instance, as Wu Hung analyzes, "Although seldom discussed by art historians, the *New Generation* exhibition in 1991 was a very important event in contemporary Chinese art. It was one of the first major exhibitions mounted after the June Fourth Movement. Taking place in the Museum of Chinese History next to Tiananmen Square, it attracted much attention from artists as well as the general public. Works in the exhibition were markedly different from government-commissioned propaganda paintings, but they also were not the sort of installations and performances seen in the 1989 *China / Avant-garde* show. The paintings' styles departed considerably from the socialist realist model, but all the artists still insisted on figurative images, not abstract patterns. The dominant subjects of these works are mundane scenes of daily life: beauticians with exaggerated smiles, lonely men and women in a public bus or a sleeping car on a train, a group of Chinese yuppies taking a picture in front of Tiananmen, and so on" (1999, 144).

Many of them became more down-to-earth and sentimental, their creations returning back to the aesthetic realm by using subtle artistic language. For example, Sui Jianguo's sculpture *Earthly Force* includes a group of heavy stone boulders, each embraced by an iron net. Many viewers have related the "reaction" of the boulders to "an artist's reaction to the tragedy of the June Fourth Movement". However, the artist recalled later that "the reaction occurred mainly in the aesthetic realm" (Wu Hung, 1999, 66). At this point, I would suggest the viewers' imaginative interpretation was inspired by the artist's aura – his deep and strong sentiment came from carving those stones silently for twenty days. Xu Bing's anti-writing (a kind of 'pseudo-calligraphy' and 'fake text') is also another good example of the reconstructive academic art. After the '85 Art New Wave, he found that most of the gathering (among the avant-gardes) were cheerless, so he locked himself in his studio for one year doing nothing except working on his pseudo-calligraphy, he explained later after he had finished his 'anti-writing'. By doing so, his nonsense calligraphy "thus appears as a rebellion within traditional Chinese art" (ibid., 39). Obviously,

> In searching for their artistic languages, both of them rejected orthodox academic styles as well as a straightforward imitation of Western modern art. In the late eighties and early nineties, they both positioned themselves at the periphery of academic art and also kept a distance from the "avant-garde" movement. Both of them had profound interest in ancient Chinese cultural traditions and forged their styles based on these traditions. (Ibid., 71)

Of course, I don't mean that these artists are the only good ones among the others, but the main point is that their works are communicable, and have provided more time and space for defining meanings of life through their artistic visual forms and languages.

In the 1990s, urbanization as a major impetus driving Chinese art development, raised new topics for Chinese artists. In this case, personal identity issues such as the contradiction and interdependence between public space and private space, and between social structure and individual thinking became important features of Chinese contemporary art. Artists during that stage chose a "multi-art setting" including painting, sculpture, installation, video, photography, model, multi-media, architecture, film, music and so forth to explore the changes of public space in urban landscapes and to explore their personal perspectives on urbanization. (Wang Feng, No. 4, Vol.66) It is very hard to find a good installation,[36] though I do not deny new art forms, in this case installations at all. For example, in Yin Xiuzhen's *Transformation*, she used her saved roof tiles to reference the issue of urbanization (hundreds of houses were torn down for modernist new buildings). On each tile she attached a black-and-white photo of the demolished house to indicate where were the tiles came from. I think her personal expression on urbanization is authentic, powerful and meaningful.

From the early 1990s to mid-1990s, "individuality soared as contemporary Chinese art developed" (Wang Feng, No. 4, Vol.66). For instance, a group of new generation academic experimental artists produced works which were related to their personal interests; their artistic language was largely defined in technical and stylistic terms; they acted individually; rather than as political activists; and they viewed themselves as individual subjects. The media they used in their creations were conventional materials and methods in traditional artistic genres such as oil painting, sculpture, or prints. (Wu Hung, 1999, 142-147) In brief, as Wu Hung notes:

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[36] My concern on installations is: they are hard to keep and present for long; most of this kind of art project requires quite a big budget.

Although seldom discussed by art historians, the *New Generation* exhibition in 1991 was a very important event in contemporary Chinese art... The paintings' styles departed considerably from the socialist realist model, but all the artists still insisted on figurative images, not abstract patterns.The dominant subjects of these works are mundane scenes of daily life: beauticians with exaggerated smiles, lonely men and women in a public bus or a sleeping car on a train.... This exhibition was important for two reasons. First, it announced the coming of age of a group of young academic artists who would soon play a major role in contemporary Chinese art. Second, it defined a new position in Chinese art beyond the dichotomy of orthodox academic art and rebellious 'avant-garde' art. (Ibid., 145).

At this level, I would agree with the author cited that

It is incorrect to view this position as a simple compromise. [Perhaps], it provided a *real* solution to problems faced by many young Chinese academic painters... This position was not a political or ideological one but was largely defined in technical and stylistic terms. (Ibid.)

For better or for worse, this summarizes the alternatives that Chinese experimental artists have chosen after their strong academic training background. Thus, in general, they have the ability to create artworks with long lasting value. I would suggest that this may help to keep them away from copying their Western mentor's 'end-game' position. In the above citation, instead of Wu's word 'Rather', I put my word 'Perhaps' there. This change means that, I am not sure it has provided a 'real' solution. In my view, nevertheless, I think it is good for artists to keep art only loosely tied with politics. In other words, I would suggest that, this is in some sense, a 'returning home' to the recalling of art to its 'natural' state, 'beauty', and to informing beauty with the ordinary languages such as Murdoch has suggested: the "Good", the "Real", and the "Love" (2003, 41). Going back to the topic question which I ask in this chapter, "What should the artist respond to in today's art world?" From a traditional Chinese perspective, the artist should respond to the Good, the Real, and to Love which are just a starting point. The ideal disposition for an artist to reach

are which, in the realm of art, is a fusion of feeling with the natural setting (*qing jing jiao rong*); and in the realm of spiritual, is the Great Man regards Heaven, Earth and the Myriad Things as One Body (*T'ien-jen ho-yi*). I will discuss these ideas in the *Contemporary and Traditional* section.

Contemporary and Traditional

Regarding form, artists are forced to choose between the traditional and the contemporary. As a consequence, in today's fashion, traditional forms have been marginalized from the contemporary art world. Regarding the meaning of 'contemporary', here is an example: in 2004, at the exhibition of *Contemporary Chinese Art Works by Huo Chun-yang & Liu Quan-yi*, I was asked "Can Professor Huo Chun-yang's Taoist paintings be called contemporary art?" I was the curator of that exhibition and my answer to this question was "Certainly they can". It depends on how you define contemporary art. My argument for this issue is twofold: first, we should see whether the artist responds to contemporary issues, and he did; second, I don't think that the new can be established only by abolishing the old, in fact, the logic of transformation is to bring forth the new through the old. In Huo's case, rather than abandonment or competition, the artist thinks that perhaps the Taoist theories of emptiness and simplicity are good prescriptions for the problematic modernist ideas of rootless imagination and the need for never-ending original innovation. In Huo's view the greatest achievement is to empty oneself because he believes that real innovation is produced only when an accomplishment is open-ended doing. (Huo Chun-yang, 2004, 11. Translated by the author) Although Huo's criticism of the crisis of modernist civilization is only one facet of the contemporary concerns, he has used a different theory to respond to such a profound lesson on contemporariness between old and

new; past and future; and traditional and contemporary. As the Chinese critic Han Bi

describes Huo's idea about 'innovative' that, "Huo has just fulfilled the traditions of the

'Northern Sung Academy School' which can be described by these three charactistics:

'following' (*xiang yan*), 'combining' (*hua he*), and 'differing' (*bie you*)" (ibid., 3). There is

nothing special to the traditional approach, however, in contrast to the modernist approach,

rather than a shallow innovation, it is a natural form of innovation. According to Huo, in

this traditional approach, that the new is the 'transcendence' but not the 'replacement' of

the old, is basic to artists. From 'a Taoist and a Ch'an Buddhist' point of view, he says:

> The essence of traditional Chinese culture can be concluded by a word 'realization'. Realization is a kind of artistic perception. Realization comes out of innateness, innateness brings about serenity, and serenity brings about perfection. Realization is a sublime recognition which is in accord with the 'Tao' and is inclined to intuition...

> The creation of an artist needs a 'harmonious' (*chong he*) and 'tranquil' (*ping jing*) disposition... Moreover, not to awaken the passion is the supreme disposition... Like the sun and the moon, all things are blessed without like and dislike, they only have the coolness but it is perpetual... thus, in art, I pursue the beauty of 'quietude', 'meditation', 'serenity', and 'harmonization'. Not to be influenced by the external elements, I adore a kind of calmed disposition so that, like 'flowers faded in their silence; (my) heart is as calm as the chrysanthemum'. I praise Chuang Tzu's idea of 'transcending oneself'. Art has its perfect disposition; artists only need to reach the perfect disposition and to go deep into it. The perfect disposition is not necessary to be developed. Any of the intention to think about transcending it is ignorant. An old Chinese saying is, 'one needs to empty the self, and to full the self, then one can move forwards the self'. Now what one can do is to inherit – to fill completely the 'hollow of art'. (Ibid., 8-11)

Thus, Huo says:

> An artist cannot purposely to pursue personality; style should be formed naturally. To have the ability of 'catching a glimpse of a passing beauty (*jing hong yi pie*)... is borne by the Ch'an Buddhist consciousness. The artistic intuition is a gift for the artists. Art should be personally tasteless. Art should be praised for being 'upright' but not for being 'odd'. Stress on the 'lonely' personality cannot reach the 'Tao'. Artistic personality can only

be valuable by accommodating the common.... The odd thing is short-lived, lacks of life energy. 'If something is circular it can be perceived; something is perceived then it can be last long' – It works well in being human as well as in art. (Ibid., 11)

I agree with Huo that humans need to live in harmony with their living environment, the living environment needs to be in harmony with the whole cosmos. Emphasis on personality is a way of being separated, in contrast, only emphasis on what we have in common is the oneness. The Eastern thoughts are broad and profound and by reasoning they have arrived at the philosophy of the 'Oneness'. (Ibid.)

Furthermore, from a curator's perspective, I just think that we will have no reason to set this type of intellectual elite's art works aside from the contemporary art world.[37] The intrinsic value of this type of traditional fine art should be timeless. In other words, it shouldn't be 'outdated'.

In my view, spiritual truth seeking and social response are the two pillars of the artistic realm; in this case, our art world needs artists' collaboration between the disciple and the spiritual truth seeker. For example, Chan Chung-shu is one of those artists (see Paintings 6, 7, and 8).

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[37] Traditional Chinese painting is such a natural visual language. For example, the art of the Northern Sung Academy School is one of the most distinctive ones. In Chinese cultural tradition, the ideal for humanity is to hold a harmonious relationship with nature. Accordingly, as Li, Zehou notes, "Chinese aesthetics, like Chinese philosophy, stresses not cognition or imitation, but emotional communication – the aesthetic emotion of harmony between humanity and nature... Chinese artists pay less attention to the object and substance, and more to function. They stress the influence of art on common everyday feelings, and find expression and satisfaction in practical psychology and ethnics of social life. This has become an important characteristic of Chinese art and aesthetics". (1994, 45-65) In the past two centuries, China's encounter with the West has had a serious impact on Chinese artistic traditions. As a result, people have criticized and devalued traditional Chinese aesthetics. In spite of these, rather than modern and/or invention, the two Chinese artists Huo Chun-Yang and Liu Quan-Yi still highly value traditional Chinese aesthetic theories. Works of these two contemporary Chinese artists successfully show us ideas about not only some of the "contemporary" arts currently being produced in China, but also redefining the value of traditional Chinese aesthetics. In this case, the exhibition *Contemporary Chinese Art – works by Huo Chun-yang and Liu Quin-yi* provides us an opportunity to gain a better understanding about Chinese culture as well as its art and aesthetics. (See my Curatorial statement).

Conclusion

It is undeniable that the conflicts between modernity and postmodernity in the last century have been challenging, not to say harmful at times to art; yet this conflict is not inevitable. As globalization can bring both challenges and opportunities, it gives us a chance to tackle the crises in art today. The different heritages of the East and the West have produced unique local cultures and the opportunity to fulfil art's best potential by keeping a fine balance (in this case) between the West and China in the sense of "sharing by art throughout [the two], with artists [of both] using their special skills to imbue sensuous media with potent meaning" (Anderson, 2004, 255).

Painting 7   *Chan Chung-shu*, **On the Street # 8**, *oil on canvas, 2001.*

CHAPTER FOUR:
SURVIVAL AND BALANCE

Art was not suffering from a swing of the pendulum, but was benighted by a total eclipse... its language, its teaching methods, its content and its judgement – have been eclipsed, one after the other, till there is virtually nothing left that is recognizable as art at all.

Julian Spalding
The Eclipse of Art:
Tackling the Crisis in Art Today.

What Is Wrong With Art Today?

Perfection as a traditional concept is a principle of aesthetics and art and implies aspiring for a better and higher purpose in life. However, since the modern period, 'perfection' with reference to art work has become problematic. In the modernist art world originality of free personal expression has become the first priority in art creation. As well, in the postmodernist art world, art has almost drowned in life – cultural and social response has become a condition of postmodernist art productions. As a result, perfection is banished from today's art world – from both modernist and postmodernist cultural traditions. Thus, I wonder if some artists are running too far away from this principle of aesthetics and art. Not surprisingly, this is the case and, as Cohen, et al. claim, "Modern aesthetics is constituted by a nest of problems and approaches" (1982, 3). What makes this problematic? A central issue Kant argues in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* involves problems of taste. As a consequence, art today is a struggle with, in Kant's terms, the

"antinomy" (ibid., 9) between feeling and reason.[38] Modern art was achieved by breaking

loose from traditional concepts, but it is very important to note, that in Kant's account,

artistic creation is connected with morality. Thus, Kant's real concern with such a

rule-governed concept is to maintain a delicate balance between feeling and reason.

However, some modernist artists haven't manifested Kant's best ideal. (Ibid., 1-12) Thus,

concerning debates on "What is art?" a chief aim of this chapter is to try to redefine value,

principle and a language of perfection in aesthetics and art by examining the issue from a

cross cultural perspective – a comparison between Western and Chinese heritages. Even

though I expect to ponder on and study art's principles, it is difficult when it comes to the

reality of human life, thus, my investigation must relate to sources of authenticity, namely,

historical, cultural religious, and political issues. As Butler states, since the 1980s, from a

sceptical attitude, the postmodernists attacked the legitimacy of 'master narrative theories'

which "are contained in or implied by major philosophies, such as Kantianism,

Hegelianism, and Marxism… which are based on the principles or metanarrative of

science" (2002, 13). For instance, in his book, *La condition postmoderne*, Lyotard attacks

the main narratives by stating that "from Christian redemption to Marxist Utopia – and that

of triumph of science… such doctrines have 'lost their credibility'" (ibid.). Ultimately, in

the late twentieth century, the movement of "new ways of seeing the world" (ibid.), has

played a central role in rapidly changing the culture of the art world. This movement

"depends upon an appeal to the cultural condition of an intellectual minority" (ibid., 14).

Art is responding for example to feminist and artistic avant-garde issues. Thus, in my

discussion I will select several typical movements for investigation.

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[38] For further discussion, see Cohen et al., *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, "Introduction" section.

In his book *The Eclipse of Art: Tackling the Crisis in Art Today* Julian Spalding

argues that art today is in crisis. According to Spalding, "Art was not suffering from a

swing of the pendulum, but was benighted by a total eclipse" (2003, 15). I shared

Spalding's view feeling deeply that 'art' means 'not art' to many artists. For instance, in

2001, in her media press, Linda Chavez notes:

> Is this really art?
>
> Gunther Von Hagens has given new meaning to the term "culture of death."
> Von Hagens, a German anatomist, has created an "art" exhibit consisting of
> works that include a man seated at a chess board, his brain exposed; a
> woman whose pregnant belly is peeled back to reveal an 8-month fetus
> curled inside; a skinned man astride a horse, holding his brain in his right
> hand, the horse's in his left.Nothing shocking about this, you say, it's just
> what passes for modern art these days? Ah, but there's an important
> difference. Von Hagens "Bodyworks" exhibit is not representational art –
> the usual paintings or sculptures or even photographs – but actual human
> bodies or body parts from 200 dead men, women and children preserved,
> dissected, mutilated and put on display to entertain. (Linda Chavez, 2001,
> townhall.com)

My feeling here is heavy. I feel we are the 'lost generation' in a time of inactivity,

who find ourselves in a dilemma – suffering in a cultural gap between modernity and

(post)modernity. To the question "What is right and what is wrong?" there seems to be no

certain, affirmative, and absolutely right or wrong answer. The question challenges

everybody's judgmental thinking. Life is complex so that art which reflects life is

inevitably complicated, therefore, there is no absolutely good or bad regarding moral

goodness, but there still should be a basic norm for judgement. For example, can we say

that Von Hagens' "art" (which he exhibited) is art? In elevating his creation to the status of

high art (as he himself referred to it), he "believed that he had given a new meaning to the

term "culture of death". Does it not matter that the "artist" can exhibit "artworks" that only

satisfy his/her subjective self but which are not recognized by others in society? How could

I agree to this as art? It really challenges our aesthetic judgment! This is why Spalding says

that "you are right not to like modern art" (2003, 9). What is the issue then?

Regarding the issue of subjective autonomy, for example in Von Hagens' case (in

Von Hagens' view, artists should have their 'rights', namely the subjective autonomy, for

responses or interpretions of 'pleasure' in their own way), I must argue that it is misleading

if someone claims that this is the power of 'autonomy' which is supported by Kant's

intersubjective theory. Kant has articulated firmly in his *Third Critique* that the taste of

aesthetic judgment, that is, the feeling of pleasure, must be disinterested (a kind of dialectic

"impersonal personal") and universally valid (which means the personal pleasure must be

grounded on a condition that he can presuppose exists in every other person). My argument

for judgment and creation is twofold: first, aesthetics and art are two domains but they are

dialectically constructed when they come about to artistic creation. Thus, the artists'

subjective responses to objects, namely, pleasure, need to be voluntarily "rule-governed"

and, regarding the conceptual tension that exists between judgment and imaginative

creation, Cohen, et al. states that:

> Although there is one fundamental difference between the judgment and
> creation of works of art on the one hand, and the evaluation and origination
> of natural beauty on the other – namely, that concepts have some irreducible
> role in the former although they are totally absent from the latter – there are
> also profound similarities between the forms which human rationality takes
> in these two domains and their significance for the whole of our thought and
> action. (1982, 8)

As Kant puts it, if there can be no rule-made assessments of beauty, then how can

anyone consciously make his/her art? At this point, Kant's idea about genius plays a central

role in his discussion of art and makes his argument about a rule (a concept) possible. As

Cohen, et al. explains, "there is a special capacity for this, different from the ordinary

capacity to make things: a capacity to make in accordance with something like a concept but not a concept" (ibid.). Kant insisted that either judgment or creation of a work of art requires such a concept, and he called this capacity the "talent genius". However, it is very important to point out that even for the judgment and creation of a genius such a concept (a rule) is still required. And Kant's real concern in his intersubjective theory is not only such a rule or feeling, but rather, the main point is to keep a successful balance between feeling and reason. So for this reason I think that there is no "self-valid passport" for an "artist" like Von Hagens to claim that his/her work is art, and, in fact, there needs to be recognition from others in society. "That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new and crucial importance to recognition", says Taylor profoundly (1991, 47-48). In the previous description of Kant's intersubjective theory, I think it is very important to clarify what that required rule means and why the required rule is so vital to creativity. Here, I need to point out beforehand that surrounding the idea about whether to break the rule or to be "rule-governed" in artistic creativity there is a fundamental difference between Western and Chinese culture. I will discuss this later.

Second, painting is one of the basic and essential visual languages of art, whose aesthetic value is hardly replaced by other media. Thus, after the 1960s, the fallen status of painting has signified a profound crisis in art today. Of course, this should not be distorted as claiming that painting is the highest, or the only form of art. Then, how is it causing a crisis in art today? The shock of calling for the "death" of painting is at the centre of the issue, since it also signifies the "death of (fine) art". According to Spalding:

> In New York in the 1940s, painting still enjoyed unquestioned pre-eminence within the visual arts. So far has its status fallen today, that it now seems odd to read the passionate debates about it that filled the columns, letter pages and editorials of the newspapers, radio air-time and the new

television channels, all over coloured pigments suspended in oil spread across canvas... then, the art of painting. All eyes were on it at that historical moment, within the art world, among businessmen and, increasingly, politicians and even the wider public too. Not just the future of art, but also that of America and the world, seemed to hang on how and why paint was put on. It was a concentration of attention that was at once stimulating, but also damaging to art. (2003, 17)

As a result:

One of the characteristic perceptions of twentieth-century art has been of its persistent tendency to question the long tradition of painting as the privileged medium of representation. Early in the century Braque's and Picasso's determination to incorporate everyday material in their paintings, such as newsprint, tablecloth fringe, or rope, was expressive of their struggle to extend the content of the canvas beyond paint. This 'struggle with the canvas' pointed the way for scores of twentieth-century artists, from the Russians Malevich and Tatlin, to Pollock at mid-century, to a painter such as Richard Prince (b.1949) whose abstractions take shape in a computer before they are painted onto the canvas. Abstraction, Surrealism, and Conceptualism, to name but a few twentieth-century forms, all participated in a profound questioning of traditional painting. (Michael Rush, 1999, 7)

This questioning produced an excessive emphasis on experimentation:

Another characterization of the period focuses on the 'experimental' nature of its art: artists bursting from the shells of painting and sculpture in a huge variety of ways and incorporating new materials into their works; painting affixed with readymade objects or fragments of objects representing everyday life; shifts in focus away from 'objective' representation to personal expression; uses of new technological media to render meaning and ideas of time and space. 'All art is experimental,' US film and video critic Gene Youngblood wrote, 'or it isn't art.' (Ibid., 7)

This is no longer fine art. In fact, such 'new technological media art' has nowadays changed its name to 'interactive art' or 'creative industrial art'. Likewise, although some critics have proposed that something is art, for example, Andy Warhol's readymade (the *Brillo Box*), "because it is appropriately related to a larger historical, institutional or theoretical context" (Dominic McIver Lopes, 2001, 491), I do not agree that it is fine art nor do I believe that it can replace the role of fine art in our life. To view the whole issue of

either modernist or postmodernist arts from a historical perspective, in this case the work is political more than aesthetical. Debates such as the above show us that whether something is or is not art, is all dependent on one's definition of art. Before turning to discuss the basis of a definition of 'art', I shall discuss the danger of claiming the death of painting' and its linkage with a series of questions such as: What is art for? Why do we value art-making which is in the form of fine art? And why do we value perfection in art-making? First of all, we need to ask "How do we value painting?" or more clearly "What values accrue to paintings and not to other art works?" According to Lopes, "We value paintings for several reasons: they describe scenes, delight the senses, express emotions, communicate ideas and allude either to other art works or to common experience" (ibid., 491), and the most important feature that distinguishes painting from photography is its aesthetic art–making, its use of painting materials such as watercolours or oil paints to make forms or designs traditionally done by movements of the artist's creative hand (it does not matter which style it is: the mimetic pictorial representation, or Formalism, or so forth). In any case, it is worthwhile to capture the gesture, the aura of the painter in his/her painting (art-making). As John Berger asserts, "More directly than any other art, painting is an affirmation of the existent, of the physical world into which mankind has been thrown" (2001, 14). He insists that "[painting] may still be worth thinking about, long after painting has lost its herds of animals and its ritual function. I believe it tells us something about the nature of the act" (ibid., 15). I agree, because one can capture in painting the spirit of making of art. As Berger notes:

> In a number of early cave paintings there are stencil representations of the human hand beside the animals. We do not know what precise ritual this served. We do know that painting was used to confirm a magical 'companionship' between prey and hunter, or, to put it more abstractly,

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between the existent and human ingenuity. Painting was the means of making this companionship explicit and therefore (hopefully) permanent. (Ibid., 15)

Notably, "every authentic painting demonstrates a collaboration" and it is about

"participating in being seen by a man". Thus, in a way the nature of art is analogous with

the nature of painting: "The impulse to paint comes neither from observation nor from the

soul (which is probably blind) but from an encounter: the encounter between painter and

model" (Berger, 2001, 15-16).

More importantly, Berger emphasizes that "the eye evolved and developed where

there was enough light for the visible forms of life to become more and more complex and

varied" (ibid.,17). He demonstrates this by introducing the great seventeen-century

Chinese landscape painter Shitao's idea about the brush: "the brush is for saving things

from chaos" (ibid., 16). As I approach Berger, I would argue that the brush is also for

"perfection of the self". However, the majority of art today has already lost this ability to

move us toward perfection. People still remember such art before the status of painting had

fallen. As Spalding notes, "unlike the art scene of today, it was still possible for someone to

win through on the grounds of sheer ability" (2003, 17). Art, in the historical development

of humanity, whether it is a craft or a specialized form of communication between human

beings, or whether it is related to either social goodness or individual artistic creativity, is

constructed by life and makes life meaningful. In the West, since the early periods of

modernity, the merit of modern art had been recognized. However, we have to admit that

from the second half of the twentieth-century, art has failed to respond to the principles of

art adequately. What makes modern art problematic? In light of the above explorations, I

would suggest that the modernist extreme subjectivism and the postmodernist calling for

the death of fine art are the two main factors of the problems of art today. In other words, it

is mistaken to overemphasize either art's instrumental value or its intrinsic value. In this

case, perhaps "the twofold life-experience both [Taoist] and Confucian, which art reflects"

(Wu Kuang-Ming, 1989, 237), in particular Chuang Tzu's aesthetic theories i.e. the

intrinsic value of nature and the art of transcendent freedom in life, is meaningful to

tackling the crisis in art today.[39] Thus, I will discuss issues of perfection by comparing

theories of art today with Chinese aesthetic and art theories from a cross-cultural

perspective.

Redefining Perfection in a Non-Western Sense

What is art? For the Chinese, art comes from a source of inspiration which

humanity shares with heaven, earth, and myriad things, so that the essential purpose of art

is to assist the perfection of the moral (Confucian) and spiritual (Taoist) personality. The

Chinese believe that self-cultivation is basic to artistic creativity, so that "art, in this sense,

becomes not only a technique to be mastered but also an articulation of a deepened

subjectivity. It moves and touches us because it comes from a source of inspiration which

humanity shares with heaven, earth, and the myriad things" (Tu Wei-Ming, 1996, 22).

What is the nature of Chinese aesthetics? The principle underlying Chinese

aesthetics, like Chinese philosophy, is that of the "self-balancing" rational spirit, and the

aesthetic emotion of harmony. In art, we can see these ideas phrased in the following

Chinese expressions: "humanity's aesthetic experiences" and "beauty is not ordinary form

but significant form". For example, the bird, the frog and the geometric patterns on Chinese

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[39] As Kuang-Ming Wu observes, "For the Chinese, beauty is the constitutive inter-involvement of many into one, and one with many, until the entire unison becomes both concrete-particular and cosmic-universal, both in scale and in substance. Here is a twofold characteristic – distinction and interchange, even on the level of the subject". And obviously, the Western philosophy that beauty is an element which is exclusively dichotomized and isolated from a coherent whole is different from this Chinese theory. (1989, 236-237)

pottery, are "different from ordinary forms and lines because they evolved from realistic images and incorporated their socially defined content or meaning" (Li Zehou, 1994, 21). Even the principal "melody" of the geometric pattern is a "performance" of "the various laws of form" – rhythm, symmetry, continuity, change, unity and so forth (ibid., 22). In philosophy, we can also define the "aesthetic harmony" by tracing this back to pre-Qin Confucianism and the opposing but supplementary doctrine of Taoism. Although Confucianism and Taoism appear diametrically opposed, they can balance each other in many ways. As Tu Wei-Ming notes:

> The Confucian emphasis on humanism may seem to be in conflict with Taoist naturalism. However, in light of their shared concern for self-cultivation, we cannot say that the Confucian insistence on social participation and cultural transmission is incompatible with the Taoist quest for personal freedom. Both the Taoist critique of Confucian ritualism and the Confucian critique of Taoist escapism are dialogical interplays reflecting a much deeper point of convergence. This is not to deny the nuanced differences between the two spiritual traditions; but, despite their divergence, they belong to the same symbolic universe in which they not only co-exist but help each other to grow through mutual influence. (1985, 9)

We can further understand this concept by examining how Taoists and Confucians define harmony. As Hall et al. explain:

> Confucians are often distinguished from Taoists by the observation that though both seek aesthetic harmony, the Taoists seek harmony with nature whereas Confucians are concerned with harmony in the social sphere. "Nature" (the ten thousand things") and "society", as contexts, are both aesthetic products whose order is a creation of the elements of the contexts. In the Taoist texts, the central notion of *tzu-jan* (self-so-ing) means that each of the ten thousand things comes into being out of its own inner reflection and that no one can tell how it comes to be so. The Confucian version of this claim is that "it is the person who extends order in the world (*tao*), not order that extends the person". (1993, 9)

In light of the above description, three features of Chinese philosophies can be summarized: first, harmony is the core of Chinese philosophies. The Chinese philosophers

assert that all the polarized opposites like man and nature, male (*yan*) and female (*yin*), reason and emotion, and so forth have established a "self-balancing" harmonious relationship. As Li Zehou notes, "In dealing with opposites, the stress was on blending and harmony more than on conflict" (1994, 48). Second, regarding the role of man (*yen*) in nature, Taoism is different from Confucianism. Taoism maintains a nihilistic attitude of being 'powerless'; the Confucian school with a sceptical but positive and energetic attitude toward life maintains ethics as its core and redefines order by relating a traditional ritual to the ethics of social life. "Whether viewed as good or bad, whether accepted or repudiated, the historical role of Confucius and Confucianism in shaping the Chinese character, culture, and psychology is an undeniable" (ibid., 45). Third, although Rationalism is the main trend which runs through the ideological realm and lays the foundations of the Chinese culture and psychological structure, the (Pre-Qin) Chinese philosophers still stress the need for emotion by integrating reason and emotion, i.e., "with reason holding emotion in check" (ibid., 47). This brief introduction to Chinese philosophical and aesthetics traditions is just mapped out as a platform for further discussions.

The idea of imaginative creativity is of concern nowadays as it is at the heart of the conflict between subjective expression and objective rules. This concern is closely linked with autonomy, imagination, subjectivity, and genius. Therefore, breaking with the familiar rules of making works of art has become the "merit" of a modernist artist. In this case, I would suggest that the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity can not be reconciled within the Western dichotomized theory; by contrast, the Chinese integrated theory may have more potential to reconcile this conflict. Inevitably subjectivity and objectivity are important sources of the self in perception, and the notion of aesthetic

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subjectivity is quite different in Western and Chinese philosophy. Regarding the main question which I will investigate in this dissertation "How does the artistic self relate to the spiritual self within a community context?" what I want to discuss first is the Chinese vision of self identity and autonomy; morality and the good. As Tu Wei-Ming notes: "A root idea in Chinese aesthetics is precisely this insistence that the dichotomies of man and nature, self and society, and subject and object are unreal and transformable" (1985, 93). This notion is based on a Confucian perception of humanity in Chinese aesthetics – humanity and nature are united as a whole. Thus, the aim of the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation is the manifestation of true subjectivity which depends on a complete transformation of the self – the establishing of the will (Goodness), the emptying of the mind (Ritual), the fasting of the heart (Benevolent Love), and the nourishing of the great body (Virtue). As a result, "True subjectivity opens up the privatized ego so that the self can enter into fruitful communion with others" (ibid., 93). On one hand, from the Confucians' perspective, social harmony is achieved through an individual's own effort, or in other words, social order is construed harmonies through one's personal participation in a ritually constituted community. On the other hand, the Taoist perspective, as expressed by Chuang Tzu, stressed an aesthetic relationship involving inner, spiritual and intuitive laws of artistic creation. Like Kant, Chuang Tzu made art as "an aesthetic view of life". (Li Zehou, 1994) Regarding autonomy, I think that the story in Chuang Tzu's *Happy Wandering* which tells about the autonomy of a big bird (*Peng*) is a good example in clarifying Chuang Tzu's idea about 'transcendent freedom'. In order to break loose from 'order' – to break the restriction on flying in a place that not every creature can reach – the big bird splashes along the water for three thousand miles (*lie*), and rises with the wind and

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wings its way up to ninety thousand miles (*lie*). Finally it can fly freely in the sky, but, in

fact, the big bird has only obtained relative autonomy that it is still limited by space. At this

point, it is important to point out that unlike Kant (who tried to make human beings as a

creator like gods) Chuang Tzu just enjoyed the happiness of roaming around with the

Creator (who tried to transform "freedom" from restriction). In Chinese culture, individual

autonomy is limited within the domain of a cosmic order, "a great chain of being", in which

humans located in their proper place give "meaning to the world and to the activities of

social life" (Taylor, 1991, 3). From the Chinese perspective, the concept of human

autonomy (freedom) is still restricted by this "cosmic order". So rather than absolute

autonomy, human beings can only obtain relative autonomy.

Imagination, as Currie notes, is of two kinds, first "recreative imagination" and

second "creative imagination". They both play an important role in the creation of art.

(2001, 253-62) However, in the modern period the idea of creativity tends to value a kind

of "rootless" imagination. Originality and breaking with the familiar or blindly rejecting

traditional rules in art making has become the priority in the evaluation of artistic quality.

And now this has become deeply problematic. For this discussion, the theme of the *Beijing*

International Art Biennale – Witness the Graceful Bearing of Chinese Contemporary Art

and the Glamour of International Easel Art may give us a better understanding of the ideas

of imaginative creativity and originality from the Chinese cultural tradition. The curator's

statement asserts that, "The sponsors believe that although new art forms, such as new

media, have extended the realm of contemporary art, painting and sculpture, as the

traditional art forms have not lost their potential for development"

(http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn). This shows that in the Chinese view, the role of

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imagination in creativity and originality rather than cutting everything off from tradition,

or breaking with the familiar rules; is to reshape the inherited traditional rules (a kind of

recreative imagination only). This is important to creativity because the demonstration of

one's own ingenuity needs to be based on "the mastery of technique, not on originality"

(Bailin, 2004). Furthermore, in training, the Chinese painters follow the practice of

copying master works; the rationale for so doing in some sense is accorded to the

Renaissance painters. For instance, the term invention (*invenzione*) was used in two

different senses during the Renaissance as noted by Kemp, in Bailin:

> One sense, associated with the discovery of truth, saw *invenzione* as a
> rational process which involves finding principles which are in harmony
> with nature. Renaissance thinkers believed that there was a unity between
> the imitation of antiquity, the laws of nature, and the artist's originality in
> invention... The second sense of *invenzione*... refers to the power of
> inventing new things and is associated with inspiration. (ibid., 11)

In the Chinese references to imagination, too, the sense of free play is not only

based on the artist's subjective free will, rather it emphasizes "rational thought" Finding a

principle, in Chuang Tzu's theme, is to meditate on the principle of the Tao. In the Taoist

sense, free play and mastery management complement each other. Chuang Tzu's story of

Cook Ding is a wonderful presentation:

> Tao is what I care about, and Tao goes beyond mere skill. When I first
> began cutting up oxen, I could see nothing but the ox. After three years, I
> could see more than the ox. And now, I meet the ox in spirit. I've stopped
> looking with my eyes. When perception and understanding cease, the spirit
> moves freely. Trusting the principles of heaven, I send the blade slicking
> through huge crevices, lead it through huge hollows. Keeping my skill
> constant and essential, I just slip the blade through, never touching ligament
> or tendon, let alone bone.
>
> <div align="right">(Hinton, 1997, 39-40)</div>

Here, in the Taoist sense, free is not 'free' from mastery, but is complemented by it – the

butcher is the 'knife-and-the-ox'. Similarly, there should be no gap between the painter and

his brush; we can recognize this subtlety from the experiences of Chinese artists. For

instance, painting, to Shitao (a great seventeenth-century Chinese landscape painter) is a

performance of a subtle language. The brush is for saving things from chaos", he says:

> Painting is the result of the receptivity of ink: the ink is open to the brush:
> the brush is open to the hand: the hand is open to the heart: all this in the
> same way as the sky engenders what the earth produces: everything is the
> result of receptivity. (Berger, 2001, 20)

In this case, whether the artist's brush can or cannot save things from chaos while it

opens to the ink and the uncertainty really depends on how much he has mastered his skills.

The settlement of self plays a central role in aesthetics and art. Conflicts between

subjective feeling and objective reason have become a great challenge in Western

dichotomized theory. By contrast, they are presented as aesthetic ideals – subjective and

objective united in oneness harmoniously in Chinese cultural tradition. Relationships

between subjectivity and objectivity are like the self and the shadow – although they are

two elements, they are inseparable and constructed in one. At the end of his essay *The*

Equality of All Things, Chuang Tzu notes:

> Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tsu, dreamt I was a butterfly flying happily
> here and there, enjoying life without knowing who I was. Suddenly I woke
> up and I was indeed Chuang Tsu. Did Chuang Tsu dream he was a butterfly,
> or did the butterfly dream he was Chuang Tsu? There must be some
> distinction between Chuang Tsu and the butterfly. This is a case of
> transformation. (Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English translated, 1974, 48)

Obviously, there must be some distinction between change and transformation.

Through this story, Chuang Tzu shows spiritual transformation is much more important

than material change. For example, in his works *The Gap Series*, artist Chan Chung-shu

shows us the artist's idea of spiritual transformation (see Painting 9 and 10). It is also true

that in aesthetic perception or artistic creation, for example, the Ch'an (Zen) theories of

Chinese landscape painting (which developed in the early Northern Song dynasty), the

'absence of self' is a good instance of intuitive perception. Like Taoism, Ch'an teachings

advocated oneness of self and nature. In order to capture and express both the spirit and the

substance of a natural object, the artist was asked to pay special attention by detailed

observation to the object; and the images, the artist's feeling and the artistic conception are

all evoked by a scene. This kind of artistic conception is characterized by 'an absence of

self' as Li Zehou explains:

> This does not mean the artist's own thoughts and feelings are truly absent, only that these have not been revealed directly.... In fact, artists are not always fully aware of how they are thinking and feeling when they are doing a piece of creative work. Rather, it is in the very process of objectively depicting something – whether it be a natural scene, or a human action – that their thoughts and feelings, as well as the principal themes eventually become clear. And, not infrequently, thoughts, feelings, and themes become richer, broader in scope, and more diverse in significance in the process. (1994, 187-188)

This transformation of the artistic creation is accorded to Chuang Tzu's story about

spiritual transformation. I would also suggest that perhaps this is the real "presence" of

artistic creativity.

Lastly, I would discuss the role of genius in the artist and the importance of fine art

making such as painting. In Kant's account, "in aesthetic judgement, genius is a union of

imagination and understanding" (Matthew Rampley, 1998, 267), I think he acknowledged

the role of the artist in artistic creation correctly. Like Kant, the Chinese also value highly

the quality of genius. For example, in the unique linear beauty of Chinese calligraphy and

calligraphic painting, the artist's product: the brushwork (the flow and turn of lines,

emotion, strength, power) and inking (the shades of ink and the interest of their placement)

"are all important aesthetically" (Li Zehou, 1994, 197). Furthermore,

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This is why photography, however true to life, can never replace painting. The latter, which possesses the aesthetic values of brush and ink, produces a beauty that does not exist in nature but was created by man after centuries of experimentation, refinement, and generalization. (Ibid.)

As the brushwork and inking represents a pure aesthetic ideal, thus through the genius's work, the fine art bears the charm of perfection in art, in aesthetics and in life. However, in art today, there is almost no genius, and there is almost no great art -- this becomes a profound problem.

Conclusion: Survival and Balance

First, what is art? Art can be defined at least under the conditions of these three theories: (1) an artistic theory which defines the essence of art as the perfection of artistic skill; (2) a philosophical theory which defines the objective of art as achieving a better and higher purpose in life; and (3) an aesthetic theory which defines (the nature of) art as embracing the former two theories but "rich in quantity and on the whole high in quality" (Collingwood, 1963, 5). They are so different, however, that "to frame a definition of art, it is necessary to think wherein precisely these differences consist" (ibid., 3). To respond to what art is in this way, I will state as in the beginning of this chapter that, perfection as a traditional concept is a principle of aesthetics and art which aims for better and higher purpose in life. This statement in some ways includes the other three (artistic, philosophical and aesthetic) theories. I would suggest that recovering the charm of perfection -- to hold

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the Good, the True, and the Beautiful together by the effort of (good) artists[40] – shall be a chance to regenerate art.

Second, although the elite and popular cultures are two different traditions, I don't find that they are essentially dichotomous; in fact, they benefit each other. Here, I would agree with Eliot that "if culture means the arts and intellectual life", the minority (elite) culture "benefits culture as a whole… the cultural elite might finally enhance society as a whole" (Eagleton, 2000, 113). Of course, in order to reach this end, what is vital is to keep a careful balance between the elite and popular culture.[41]

Furthermore, it is also important to insist that elites (artists) can best fulfil their potential by striving for self-perfection.

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[40] I assume that all artists should have their intentions to perfect the selves. The ideas about a good artist should at least twofold: first link to "ideas of social goodness… [For example], consider the traditional conception of the artist in Chinese culture: He is a man 'who is at peace with nature… Above all, his breast must brood no ill passion, for a good artist, we strongly believe, must be a good man" (Anderson, 2004, 285). Second, the artist should have not only artistic skill, but also special skill of aesthetic response, for example "the qualities the Aztecs attributed to true artists: 'capable, practicing, skilful; maintains dialogue with his heart, meets things with his mind'" (ibid. 318).

[41] Of course, it does not mean that Eliot's idea is without criticism, as Eagleton observes, "Eliot, then, has his own version of the Culture / culture problem, but has his own solution too. He cannot opt in purely elitist manner for Culture as against culture, since he is shrewd enough to recognize that no minority culture will survive unless it sends down complex shoots into popular life. Only in this way will high culture become a *political* force in an age of distasteful mass democracy. But how can high culture do this if the great majority of men and women can hardly think at all?" (2000, 116).

Painting 8   *Chan Chung-shu,* **Distance,** *oil on canvas, 2003.*

CHAPTER FIVE:
REFLECTIONS ON WESTERN CONTEMPORARY ART AND ART EDUCATION

The real tragedy of postmodernist thinking in art and art education is the privileging of theory over practice and the consequent negative influence on student understanding and artistic capability.

Richmond,
In Praise of Practice:
A Defense of Art Making in Education.

Art Education's Milieu

In the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of academic postmodernism, art became a locus of philosophical, cultural, and political battles between modernity and postmodernity. One outcome was that the privileged postmodernists had a significant influence on the nature of art education; the language of art was characterized by conceptualism, the theory that "every creation, every life form – including people – is a 'text' to be read and interpreted, and no text or 'reading' holds primacy" (Weiner, 2000, 110). Art became nothing other than critical thinking. Meanwhile, there were three significant changes in art education. First, the purpose of art education shifted from training students as fine artists to training them as applied artists and designers. Second, the method of art teaching changed from an emphasis on apprenticeship to an emphasis on

theory. Third, studio art training (in this case, painting and sculpture) was almost dismissed from the visual arts curriculum. (Spalding, 2003, 41-53)[42]

The Role of Art Education

Philosophical postmodernism is "a long reaction to the central doctrines of Enlightenment thought" (Novitz, 2001, 155). Hence, in considering the role of art education there is the extreme polarization between art and science. At the end of the twentieth century, art's situation was on the horns of a dilemma – "either art has a serious message or it is entertainment" (Inwood, 2001, 71). Consequently, the style in art turned to echo either the cynicism of the intellectual avant-gardes or the permissiveness of the 'me generation'. Art school deconstructed as a field into either the 'power game' or the 'emotional game'. As a result, shaped by postmodernist scepticism, our understanding of the two core aesthetic elements, namely, sensibility and creativity has become problematic.

Because modernism and postmodernism are "extremes at either end of a continuum" (Novitz, 2001, 160), it is dangerous to fall entirely into the camp of either the modernist or postmodernist heritage (Spalding, 2003), or in this case, the privileged intellectual postmodernist theorists (Richmond, 1998). Meanwhile, I may suggest that the main role of art education is to develop students' abilities to create positive meaning in their lives with both aesthetic and artistic experiences as well as judgments. With respect to meaning and function in art, this discussion still hinges on the essential questions: "What is the value of art? What is art for? For what kinds of experiences do we prepare students with

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[42] The apprenticeship system is basically for training the individual artist who used to learn artistic skill in his/her master's art studio. The main goal of this kind of training is to develop the artist's "eye-to-hand co-ordination". In the eighteenth century across Europe a kind of "collective apprenticeship" evolving into the academies of art – this kind of art school was run by masters from the academy. Rather than apprentice training (studio art-making), the new academic training shifted to the theoretical training which is a kind of intellectual thinking and critical skill training. (Spalding, 2003, 41-53)

art education? In what ways do we develop students with art education?" When

considering educational purpose, reflections on Kant's analytic philosophy and Dewey's

pragmatist aesthetics are worthwhile. Perhaps, we can map out some of the alternatives

from an integrated model of these two traditions. As Shusterman notes:

> Dewey's pragmatist tradition in aesthetics has been revived and extended
> by more recent philosophers who were trained in analytic philosophy and
> remain appreciative of its resources and style of argument, even in making
> their more pragmatist points. (2001, 97)

Reason and Emotion

Understanding of the relationship between aesthetic judgment and artistic

experience marks a practical challenge between Kant's analytic philosophy and Dewey's

pragmatist tradition. Although they both deny that there is any rigid dichotomy between art

and science (in this case, the aesthetic judgment), they give priority to different responses

to experiencing art – Dewey emphasizes emotional feeling and Kant emphasizes

disinterested judgment.

According to Shusterman, in his aesthetic theory Dewey insists on art's "*global*

instrumental value" (ibid., 99). Dewey says:

> ART is a Quality that permeates an experience; it is not, save by a figure of
> speech, the experience itself. Esthetic experience is always more than
> esthetic. In it a body of matters and meanings, not in themselves esthetic,
> *become* esthetic as they enter into an ordered rhythmic movement toward
> consummation. The material itself is widely human... The material of
> esthetic experience in being human – human in connection with the nature
> of which it is a part – is social. Esthetic experience is a manifestation, a
> record and celebration of life of a civilization, a means of promoting its
> development, and is also the ultimate judgment upon the quality of
> civilization. For while it is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those
> individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of
> the cultures in which they participate. (1958, 326)

No doubt, his goal of 'integrating art and life' is worthwhile. However, between

reason and experience, Dewey values only the experience of art's immediate enjoyment,

namely "intuition" as the final standard for evaluating art (ibid., 294). He says:

> Since a work of art is the subject-matter of experiences heightened and
> intensified, the purpose that determines what is esthetically essential is
> precisely the formation of an experience *as* an experience. Instead of fleeing
> from experience to a metaphysical realm, the material of experiences is so
> rendered that it becomes the pregnant matter of a new experience.
> Moreover, the sense we now have for essential characteristics of persons
> and objects is very largely the *result* of art, while the theory that is under
> discussion holds that art depends upon and refers to essence already in
> being, thus reversing the actual process... (ibid.)

Considering this, I have at least two concerns about the supremacy of Dewey's

aesthetic experience. First, in view of sensation, Dewey insists that art is the live creator's

spontaneous instinctive *expression*. In contrast, Kant argues for the legitimization of

judgment which argues that the experience of subjective pleasure must conform to a

common sense with which everyone ought to agree. In other words, more than the moral

good, Kant makes *communication* an important concern. (Crawford, 2001) By contrast,

Dewey maintains that *experience* is more important. As Shusterman states:

> While Dewey saw art as the qualitative measure of any society, analytic
> philosophers [for example Kant's critique of the power of judgment] saw
> science as the ideal and paradigm of human achievement... [which] was
> largely an attempt to apply the logically rigorous and precise methods of
> scientific philosophy to the wayward and woolly realm of art... (2001, 100)

In his view, the experience of the analytic approach which is pursued under the

ideal of judgment is "thinner" than the natural satisfaction of artistic experience. He claims

that "art engages more of the human organism in a more meaningful and immediate way,

including the higher complexities of thinking" (ibid). Here, compared with Kant's 'lonely

will', perhaps Dewey is right that the feeling of beauty may be thinner. However, when,

considering the role of art, in particular, its connection with ethics, we see that art is not only for self expression. As Cohen et al. notes, Kant is correct to argue that "certain other subjective responses to objects, namely, feelings of sublimity", in certain salient ways, "had been linked to feelings of beauty in the philosophical tradition" (1982, 4). Meanwhile, in contrast to Kant's 'universal pleasure', Dewey maintains that there should not be any "permanently fixed" aesthetic value; it must be "continually tested" (Shusterman, 2001, 101). Dewey's idea contributes to postmodernists position that exists in a 'perpetual present' where the ground is constantly shifting. My main concern in Dewey's idea is that he gives too much attention to possibilities, to the idea of change.

Second, in considering ethics, Dewey's emotionalist theory of holding *"experience not truth"* as the final standard, gives no room for reason. By contrast, Kant's formalist theory which sees art as a good tool for moral education draws an analogy between aesthetics and morality by saying that beauty is the symbol of morality, both the beautiful and the sublime are in reference to moral feeling. In his analysis of the sublime, 'the intellect's interest in the beautiful', Kant argues:

> It has been with the best intentions that those who love to see in the ultimate end of humanity, namely the morally good, the goal of all activities to which men are impelled by the inner bent of their nature, have regarded it as a mark of a good moral character to take an interest in the beautiful generally. (Kant: CJ, § 42, trans. with analytical indexes by J. C. Meredith, 157)

Thus, by showing the relationship between sensibility and judgement, Kant focuses on the nature of moral law. He argues that "our faculty of judgement itself exercises a power over sensibility," so rather than drawing "an analogous relationship between an immediate interest in fine art and the moral," (Crawford, 2001, 62) he emphasizes training

in judgement – training for the moral good by making *good sense* in judgement of taste. (Herman, 1998) Dewey, however, deplores Kant's tradition as elitist hypocrisy. I would claim that works of the postmodernist experimental artists which express their feeling of fear, their infatuation with injury, or their tendency towards 'distorted bodies', as presented in art exhibitions are the most controversial experimental art activity. Many people cannot accept the eccentric postmodernist avant-gardes' sensibilities as healthy emotions. For this reason, I maintain that the analytic aesthetics, which tries to develop students' artistic experiences and caring for the moral good as well, is *positive* and still *appropriate* in the field of art education. "Art then is not a diversion or a side-issue," argues Murdoch "it is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be *seen*" (2003, 85). Thus, I argue the conclusion is clear that, the main role of art education is to develop students' *communicable* abilities for creating good and joyful lives, with both artistic understanding and experience.

In defining the proper relationship of judgment and experience, I would suggest both Kant's and Dewey's theories are appropriate, but they are weakened by their own limitations as well. Kant discusses 'what is right to do' while Dewey talks about 'what is good to do'. However, the 'right' and the 'good' are equally important. Hence, rather than separating right from good, the best course is to work for their harmony. At this point, it is good for us to review one of the Chinese aesthetic theories which I have discussed in Part one:

> The Pre-Qin Chinese philosophers attached importance to the integration of reason and emotion, with reason holding emotion in check. They stressed psychological experience and satisfaction in social and ethical issues, not an ascetic suppression of sensory desires, nor rational cognitive pleasure. (Li Zehou, 1994, 47)

Curriculum and Evaluation

Art education has been divided between fine art and applied art since the mid-twentieth century; many art institutions treat the fine-art element separately from practical skill training. Many art classes no longer offer academic fine art courses like figure drawing, landscape painting and sculpture. Rather than teaching fundamental artistic skills, art colleges have started to train students in a whole range of new techniques, such as photography, graphic and 3-D designs, and media art. As a result, studio art teaching has been dismissed in many art learning classes. Many educators have embraced the idea that "the digital image revolution means the advent of a new age for art education"; doubtless, after photography, digital art has become "a major force in art curriculum" (Bergland, 2001, 153-154). As Spalding notes, "There was no point in learning to draw a figure if you would never have to paint one… [thus] a generation of artists emerged who had never learnt to draw" (2003, 46). One might ask, "Is it so important to learn drawing, painting and sculpture?" while some (myself included) might argue for the merits of aesthetic education. This question has not only been asked by Western art educators, it has also been posed by Chinese art educators. In the 1980s, following the example of the West, there were a series innovations in Chinese art education. As a result, from a global viewpoint, traditional academic fine art training has been marginalized, and to a large extent replaced by the development of practical skills and technical accomplishment with new-image, hi-technique and multi-media resources.

Furthermore, there is much concern about how this experience in new communication (in this case, the so-called 'art in science' digital technique) contributes to the students' artistic development. In the 1980s, the postmodernist framework functioned

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increasingly within contemporary art education. Profound conceptual differences were presented in contemporary culture such that "inspiration, originality, and purity of form [were] out; appropriation, collage, and juxtaposition of meaning [were] in" (Clark, 1996, 2). Based on the control over power of viewing and the use of digital images, from a postmodernist perspective, some might assume that digital technology is a potential tool for creativity (Bergland, 2001). However, the powers of digital technology, for example, duplicating, simulating, and integrating all previous visual media and so forth, can be criticized. Undoubtedly, technology has its advantages:

> Once information in any given form – modeling, data, text, graphics, sound, animation, still and motion pictures – is converted into a set of binary digits, computers can manage it, package it, compress it, store it, replicate it, analyze it, slice it, dice it, and deliver it or express it in ways that no one ever dreamed of before. (Nelson, 1993, 94)

However, its disadvantage is that this 'artistic experience' is not a human hands-on experience. Artistic skill training has largely been denied in art learning, and as a result, the human spirit has weakened in the explosion of machine-made ornament. Students find themselves becoming 'handicapped' in manual skills. It is true, as Spalding clams, that "there were not many teachers who had the ability or inclination to teach the [artistic] skill" (2003. 52).

The issue of recognition of *excellence* as a theme in evaluation is a further consideration, and I will discuss two aspects of it. One involves the concepts and the other involves the criteria of excellence in art education. In the West, traditionally, originality and formal and technical achievement have been the two essential elements in evaluating the standard of excellence. However, the understanding of quality and standards of

excellence has marked a cultural conflict between modernism and postmodernism in contemporary art education. As Hadas notes:

> What the world has admired in the Greeks is the remarkably high level of their originality and achievements, and this high level premises a deeply held conviction of the importance of individual attainment. The goal of excellence, the means of achieving it, and (a very important matter) the approbation it is to receive are all determined by judgment. (Hadas, 1966, 13, cited in Smith, 1995, 1)

The following anecdote may illustrate the issue. A Ph.D. candidate of the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts in children's education gained her first class honours by demonstrating how to make 'Chinese dumplings' at her oral defence. She invited all the examiners to eat (participate and evaluate) the dumplings (her art creation). The evaluation was based on two criteria. First, they considered her presentation as unique because no body had done that before. Second, they credited her presentation as an opposition to the modernist elite's authority (formalism). In the postmodernist perspective, this is a matter of deconstructing the 'artist's authority' – the observer (in this case, the examiner) could participate in her 'art making'. (Zhang Qi-kai, ttp://arts.tom.com/Archive/1004/2003/6/24-91423.html) However, I would criticize the correctness of this evaluation by asking "What is the most important qualification for her future role as an art teacher – the political primacy or a good understanding and ability to teach art?"

In addition, since theories and practices in life are various, so the understanding of excellence in art and art education is complicated. For example, "historically the worthwhileness of an artwork has usually been defined by the particular purpose the work was meant to serve" (Smith, 1995, 80). The criteria are so different between eras and

between professional fields (historians, philosophers, sociologists and psychologists). For example, the concept of excellence in art in the modernist account has been based on formal qualities, while the postmodernist version has focused on human values. Each one of these two has addressed only part of the measurement of excellence. Hence, the caution here is to guard "against facile generalization", (Smith, 1995, 81) and to recognize that "the pursuit of excellence is not incompatible with democratic values" (ibid., 199). In considering what is the important quality in art education, Ralph Smith insists that student should have a commitment to excellence so that:

> Students would strive to attain the capacity to appreciate quality in art in a number of contexts which presuppose on the part of the teacher of art substantive training in the humanities, especially aesthetics and the history of art. (Smith & Simpson eds., 1991, 199)

Debates on Concepts of Creativity

In defining versions of creativity, in the West, according to R. K. Elliott, there are two main concepts of creativity: one "traditional" and one "new" which is marked by "revolutionary" ideas (1991, 60). These two approaches construct concepts of creativity differently. As Elliott notes:

> The myth of divine creation is central to the traditional concept, since analogy with the creative activity of the myth has been a criterion for the use of "creative" as an evaluative expression; but because the creation of the world has traditionally been conceived on the model of that of a work of art, the notion of artistic creation is even more fundamental to the concept. Consequently the traditional concept, which is firmly embedded in the uses and usages of our ordinary language, fairly readily allows creativeness to be attributed to makers, but resists its ascription to persons who bring no new thing into being. (Ibid.)

As Elliott points out that:

> [Traditionally scientists] have been regarded as men of wisdom who have discovered truths concerning things which already exist, but have not been

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called "creative." But in recent times creativeness has been attributed to certain "revolutionary" scientists because they have re-created or re-constructed the world as "we, [human beings] conceive it... [Thus, notions] of self-becoming and self-realization are of considerable antiquity and have had a continuous history" (ibid.).

As Elliott notes:

According to this new concept, it is not necessary to make or create anything in order to be creative. Creativity is imaginativeness or ingenuity successfully manifested in any valued pursuit, and the paradigms of creativity are located not in art but in science and practical activity. (Ibid., 60)

Here, according to Elliott, it is important to point out that:

Accounts of the new concept (which is in some ways antithetical to the tradition one) have been received – and sometimes even put forward – as if they were characterizations of the traditional concept. No philosophical analysis of the concept of creativity will be fully satisfactory unless it uncovers the factors which make for confusion in this area, or if it fails to do justice to the powerful appeal which the concept has for us. (Ibid., 61)

In other words, under the traditional concept of creativity, Elliott says, "there would be no point in calling someone a 'creative [artist']" (ibid.). Thus, he argues, "Creativeness is part of the concept of an artist, but it is not part of the concept of a scholar or a scientist, and even resists being predicated of them" (ibid.). Furthermore, as Elliott points out that, "[the scientist's] business is not creation but discovery" (ibid., 62). In Elliott's view, "the scientist will not attain the creative rank of the artist, for we call the production of novel useful objects not 'creation' but 'invention.' Invention has its place in the hierarchy of creativeness, but its place is not at the top" (ibid.). Thus Elliott emphasizes:

Our ordinary concept of creativeness is still dominated by this myth. Instances of creating are arranged in a hierarchy, from accidental production and mechanical fabrication through simple originative making

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(as when a schoolchild makes something of his own choice out of clay) to production which involves uniqueness or originality and is further classified as invention artistic creation. The closer the analogy between any human activity and the mythical paradigm, the more confidently we attribute creativeness to the agent. This is why the artist's claim to creativeness is unassailable" (ibid., 63).

Thus, in the art field, perhaps, Huo Chun-yang is right to argue that:

Art has its perfect disposition; artists only need to reach the perfect disposition and to go deep into it. The perfect disposition is not necessary to be developed. Any of the intention to think about transcending it is ignorant. (2004, 11, translated by the author)

At this level, the above discussion shows obviously that the definitions of creativity are diverse and they have created huge debates. Furthermore, from a cross-cultural perspective, the nature of creativity need not be defined solely within the contemporary Western cultural context; it can be located also in the historical Western traditional pattern; or it can also be derived from a non-Western cultural tradition. (Weiner, 2000, 143-172) Indeed, for overcoming these conceptual problems, some people recently believe that both 'traditional' and non-Western approaches to creativity may present productive alternatives.

Traditional, Modern and Postmodern Approaches

Uniqueness and universality, although opposites, should be interconnected in our concept of creativity. In art education, there are some parallels between imitation of nature and imaginative self-expression; artistic art making and theoretical conceptual thinking; apprentice training and theoretical training. The traditional apprentice training system has been considered as lacking in imagination, so it has become an issue in contemporary creative learning. Obviously, in the modern art cultural context, the term 'imagination' has been closely connected with sources of individuality, originality, freedom and

self-expression. Because of the way that the modern conception of imagination has emphasized personal uniqueness and the expression of free will, the concept of imagination has been cut off to some extent from context and community. The problem here is that the modern conception of imagination has emphasized only one end of the continuum – radical novelty and discontinuity. However, novelty arises from a continuity of tradition. (Bailin, 1994)

By contrast, in some other cultural contexts, for example, in the Renaissance art culture, apprenticeship to a master was regarded as the source of the artist's inner being. The painter's self expressive skill was acquired from training as an apprentice, in this sense, the artist's imaginative creativity as Bailin says:

> ... was connected with a series of contextual, intellectual, artistic and social factors.... a better way to think about what these individuals possessed might be in terms of a combination of abilities and traits, fuelled by a rich and extensive repertoire of knowledge and developed through rigorous training,... Imagination, viewed in this way, is inextricably bound up with the mastery of the artistic repertoire. (In press)

It is clear that traditional art was not seen as "making something out of one's experience"; rather, it was "an activity centred on communal meanings" (Bailin, in press).

Moreover, "the modern sense is one in which subject and object are separable entities" (Taylor, 1989, 188). There are two concerns about the modernist version of self-expression. The first is about the modernist blind faith in the breaking of existing rules. This is the problem of "free will" imagination which denies skills and knowledge. However, "most artistic work is not revolutionary, but rather takes place within the confines of a frame work and is characterized by adherence to rules dictated by a tradition, a school, a style, or a genre." For example, "the painter is directed by the rules of style and

technique of the relevant school of painting" (Bailin, 1994, 88). In fact, "the work of art grows from the artist's dialogue with himself and his [experiences] on the one hand and the emerging work of art and its demands on the other" (ibid., 92). Thus, what is important for creativity is not breaking the rules, rather, it is "having a real understanding of the discipline in which one is engaged" (ibid., 87). Second, as subjective "free play" is separated from external context, in my experience, within a traditional discipline, for example, landscape or still-life painting, students can learn objective observation and to have a good sense of communicating with natural reality.

Regarding the curricula of art education, the modernist and postmodernist approaches may contribute something of value. For example, it might be argued that the deconstructivist approach, of necessity, requires a broad knowledge of history, art history and politics. This knowledge and awareness of issues and how they impact on human beings at various levels can provide serious focus and purpose for art. Larger political issues have traditionally been a subject for artists. Consider, for example, the work of Goya or Picasso's *Guernica*; the subject matter may be offensive to some but the moral outrage of the artist is clear. The problem, then, may lie not so much with the modernist or postmodernist perspective as with how the individual artist executes within this approach. In terms of art education, the problem may be primarily in the degree of emphasis on conceptual art, deconstruction, and social issues. This problem may be addressed not by eliminating these approaches entirely, but by a rebalancing of the curricula toward the teaching of more traditional aesthetics and skills.

A better awareness and understanding of the Chinese tradition and philosophy of art might contribute in the West to the development of a fresh perspective from which to begin this rebalancing of the art education curriculum.

Could the Chinese Art Training Approach be Creative?

In order to answer this question, it is important to outline the Chinese definition of the concept of creativity initially. Unlike the Western concept of creativity which emphasizes "willful innovation and novelty" (Weiner, 2000, 178), the Chinese conception of creativity stresses emptiness, continuity and transcendence. A main idea about creativity here is to empty oneself, and to follow the way of nature.[43] A unique character of the Chinese concept of creativity is the idea of 'change'.[44] As Weiner notes:

> ... what were some of the common Chinese conceptions [of creativity] which lay behind these works? The focus on honouring the eternal ways of heaven and nature, the ancestors and the ancient texts, coupled with the Taoist teaching of quietude, merged with the Buddhist goal of overcoming all desires and attaining enlightenment. This formed a perception of the motivations and purposes of creative effort which had a distinctly different tone from the wilful innovation and pursuit of novelty highlighted in the West since the Renaissance. (Ibid.)

[43] Initially, the understanding and interpretation of the concept of 'following Nature' between Confucianism and Taoism are different. The Confucian ideology of 'to follow the way of Nature' is "a doctrine of loyalty to the ruler" who is described as "the Son of the Heaven", and who has been called by his teacher to "follow the Way of Heaven" (Weiner, 2000, 174). 'Nature' in the Taoist term is called the 'Tao' which is powerful in a way of 'emptiness'. According to the *Tao Te Ching*, the nature of the Tao is as follows: "The Tao is empty and yet useful; Somehow it never fills up. So profound! It resembles the source of All Things." (Bk. 4) As Wing points out, "it is the way that everything in the universe changes and evolves" (R. L. Wing, 1986, Bk. 4). The concept of 'to follow Nature' is explained according to the *Tao Te Ching* as: "Man follows the earth; earth follows heaven; heaven follows the Tao; Tao follows what is natural." (Bk. 25) As Weiner notes, "By the fourth century B.C.E., Confucian, Taoist, and earlier ideas were linked to form a kind of composite teaching, in which the Way (the Tao) of Heaven and the Way of Nature are identical. They bespeak harmony, the balance of *yin* and *yang*, active and passive, male, and female; the five elements and the four seasons reflect this as well. When the ruler follows the Way, the earth and society flourish" (2000, 174).
[44] The idea of 'change' means that things are not constant. As Weiner notes, the *I Ching* (book of changes) "tells of the movement of *yin* and *yang* and change through the subtle, active force of *chi* [which is]... The great characteristic of Heaven and Earth ... to produce" (ibid.)

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For example, in the view of Confucians, to create something new one needs to learn first the old. From the Taoist perspective, creativity is "like water, always seeking the lowest ground", one engages in "actionless doing... creating, but not possessing" or "taking credit" for what he creates. Chan Buddhism recognizes that "there is not even a Self" (ibid.).[45] Thus, the basic approach of creating something new is, initially, to 'empty the Self'.

In brief, in contrast to the Western approach to creativity as "achieving extraordinary ends" (Bailin, 1994), the Chinese approach to creativity is acting to transcend the master.

In art, as Weiner says, "Together, the Taoist and Buddhist teachings encouraged a uniquely Chinese aesthetic. This became pronounced and reached full bloom in the T'ang (618-907) and Sung (960-1279) dynasties" (2000, 178). For instance, landscape painting[46] "was revered because of the meditative goals of emptying the Self and following... nature" (ibid.). As Li Zehou notes, "The Northern Sung landscape painting is characterized by an 'absence of self'... This does not mean the artist's own thoughts and feelings are truly absent, only that these have not been revealed directly" (1994, 187-188).

The Chan theory of landscape painting, as li Zehou states:

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[45] As Weiner says' "Although possessiveness, wilfulness, and boasting must have been common enough in China for Lao Tzu and others to preach against it, their teaching did not fall on deaf ears. In fact, it was greatly reinforced by Buddhist doctrine. Several schools of Chinese Buddhism (like the Three Treatise School) taught that wisdom lay in recognizing that there is not even a Self. The central doctrine of the Lotus Sutra is that all that seems to come into and go out of existence is illusory, that all is really one mind,' the 'Buddha nature' – but that this has no 'substance': it can be described only as 'true thusness'... We know this truth through 'concentration' or 'bringing the mind to rest" (ibid.).

[46] Chinese landscape painting of the Sung and Yuan dynasties "was the art of the secular landlords. These landlords were less isolated from the common people than were the great families, or hereditary landlords, in a rigidly stratified feudal society. Thus the ideas and sentiments reflected in the landscapes of the Song and Yuan have more affinity with the common people... The philosophical trend represented by Chan Buddhism, which accorded with the class nature and social life of the Song and Yuan, was the subjective factor that led to the formation of the aesthetic tastes of this period" (Li Zehou, 1994, 183).

… advocated oneness of self and nature and taught that people could free themselves of wordly cares and obtain emancipation of their souls by seeking the truth or enlightenment in nature. It claimed that the lasting world of nature, with its hills and water, was superior to the transient glories of the world of man; that conforming to nature was better than seeking artificial creations; and that hills, streams, rocks, and nature itself were of more enduring value than mansions, gardens, and courtyards. (Ibid., 183)

It is important to note that the spirit of a natural object, such as hills, streams, and rocks, must be expressed in the painting. The landscape painters like Jing Hao believe, as Li notes, "A true representation possesses both spirit and substance", in other words, a true representation "must reveal the inner spirit, quality, and charm of the subject…. This approach might be called 'imaginative realism': the realistic portrayal of images evoked by a scene or object when the general idea is grasped and the artist's feelings infuse his work" (ibid., 185-186).

The Chan theory seems not only to have inspired the Chinese painters, it has also inspired some Western artists; I would say that Professor Richmond is one of those artists. In his works of medieval architecture, his feelings can be perceived (see Photograph 7).

Photo 7   *Stuart Richmond,*
South Cloister Fontenay Abbey, *photograph, 2005.*

I also enjoy reading his artist's statement, as he says, "Light and stone; order and simplicity; silence; patina and time – in my photographs I aim for a feeling of place evoked by these ancient elements" (artist statement of his exhibition *"Medieval Places: Recent Photographs of French Romanesque Architecture"*, Alliance Francaise Vancouver, April 2006).

Concerning the ideas of the Taoist painter Professor Huo about creativity in art production which involves the meditative goals of emptying the Self and following nature, I would say that the Chinese approach is trying to seek the 'true' nature of creativity.

Aesthetic Experience: Perception, Sensibility and Judgment

How to provide a coherent and judicious account of the relations of art and society has, according to Eaton (1991, 85-94), become a central problem of contemporary philosophical thinking about art. I am greatly concerned about the most controversial experimental art theory of postmodernist sensibility. In order to reveal the artists' inner feelings and to arouse the viewer's sensual reactions and emotional responses, as Wu Hung says:

> In recent years, artists have frequently and delicately staged psychological dramas in their works – dramas related to syndromes such as voyeurism, exhibitionism, masochism, and paranoia. In so doing, they have transformed mental syndromes into artistic representation, and have blurred the boundary between normal and abnormal psychology. (2000, 165)

Many people are increasingly responding negatively to such aesthetic experiences derived from a kind of 'aesthetic pain'. I would suggest that with such pessimistic concepts of aesthetic experience little can help, in shaping the self "in positive ways [namely toward beauty and pleasure] while providing humanistic insight into natural phenomena and

human life" (Smith, 1995, 58). Meanwhile, I could not see any benefit to art education if students are developing with such kinds of artistic and aesthetic experiences.

On the contrary, from the traditional European point of view, a good theory of aesthetic education would wish to produce:

> ... an individual who embodies the human values of tolerance, communication, judgment, and freedom in contrast to the disvalues of intolerance, dogmatism, conformity, and suppression. (Smith, 1995, 65)

As Eaton maintains, "art and aesthetic experience are integral parts of a good life and that developing the capacity for aesthetic response is one of life's central goals" (ibid., 66). Therefore, I believe the pragmatic value of aesthetic experience in art education is its capacity to *cultivate* the human's soul in an appreciative moral sense.

However, holding the position of art and aesthetic experience in this status, as Eaton claims, does not mean that we should be narrow minded in seeing art and aesthetic experience as having only institutional efficacy value in both the personal and social realm (Kaelin, 1991, 162-170), or in arguing that cognitive experience enlightens understanding (Goodman, 1991, 108-118). No doubt we need to acknowledge also the motivation of aesthetic perception (Osborne, 1991, 95-107); or to grant the essentially gratifying worth of art and aesthetic experience which derives from the sensitive and knowledgeable experiencing of outstanding works of art (Beardsley, 1991, 72-84). And in addition, what is most important to art educators, as Smith recommends, is "... a rational justification of art education that combines the best of traditional theories while incorporating relevant aspects of contemporary thinking" (ibid., 73). In short, what is important is to maintain a good balance between emphasizing the aesthetic and the artistic experience.

Conclusion

Many would now recognize that, in art, it is fallacy to see beauty as the property of the bourgeois or to regard the enjoyment of pleasure, insight and empathy as the privilege of modernist elites. And in art education, it is misleading to train students to be good only at critical thinking or to become the slaves of technology. However, since the middle of the twentieth century, postmodernists have tended to promote this situation. Thus, the contemporary art culture (in particular the counterculture in the 1960s) has to some degree incapacitated student's ability to appreciate "the enjoyable artistic embodiment and formal sophistication which so many had learned to appreciate in modernist art" (Butler, 2002, 6).

In light of the preceding discussion, I conclude that the goal of art educators is not to achieve any extreme ends, rather, it is to respond to natural aesthetic and artistic experiences and to develop, "... a rational justification of art education that combines the best of traditional theories while incorporating relevant aspects of contemporary thinking" (Smith, 1995, 73).

Painting 9 *Chan Chung-shu*, **Life Cycle # 1**, *oil on canvas, 2001.*

CHAPTER SIX:
CHINA'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE WEST
IN THE CONTEXT OF ART AND ART EDUCATION

> *Through most of the twentieth century, the response of*
> *Westerners confronted with a modern Chinese painting that*
> *was not obviously in the traditional style was typically:*
> *'That's not Chinese!' or 'Why don't the artists stick to their*
> *own tradition instead of trying to imitate Western art?' The*
> *implication was that accepting Western influence was*
> *wrong – while this same Westerner would note the Japanese*
> *influence in, say, the work of Degas or Whistler as a*
> *stimulus, an added enrichment to European art. Although in*
> *recent years Western attitudes to modern Chinese art have*
> *become more sophisticated, there is still a lingering*
> *tendency to see foreign styles and techniques as a corrupting*
> *influence. Meantime, progressive Chinese have long been*
> *insisting that the only way in which a decaying tradition*
> *could be brought to life again was by a strong injection of*
> *new ideas, forms and techniques from the West.*

> *Michael Sullivan*
> *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*

Problems in the Process of Defining Modernity

China encountered the West while the May Fourth Movement (*wu si yun dong*)[47]

in 1919 shook the whole nation. Attempting to reform the old-fashioned, rigid and stagnant

Chinese traditions, many students went overseas to study. They were stimulated by foreign

thought including both modern and postmodern ideologies. Upon their return art students

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[47] The May Fourth Movement (*wu si yun dong*) was an anti-imperialist, cultural, and political movement in early modern China. Taking place on May 4, 1919, it marked the upsurge of Chinese nationalism, and a re-evaluation of Chinese cultural institutions, such as Confucianism. The Movement grew out of dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versilles settlement and the effect of the New Cultural Movement (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_Fourth_Movement).

brought back new ideas, techniques and methods which they learned from the West. As a consequence, "Chinese painting in the twentieth century [was] characterized by a surge to learn from the West" (Mayching Kao, 1992, 6).

In the twentieth century, three main streams co-existed in the movements to modernize Chinese art. The line of Qi Baishi, Fu Baoshi, and Pan Tianshou ignored the influences of Western art by reasserting traditional values and techniques with a new confidence and viewed the national painting (*guobua*) as "an expression of the newly [awakened] Chinese spirit" (Sullivan, 1992, 12). Another stream was the line of Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu, who both trained in Europe. After they returned to China, they became the pioneering leaders of the Westernizing movement. From a totally opposite position, they "wanted to discard traditional forms and techniques altogether as useless, and devote themselves to realistic Western drawing and oil painting" (ibid., 12). The third stream was the line of Gao Qifeng and his brother Gao Jianfu, who trained in Japan and were the founders of the Lingnan School. Their approaches updated "the *guobua* tradition by painting contemporary subject matter… and injecting a degree of pictorial realism through the use of shading and cast shadows" (ibid., 14). Over a hundred years have passed since the first Chinese encounters with Western art, but questions about what is of value in each tradition remain. "Which path should be the best possibility?" and "What experiences had the reformer artists derived from exploring and learning from their Western mentors?" Among the reformers there was no agreement, since each exercised his talent in different ways. However, the reformation was potentially dangerous, at least in the following two cases. First, in the issue of how to modernize Chinese art, there was the danger of marginalizing traditional Chinese painting (*guobua*), devaluing traditional Chinese art

theories and abandoning traditional forms and techniques. Second, in the process of researching and learning from Western art, the adoption of an extreme view, either in modernist or postmodernist expression, was hazardous. This does not mean that accepting foreign influence is wrong, but it is misleading to view the modernizing of China as the Westernizing of China.

Regarding the potential alternatives, I would suggest that returning home to Chinese cultural traditions, and keeping a healthy balance between the traditional and the contemporary, between Chinese and Western, and between modern and postmodern, may offer some beneficial possibilities.

Realism versus Expression

"During the twentieth century, overriding concerns for national survival and cultural relevance caused Chinese artists to become polarized between two extreme positions: a denial of their traditional past, on the one hand, and the rejection of Western influence, on the other" (Wen C. Fong, 2001, 258).

The understanding of the traditional Chinese painter of what defines art was so different from Western realism. According to the Beijing based leading scholar-painter and theorist Chen Hengke:

> What defines art is the artist's ability to affect his viewer and to elicit a sympathetic response by means of his own spirit... Only when the artist himself experiences a response to an object can he move his viewer to respond to what he feels. (Cited in Wen C. Fong, 2001, 140)

In other words, Chen rather disliked the Western emphasis on realism; he considered the imagination of the scholar painter to be more essential. For instance, when

Chen decided to paint a garden rock and a dead tree trunk, instead of painting a real tree and rock, he painted a dead tree that looked like a chanting dragon. He added a colophon:

> There is this strange sight in the Central Park [in Beijing], but tens of thousands of tourists have passed it by, unnoticed. So I decided to paint it. A Buddhist monk friend of mine asks, "What does it mean when a dead tree looks like a chanting dragon?" I have no answer. (Ibid., 138)

Influenced by Chen, Qi Baishi, the pioneer leader of the traditional style of painter in China in the twentieth century, began "to paint in a simpler, more expressive style" (ibid., 142). Before that, Qi learned from two available sources: the indigenous copybook, the *Mustard Seed Garden Painter's Manual* and the foreign photographic image. In his painting *Scuttling Crab* (dated 1919), with "sensitive and lively... free-form strokes" he "capture[d] the essential character of the crab and deftly convey[ed] a sense of movement" (ibid.,149). Later, Qi combined both realism and calligraphy to make his signature style – he used the "running ink tones" to create the "impression of the shrimp in water" (ibid., 149). There were many painters imitating Qi Baishi's formulaic approach. However, Qi repeatedly warned his students by saying that "Those who learn from me live, those who copy me die" (ibid., 159).

In the climate of cultural reform, twentieth century traditional Chinese painting was condemned by the reformers. From the reformer's perspective, traditional Chinese painting was a kind of decayed elitist old fashion. According to Dai Yue:

> The weakness in traditional Chinese painting [was that] it presented only conventional 'type-forms', being unable to depict a particular thing; it bore no relation to the real world; and, lacking perspective and modeling, its techniques were 'irrational and unscientific'.(Sullivan, 1992, 12)

These views were echoed by Pan Tianshou. Pan was a self-taught painter before he enrolled in the First Normal College in Zhejiang in 1915. The pioneer Western-style teacher Li Shutong was his teacher. In 1928, Pan was appointed by Lin Fengmian as a professor of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, teaching traditional-style painting in the late 1950s. In contrast to Qi Baishi, Pan insisted that "art is the expression of the artist's ethical values" (ibid., 215). As Pan says:

> Chinese painting comprises spirit and feeling [*shenqing*], the idea state [*yijing*], and style and tone [*gediao*]. Painting must express high-minded moral principles.... Without cultivating a spiritual state, brush and ink alone can never achieve a noble style. (Ibid., 216)

These ideas were consistent with Chen Hengke, who defined "the elements of Chinese painting as moral character, learning, talent and feeling, and idealism" (Wen C. Fong, 2001, 215).

Xu Beihong was an idealistic painter. He was trained in both Chinese and Western styles. Xu learned oil painting with Dagnan-Bouveret in Paris. However, the academic salon style which Xu learned from his teacher was already long outdated. (Sullivan, 1992, 14) Xu was strongly influenced by the "conservative academic tastes of his teacher Dagnan-Bouveret... He worshiped classical and Renaissance art, and admired Rodin, Delacroix, Monet, and Degas. He rejected Renoir, Manet, and Cézanne, but he accepted Picasso – while denigrating Matisse" (ibid., 91).

In art education theory, Xu adopted Cai Yuanpei's dictum that "in the new society religion should be replaced by the fine arts" (ibid., 90). Xu claimed that as a result of 'traditionalism', the painters lost their independent and professional status. In order to transform Chinese painting, he argued, the painter must "keep what is good... change what

is bad... and adopt what he can from Western painting. [In addition, the Chinese] must

forswear the pernicious habit of copying the ancient masters... and instead apply modern

technology to a disciplined rendering of 'true' painting" (Wen C. Fong, 2001, 90). Thus, in

his lecture entitled *Methods of Reforming Chinese Painting* which he gave at Peking

University, he says:

> The decline of Chinese painting has reached its nadir. A civilization
> should never go backward. But Chinese painting today has gone back
> fifty paces from twenty years ago, five hundred paces from three
> hundred years ago... and a thousand from seven hundred years ago! (Ibid.,
> 90)

In order to bring Chinese painting into the twentieth century, Xu insisted that the

"representational practice of painting" must be "shared by all reformers of Chinese art"

(ibid., 90). For example, Xu uses Chinese theory to interpret Western art; he explains:

> It is said that while Chinese art values spirit-resonance, Western art
> emphasizes form-likeness, not knowing that both form-likeness and
> spirit-resonance are a matter of technique. While "spirit" represents the
> essence of form-likeness, "resonance" comes with the transformation
> of form-likeness. Thus for someone who excels in form-likeness, it is
> not hard to achieve spirit-resonance. Look at the relief sculptures at
> the Parthenon, carved some twenty-five hundred years ago in ancient
> Greece, and see how wonderful they are! It is simply not true that all
> Western art has no resonance" (ibid., 90)

Here Xu's remarkable painting *Galloping Horse* (dated 1943) is a good example of

demonstrating spirit-resonance. After the Communist Party came to power, Xu was made

"titular head of the prestigious Beijing National Academy of Art... Under the strict

supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Xu's Sino-Western style was banned in favor of

Soviet-style Social Realism. Ironically, it was Xu's legacy of teaching drawing from

plaster-cast models at the academy that made the out-pouring of Social Realist art

possible" (ibid., 100).

In Shanghai, Liu Haisu, "who saw himself as China's Van Gogh, [and] promoted Post-Impressionism" (Sullivan, 1992, 14), was a lifelong rival of Xu Beihong. Liu was "a standard-bearer of the modern art movement in southern China". Liu was highly critical of Xu's academicism. In 1935, he wrote:

> Like the Cubists... [the Fauves] were drawn to something that lies beyond nature.... The Fauves were opposed to those who neglected personal expression in favor of nature's surface appearance.... In applying to their work the lessons of Cézanne, Seurat, and Renoir, they initiated a surge of creativity that transformed Impressionist techniques into a new art which enabled them to build on the foundations of Impressionism and reach for something that is far richer than the traditionally based new academicism. (Ibid., 101)

In art creation, Liu emphasized reflection on one's own artistic heritage. While he compared Shitao with Cézanne he wrote:

> About 1914, I discovered two great artists: Cézanne of France and Shitao of China. I was nineteen at the time.... Shitao's paintings "express" rather than "represent." What is expression? It is the subjective manifestation of a personality that comes from one's heart; when expressed in an objective manner, it radiates outward from inside. What is representation? It is taken from nature. It is not created, but is a reflection of the outside world; it is not artistic expression, it is a [literal] recording of what is found in nature.... In the history of Chinese art from Wang Wei to the present, over a span of 1,168 years, there has been no shortage of fine art, but no one can equal the greatness of Bada Shanren and Shitao. (Ibid., 103)

Later in his paintings, Liu attempted to combine a Chinese (Shitao's) with a Western (Cézanne's) aesthetic. Liu was the founder and director of the Shanghai Academy. He was a "self-taught Western-style oil painter"; he usually liked to use "strong colors to enrich his compositions... [but] he returned in the late 1930s and 1940s to painting with brush and ink on paper" "As head of the Shanghai Academy of Art he

contended with conservatives who objected to his introduction of drawing from the nude, which was unprecedented and therefore shocking for the Chinese public" (ibid., 103-104).

Synthesis of East and West

Lin Fengmian was one of the leaders of the second generation reformer artists. He spent six years in France studying oil painting. However, after his returning to China in 1926 as an expressionist painter, Lin felt that the Chinese medium was better for capturing the spontaneous image for emotional expression. Thus, he abandoned oil for Chinese brush with gouache on paper but synthesized oil techniques with ink and water colour media. As the modern scholar Lang Shaojun notes:

> Lin's figure is both flat and formless.... [By] using brush and ink, [he] captures the image at once, with every stroke clearly marked on the paper surface, reflecting the Chinese belief that the rhythmic quality of the brushwork alone expresses the artist's intent and state of emotion.... [T]he style of such works [is known] as Expressionist Realism, which he attributes to the influence of Matisse. (Wen C. Fong, 2001, 209-211)

For example, in his early 1960s work *Seated Woman,* ink and colour on paper, the two-dimensional figure was depicted with his expressive linear drawing, using poetic bright yellow and dark blue oil colours for "[capturing] an elusive, visible but intangible, kind of beauty" (ibid., 211). Lin committed his artistic life to the search for a synthesis of Western musical language and Oriental poetic feeling in his painting. He was an inspired teacher who encouraged a generation of students that included Wu Guanzhong to seek artistic freedom. For instance, under the "puritanical Communist rule", he introduced nude models into the Chinese art curriculum (ibid., 214).

Wu Guanzhong was Lin Fengmian's student. As Sullivan notes:

He is not a pioneer in the movement – he was not yet born when it began – but he has become a distinguished and articulate exponent of it. At the same time his own work shows that once liberation from a stifling traditionalism had been achieved, it was possible, enriched by Western experience, to return to the natural mode of Chinese pictorial expression – the calligraphic gesture of the brush – and so achieve an art that is both Chinese and contemporary. (1992, 11)

In the late 40s, Wu studied modern Western art, in particular oil painting in Paris at the Ecole National Superieure des Beaux-Arts for three years. In 1950, he returned to China, and he spent over thirty years experimenting in the synthesis of Chinese and Western art by "[preserving] the traditional [Chinese] styles but adopt[ing] the formal principles of modern Western art [in his creations]" (Mayching Kao, not dated, 6). According to Mayching Kao:

... [where] Wu differed from the pioneers in the East – West encounter, [was that he] felt the weight of tradition and [was] troubled by the loss of national identity. In his art he takes pride in being a child of mixed blood, firmly convinced that the fusion of Chinese and Western art holds the future for modern China. Both oil and Chinese ink are media to express the inner soul of the artist; they are like two blades of a pair of scissors for him to tailor a new fashion combining both Eastern and Western elements. (Mayching Kao, 1992, 24)

Wu's uniqueness in artistic creation can be characterized by these features: beauty in nature is his source of inspiration; the Chinese aesthetic concepts of simplicity and lyricism are his artistic languages; and he has bridged the East and West by preserving the traditional styles but adopting the formal principles of modern Western art. His path, as concluded by the artist himself, is "searching East and West, holding the middle way" (Mayching Kao, 1982, 6). Wu's work, *Monastery of Zashilunbu*, is a good example for demonstrating Wu's personal style of landscape in oil. Although it is an oil painting, Wu considers it as Chinese painting. "The painting captures the immediacy of the artist's visual

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and emotional experience, but at the same time achieves a poetic expression with pearly colours, indistinct forms and fluid lines" (ibid. 26-27). In this work the artist uses the natural mode of Chinese pictorial expression while the calligraphic gesture of the brush shares similar artistic languages with the formalist principles of Western modern art. In his other artwork, *Colours and Emptiness*, Wu successfully brings together the variations of Chinese ink and the intense colour sense of oil medium – the tonal lines *dance* freely with the sensitive colours. In the artist's statement, Wu says:

> Gushing streams, torrential rain, unrestrained tears. Dark ink pours from high above. Deluges interspersed with mere trickles. Invert the painting: grey ink charges down from on high, crossing swords with the dark ink. Are the brilliant colours there to steal the show, or are they the battle drums setting the rhythm of the combat? The mysterious horizon attempts a widening and deeping of visual perception: yearning for my riverside home town? Life's many vicissitudes? Sombre misfortune? Radiant success? Shitao said, "Steer with clear vision in a sea of black ink and let the light shine through in a world of darkness." When my daughter-in-law asked me to name a title for the painting, I pondered a moment, and said, "Colours and emptiness." (Wu Guanzhong, 1995)

Regarding the relationship between aesthetic experience and artistic skill, Wu insists that the artist's sensibility, perception and judgment can only be expressed in an artwork. Thus, he believes that both experience and skill are equally important in the creative process. Wu explains with his own experience in creation that "[he] seldom paint[s] whatever scene [he] encounter[s] on a painting excursion". What he will do essentially is first "observe" and then "synthesize" and "more important... analyz[e] the formal characteristics [of]... subjects and extract the abstract qualities in [those] forms" (Mayching Kao, 1982, 7). Regarding form and content, he believes that "our response to visual beauty of every kind ... [is] a natural response to pure, non-figurative form". He also believes that "pure form is *mere* form, without content, and, in a famous simile, insists that

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the line connecting the artist with objective reality is a kite-string that must never be broken" (Sullivan, 1992, 22). Wu affirms in his essay *Kite with Unbroken String* (1983) that "the 'kite string' [has] connected his art to his land and its cultural traditions" (Wen C. Fong, 2001, 254). Thus beauty in nature: "the mountains and stream[s] of his homeland..., the emotions of the people and the smell of Chinese soil..." (Mayching Kao, 1982, 6-8), all this to Wu are the source of inspiration to enrich the forms of his art. In his other essays *Searching East and West* Wu summarizes that in "his long artistic career... [he] has found a middle path between representation and abstraction, or between nature and art, providing [him with] a modern interpretation of the traditional attitude" (ibid., 8). For example, in his landscape painting, "he combines traditional ink techniques with the intense gestures and drips of Abstract Expressionism, yet the subjects are always identifiable" (Cohen, 1987, 123).

Although Lin Fengmian and Wu Guanzhong were held in high esteem by foreigners, they both had less recognition in their home country.

Postmodern expression

In discussing recent controversies about contemporary Chinese art and art education, I would start with my response to the 'resignation' issue of Chen Danqing – who made public his letter of resignation in his book, *Essays on Retrogression*. Chen is a New-York-based contemporary Chinese oil painter renowned for bold imagery and striking technique. For example, in a piece of his recent work, he has reversed images like Chinese calligraphy, RMB yuan and magazine photos into a minor key. He was also a professor of the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University. What was the issue? Chen was a self-taught painter until he was admitted to the Postgraduate Class of the Oil

Painting Department of the Central Institute of Fine Arts (Beijing) in 1978. He taught in the same school after his graduation. As a free artist, he went to New York in 1982 and stayed there until 2000. Chen returned to Beijing in 2000 and was invited to be a professor teaching the doctoral program of fine art at Tsinghua University. His renewed contract was started from 2002 until January 2005; however, in October 2004 he resigned. In his resignation letter he declared that he was very disappointed with the systems of contemporary art education in China. Attempting to revitalize Chinese culture while creatively engaging contemporary Western influences, he brought back new Western concepts and techniques upon his return. During the next five years, he criticized traditional conventional thought in art and art education. According to Chen, what he calls the end of painting is not the work of the avant-garde but of the media image, and the future of the art world will belong to a world of media images. Thus, he questions the culture of oil painting in China, saying that to copy the photographic images in painting but not to use media images to create directly is a dead end for easel art. He claims that the Chinese official art institution's intention to give favour to oil painting and other forms of easel art is based on a single-minded policy. (2005, 85-95, translated by the author) In Chen's view, the maintenance of oil painting in China is only "a silent and implicit protest against the present art market" (Danny Yung, 1998, ¶ 3). He asks if art could be based only on pure drawing and painting (Chen Danqing, 2005, 97). He claims that what is vital in drawing and painting is not how to draw; it doesn't matter whether you are imitating natural objects or copying from a photograph, what is important is whether you know how to observe and what you are attempting to draw (ibid., 107). By the same token, Chen insists that, forced by the media technologies, art education in China must stop preparing students as pure

painters (in the nutshell of just drawing and painting), rather, art education must train them directly to use media art technologies to create (ibid., 95). In addition, he states that to maintain the 'Soviet Socialist Realist style' sketch training[48] as a foundation course in curricula is unnecessary. In his view, what is important, rather than such basic drawing skills training, is artistic experiences – for students to have as many chances as they can to view original artworks (ibid., 99).

Is Chen's claim appropriate? It seems there is no simple yes or no answer. Certainly the technological art medium is a tool for creative activities. However, concerning the training of artistic experience, I would not agree with Chen to train students directly with the technological art medium without teaching the fine art foundation. I question the removal of fine art training courses from curricula. In China, art students will train with a wide range of concrete foundation courses before they get into their majors. For example, usually in the first two years, they will have to learn Chinese painting, sketching, drawing, painting and art history. Even students in the program of interior design, for example, before learning web design, have to learn how to do hand drawn graphic design first. A few years ago, one of my research fellows told me that a research paper showed that art education in Hong Kong is in behind the West by at least twenty years, and China is behind by fifty years. This may be true to some extent, that is, compared with the Western both modern and postmodern educational art theories, the Chinese still value studio art training and art making. This training, I think, is still worthwhile. Some Western art educators

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[48] As Cohen notes, "During the years 1949 – 1959, the Chinese invited Soviet experts in all fields to teach them how to modernize.... The basic Soviet Socialist Realist style had also evolved from a Russian version of the nineteenth-century academic painting that was popular in Paris salons. The technique was developed by Chestakov, teacher of the Russians Repin and Serov. It involved six steps: outline, shadows, chiaroscuro, detail, color, and, finally, recalling the first impression. The softly muddied landscapes of Courbet, Millet, and Corot were emulated by the Russians, and after the Russian Revolution, the romantically silhouetted reaper with scythe was gradually replaced by a smiling young woman and her tractor" (1987, 18).

continue to value of fine art skills training and art-making in education, for example, Esiner

argues that:

> Many of the most complex and subtle forms of thinking take place when
> students have an opportunity either to work meaningfully on the creation of
> images – whether visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic – or to
> scrutinize them appreciatively. To be able to create a form of experience
> that can be regarded as aesthetic requires a mind that animates our
> imaginative capacities and that promotes our ability to undergo emotionally
> pervaded experience. Perception is, in the end, a cognitive event. What we
> see is not simply a function of what we take from the world, but what we
> make of it. (2002, xii)

Considering issues of art curriculum, it is necessary to have some 'reserved'

programs like drawing, painting, sculpture, and art history included in the foundation

curriculum of a fine art program. The aim of taking such art classes is that, students will

learn more than mechanical skills. For example, in the case of drawing, it is "one of the

better ways of training observation, hand and eye coordination, representational skills and

a feeling for form; characteristics important in all media" (Richmond, 2004, 17).

Furthermore, responding to Chen's claim regarding the issue of teaching media art, I don't

think that teaching media art has the same function as teaching photography has. On the

one hand, in teaching photography with the camera, students "can be taught about

composition: about balance, symmetry, rhythm, variety, unity, unity, emphasis and

qualities of form and light… More important is [that they can be taught how] to make an

image that satisfies cognitively and emotionally, given a certain idea and set of

circumstances" (ibid., 18). Having finished basic skills training then students can act to

practice on their own. In my view, the aim of teaching photographic art is to teach students

how to use a technological tool to develop aesthetic perception and understanding. In other

words, what I legitimize with the teaching of photography is that taking photographs with

the camera is like drawing with the pencil; it is a person's first-hand experience. Students

derive such experience from the process of art-making while personally encountering the

real world. With the camera we take photography from place to place as well. Thus, I

prefer that teaching photography be viewed as one of the foundation courses.

On the other hand, with computer technology, I will not criticize its productive

creative potential. However, what I am concerned with is working with computers in a

'virtual reality' environment. A key point here is whether or not the personal experience

encounters the real world. Thus, I don't think teaching media art (working with a machine)

can replace any of the studio art subjects. From this perspective, I don't agree with Chen

that technology is the factor which signalled the death of painting, rather, it is the extreme

ideology of postmodernism which has attempted to marginalize this form of art.

The postmodern expression is by no means the whole picture of modernizing

China. Perhaps there are aspects of modern expression that can be more fruitful in

developing a synthesis.

Originality, Contemporaneity and Locality

Regarding the issues of realist Chinese oil painting, although one may criticize

Socialist Realism paintings as propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party, one cannot

deny the genius of some of the works. For example, Xia Baoyuan's *Roar of the Yellow*

River (1971) is still an outstanding work; as Chen notes, "although this painting had never

been exhibited or published, it was still a great art to my generation" (Chen Danqing, 2005,

75). Chen himself is also a popular oil painter, good at figure painting; his *Tibetan Series* is

remarkable. However, three decades later, Chen questions the situation of the Chinese oil

painter, "How does the realist oil painter respond to the postmodernist consumerism and universal simulacrum?" "How do they justify their isolation from the contemporary art world?" (ibid., 94) Chen has admitted that the realist oil painters in China, including himself, have had to deal with the dilemma of being connected with the contemporary art world while trying to maintain their role as pure painters. Finally, Chen suggests that the Chinese realist painters should maintain a "shut the door" policy of disconnecting with the contemporary art world. Here, I think Chen's suggestion is right. Many Chinese artists work only as pure painters. (ibid., 85-95)

The response of many Chinese realist oil painters is to keep working on realist paintings. The artistic path of the oil painter Guo Shaogang is an outstanding example. Guo was born in 1932. He enrolled in the Beiping Art College in 1949, graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1953, and devoted five years of study to oil painting at the Repin Academy of Fine Arts. Guo was the student of Xu Beihong. Although Guo was trained with the Soviet formulas of "learning how to paint darkly histrionic scenes, scenes of noble peasants, and academic landscapes based on muddy Barbizon School models" (Cohen, 1987, 90), his colours are rich, bright and beautiful. Guo is a naturalist painter. For both nature and life he has boundless enthusiasm. As he says, "embracing nature is my greatest happiness, I enjoy the simple life and like to paint life landscape painting" (Gao Shaogang, 2005, January 6, A1, translated by the author). With his quiet and tasteful artistic languages, strong and graceful emotion, rich and subtle colours, and bold and fluid brushstrokes, Guo composes his beautiful life odes. Guo likes many other painters, and has devoted sixty years to his painting. This is such a powerful response to the challenges.

Ironically, rather unlike the West, the artistic status of oil painting has been maintained by the Chinese painter since the second half of the last century. Oil painting, as an original Western art medium, is nowadays recognized in the exquisite works of art in China. Chen's claim has become true that Chinese oil painting culture, to some extent, has already escaped from contemporary Western painting culture. (Chen Danqing, 2005, 94) An example of this claim is the remarkable nature of the First Beijing International Art Biennale, 2003:

> ... The exhibits were mainly paintings and sculptures, instead of such forms as installation and video – the mainstream forms prevailing in other biennales in other countries. The First Beijing International Art Biennale on the one hand raised aloft the banner of [originality], and on the other hand, confined the exhibits to the categories of painting and sculpture. The sponsors believe that although new art forms, such as new media, have extended the realm of contemporary art, painting and sculpture, as the traditional art forms have not lost their potential for development

(http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn/english/introduction.asp)

The theme of the First Beijing International Art Biennale not only clarifies the definition of contemporary Chinese art in an official form as including the tradition easel art, but also demonstrates the charm of easel art.

I do not agree with Chen's claim that confining the exhibits to the categories of painting and sculpture within the First Beijing International Art Biennale is based on a single-minded policy. Rather than acting in isolation, China is taking the initiative in opening up the definition of art for discussion. As one of the presenters of the first Beijing Biennale international symposium, Wan Qingli, Professor from Hong Kong University points out:

Western popular culture, especially American popular culture, is becoming the global culture with... economic and information globalization. Popular culture, driven by commercial packaging, media hype, supplemented by hi-tech acoustic, light and color effects, and all-round stereo dissemination, is quickly expanding in the developing countries and eroding the living space of national culture. Facing such grave reality any responsible government of the developing countries has to think over its countermeasures. China's historical experiences have proven that, for the developing countries, it is wise and beneficial to take the initiative in opening. If they adopt passive or closed strategies, the national culture may lose the hard-won opportunity to finish the modernization transformation in the current world cultural exchange.

(http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn/english/introduction.asp)

Nor do I think that it is correct, as Chen suggested that painting needs to surrender to the force of technological media. We do not need to give up painting. As another presenter, the American painter Tom Birkner says:

It is very meaningful to see many painting works. When historical tradition limits the development space of painting, [it] require innovation [to respond] to the traditional history of painting. Innovation may just be the possession of enough respect for the past brilliance, but it doesn't rely on the past brilliance. The Chinese works are abundant in content; abstraction and realism can coexist in harmony, video is not the only way to reflect reality. It is a trend for the varied parts of the world to influence each other.

(http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn/english/introduction.asp)

As another presenter, the Swedish artist Anders Liden points out:

Most works on the contemporary art scene of America and Europe are video and installation. We found everything fresh and new when we saw many paintings and sculptures from different countries in China. The traditional media should not decline because of the new media's appearing. China offers one fulcrum for the world; world contemporary art inclining towards America will now begin to tend

towards equilibrium because of China's involvement. This is the point which made the Beijing Biennale different.

(http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn/english/introduction.asp)

Conclusion

Historical experiences have proven that the conception of modernizing as equal to Westernizing Chinese art, is a profound misreading. However, whether or not you like the works of Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian and Wu Guanzhong, it is not right to say that all the reformers in the movement of modernizing Chinese art are "imitating" the West. It is also incorrect to marginalize traditional Chinese art, but it does not mean that to accept Western influence is 'wrong'. Intercultural influences between nations are evitable; uniqueness and locality as well, does not require one to 'stick' to one's own tradition.

Regarding debates over the traditional versus the contemporary and realism versus expressionism, in light of the above discussions, obviously, they are not only selections of personal artistic style, but also different interpretations between the Chinese and the Western cultural traditions. It is meaningful to explore these ideas further and I will discuss them in more depth in the Conclusion chapter.

Painting 10   *Chan Chung-shu,* **The Gap # 13***, watercolour on paper, 2001.*

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CONCLUSION:
THE BEAUTY OF HARMONY

*As in all cultures and at all times, art is not a luxury but a
necessity without which we would be vastly impoverished.*

*Bruce Cole & Adelheid Gealt,
Art of the Western World*

*For a man to give full realization to his heart is for him to
understand hid own nature, and a man who knows his own
nature will know Heaven. By retaining his heart and
nurturing his nature he is serving Heaven. Whether he is
going to die young or to live to a ripe old age makes no
difference to his steadfastness of purpose. It is through
awaiting whatever is to befall him with a perfected
character that he stands firm on his proper destiny.*

*Herbert Fingarette
The Self in Transformation*

In light of the discussions which I have made throughout the chapters in my

dissertation, there are points of congruence between Western and Chinese cultural

traditions. For example, there is Plato's ethical good versus Confucian moral good, Kant's

aesthetic judgmental taste versus Chuang Tzu's aesthetic ideal life, and expressive

Romanticism versus Chan Buddhism. To some extent they are correspondent, however,

there are significant differences too. One might consider that, the differences have emerged

from two different conceptual approaches involving the humane spiral right mind of the

Chinese and the scientific linear left mind of the West. However, it is better for us to use 'a

whole mind approach' for overcoming the challenges which are produced by the limits of

either the right or left mind approach. Perhaps the Chinese vision of nature as the

"continuity of being" which defines the cosmos as the "Great Harmony" is a prescription for avoiding the ecological crises of the latest form of capitalism, namely "bureaucratic individualism" (Tu Wei-ming, 1985, 8-9). For the purpose of this chapter, my discussions (which will relate to debates between modernity and postmodernity in Western societies) are focused on three dimensions: (1) the beauty of harmony (the principle of Chinese aesthetics) – which aims to transform the polarized opposites into a *self-balancing* rational spirit; (2) The Taoist principle of polarity; and (3) art education theories which view the meaning of art making in the Chinese aesthetic theory as a process of *self-cultivation* and a training of *self-mastery*.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Chinese philosophy is multidimensional. For instance, the mutual and complementary roles played by Confucianism and Taoism are an important thread that has run through all Chinese aesthetics thinking for the past 2,000 years. (Li Zehou, 1994, 45) My point here is that perhaps it is a worthwhile practice for the West to contemplate the idea of keeping a healthy balance between modernism and postmodernism. Additionally, I will discuss the Western postmodernist deconstruction theories in light of Taoist theories. Lastly, as the Chinese arts are now at "the cross-road of past and future, East and West (Wu Hung), I must clarify that I am not going to criticize the right or wrong between the Chinese and the Western thinking. The purpose of this study is to explore some possibilities in using a *whole mind* approach through dialogue, and through raising challenges and making comparisons and contrasts. For this purpose a key question I am going to respond is "What possible contributions will Chinese aesthetics make to the Western thought in contemporary art and art education?"

What Are the Clues from Chinese Aesthetics
for Contemporary Art and Art Education?

"How could the ideas of Chinese aesthetics make sense to Western thinkers?" I asked Professor Mackinnon (a supervisor in my committee). "To have an understanding of the Chinese mind is very important," he replied. Then he shared with me his experience of approaching his idea of the Tao of teaching - of seeing how "the dialogical relationship between Confucianism and Taoism provides a useful framework" for his ideas about learning to teach. (Mackinnon, 1996)

Understanding the Chinese Mind

The main principle underlying the various forms of Chinese aesthetics involves tuning the self to become a *self-balancing* human being, in this a case balancing between the Confucian rational spirit and the Taoist aesthetic emotion. In contrast to the Western idea about the dichotomous relationship between modernism and postmodernism, I understand that the Chinese idea of 'self-balancing' is hard to apply. Here, the Chinese thinker advocates *harmony* and oneness while the Westerner emphasizes *conflict* and difference. In my opinion, the Chinese idea of the harmony of *yin* and *yan,* in this case the mutual and complementary roles played by Confucian and Taoism, would contribute an alternative. Thus, perhaps it would be a worthwhile practice for the West to contemplate the idea of keeping a healthy balance between modernism and postmodernism.

The Beauty of Harmony

In the Introduction I express my concerns about some pessimistic conceptual art. I argue that much postmodernist thinking in art is too negative. As to whether or not I have over criticized postmodernist deconstruction, I think that I have just pointed out the

problem of this nihilist theory. I do remember that five years ago in my course of study on

philosophers on education, I criticized Plato's statements on form in art and art education.

However, recently in my study, I related Plato's claim on tragic poetry to my claim on

postmodernist deconstructive art. I asked "Can we deny that the theory of the privileged

and the extreme pessimistic line of postmodernism is not healthy?" My response to this

question is that to be privileged is dangerous, and I can not agree that to be pessimistic is a

good practice, or that the nihilist attitude is the only solution. Rather, I would suggest that

the Taoists philosophies of 'polarity' would be a therapy for offsetting the cultural conflicts

between modernity and postmodernity. 'Polarity' is the underlying principle in Taoist

philosophy. In *Using Polarity* Lao Tzu says:

When all the world knows beauty as beauty,

There is ugliness.

When they know good as good,

There there is evil.

In this way

Existence and nonexistence produce each other.

Difficult and easy complete each other.

Long and short contrast each other.

High and low attract each other.

Pitch and tone harmonize each other.

Future and past follow each other.

Therefore, Evolved Individuals

Hold their position without effort,

Practice their philosophy without effort,

Are a part of All Things and overlook nothing.

They produce but do not possess,

Act without expectation,

Succeed without taking credit.

Since, indeed, they take no credit, it remains with them.

The main idea of the Taoist polarity is that opposite elements are coexistent, so that rather than demonstrating their differences, they produce work for their harmony. In contrast, the postmodernist deconstruction theory emphasizes the negative concept of difference. For instance, in Derrida's view, there is no stable point between opposing elements; for him, 'change' is a principle by which culture defers to Culture, low defers to high, feminine defers to masculine, and so forth. Thus, conflict is in the nature of opposing elements, where one element should be 'replaced' by the other. In my view, this concept is a problematic factor in postmodern theory because the postmodernists struggle to maintain their positions. In contrast, the Evolved Individuals, who practice the Taoist way, hold their position without effort. However, here I need to point out that in the Chinese tradition, the Confucian's engaged approach will be a more appropriate to the situation. Thus both approaches can be utilized depending on the context.

Art as Self-cultivation

Self-cultivation is the main role of art in Chinese aesthetics. Thus, although their interpretations are different, both Confucian and Taoist thinking place a similar value

on self-cultivation, that it is basic to artistic creativity. The Confucian (in the Mencian

fashion) self-cultivation tradition in Chinese art has deep humanistic roots. For example,

the Confucians take a disciplined approach to the human body. They ritualize the human

body, using rhythmic bodily movements and breathing techniques in doing art, as a form of

the mental and physical rejuvenation of the person. (Tu Wei-ming, 1985)

The Nature of Self-cultivation

What is the nature of the Mencian's self-cultivation approach? According to Tu

Wei-ming, self-cultivation is a form of mental and physical rejuvenation involving four

dimensions: (1) *The Way (Tao)*. As a metaphor, the way is never a static category

signifying something external and objective. It is a process, and a dynamic unfolding of the

self as a vital force for personal, social, and cosmic transformation. (2) *Body (Shen)*. The

importance of taking care of one's body, in the Confucian tradition is a necessary condition

for learning to be human. The idea is that "without an awareness of the importance of the

body, we can hardly appreciate the significance of the six arts (*liu-i*)[49] in classical

Confucian thought…. The 'six arts' are therefore ways of cultivating the body" (1985,

96-99). (3) *Heart (Hsin)*. In the Chinese view, the body is a spatial concept, and the heart

has its remarkable ability to wander. In other words, we establish behavioural criteria to

describe the heart, this is why the teaching of Chinese art is an exemplary teaching. In the

Confucian's view, training the heart with the six arts is a discipline for the body. (Ibid.,

100-103) (4) *Spirit (Shen)*. Spirit, in Mencius' term, characterizes the greatness of

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[49] The 'six arts' (the Six Classics) : the Book of History (the *Shujing*), the Book of Odes (the *Shijing*), the Book of Changes (the *Yijing*), the Book of Rites (the three texts on ritual: the *Zhouli*, the *Yili*, and the *Liji*), the Book of Music (the *Yuejing*)and a historical work (722-481 BCE), the Book of Spring & Autumn Annals (the *Chunqiu*). They are "correspond to the liberal arts" (Osborne et al., 2000, 109)

transforming oneself as "sagely", an aesthetic appraisal of what a human being can attain. In other words, "sageliness" is an approach to self-perfection (ibid., 104-106). Finally, it is very important to summarize and point out that, as Tu Wei-ming notes, "Rather than a norm to be conformed to, Mencius sees [those moral sources for self-cultivation] as a standard of inspiration that must be re-enacted by ceaseless effort" (ibid., 94). I can find some correspondence in this Mencian approach to epiphanic art and liberal art education as well. Perhaps Mencius' approach may be helpful to us in our ethical and aesthetic education.

Defining the Meaning of the Self-cultivation Approach

Some might debate whether the Confucian self-cultivation tradition is a given human condition or an achieved state of moral excellence. In today's pluralistic cultural context, this debate is similar to the Western criticism of the 'epiphanies of being'[50] with its reference to the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. As a challenge from the counter-epiphanic strand of naturalism, some may ask if it is acceptable that 'the sage-like moral idealism' or 'the epiphanies of being' is based on an alleged expression of spirit in nature. I will discuss these questions from the perspective of the Chinese theme of 'oneness' which is concerned with how to transform the mental by rejuvenating the physical body and by cultivating the self with ritual. Oneness is a vital theme in Chinese philosophy and aesthetics which, in contrast to 'dichotomy', is an important distinction between Chinese and Western thought. The two opposite elements, mind and body, in the Chinese view are the two sides of a same coin. I would suggest that the challenge comes

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[50] To pursue the harmony of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful in being a human.

from how to access that state of oneness. According to Wong Ping Ho, the practical

metaphor is "tuning"; as he notes:

> The term hints at a complete "resonance" or "being in tune" with something
> outside of oneself, such as a musical performance or nature, if the
> dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" is still applicable to the feeling of
> oneness of subject and object brought about [by] the resonance (which
> means the concepts of "subject" and "object" actually do not apply to that
> state of oneness and are unnecessary: there is simply oneness. (Wong Ping
> Ho, 2000, section 2, ¶1)

This is quite a natural or Taoist way of seeing oneness. On the other hand, the

Confucian interpretation of the term 'oneness' in the case of self-cultivation involves

knowing how to locate the relationship between self and others in society. In the Confucian

view, human relations should be harmonized, but they may not be naturally harmonized; if

there is harmony, it is because the people involved have cultivated themselves. As Tu

Wei-ming notes:

> To anticipate a harmonious state of affairs in one's social interaction as a
> favourable condition for self-cultivation is, in the Confucian sense, not only
> unrealistic but illogical. Self-cultivation is like the root and truck, and
> harmonious human relations are like the branches... Strictly speaking,
> learning for the sake of others as a demonstration of altruism cannot be truly
> altruistic, unless it is built on the foundation of self-knowledge. (1985, 56)

My interpretation of these dichotomies, in light of the theme of oneness of self and

others is that they should not be construed in terms of conflicts. If self-cultivation is a

precondition for harmonizing human relations, then in order to learn to be a good person,

the self should open the private ego to communicate, to deliberate, and to be considerate of

others. To the challenges from the counter-epiphanic stand of naturalism, it should be

acknowledged that the decision is not made by the self, nor is it based on an expression of

spirit in nature.

With regard to the place of epiphanic art in a world largely determined mechanistically, we must note that humanity and science are twin pillars of knowledge and experience; thus, in the world largely dominated mechanistically, spiritual and epiphanic art education should have a prominent place. Second, we can reconcile the subjective and objective, in the Confucian self-cultivation tradition, so that epiphanic art education becomes a process of self-perfection. Thus, in this sense, it is not a problem, as Taylor has noted, to define moral sources through personal resonance. My point here is that if more people can experience a personal resonance and locate epiphanic art as their subjective moral source, then perhaps we can emphasize epiphanic art's importance as the public's objective moral source.

Exploring the Tao of Teaching in Art Education

"Can art be taught?" Some may say "Yes", but some may say "No". Let me discuss this issue by reversing the question as "Can I learn how to draw and paint?" Now the answer is properly, "Yes". I need to learn some drawing and painting skills. However, I can not verify whether I know the skills. I need to train myself from my experience in drawing and painting. By the same token, we can only teach art through demonstration and training.

Ways to Teach

The traditional Chinese art teaching approach is that students have to imitate the masterpieces thoroughly until the teacher thinks that the student has already 'mastered' the skills. In contrast, a common contemporary Western art teaching approach is not to instruct, but just to let students learn from their own experiences. Regarding imaginative creativity, I do not agree that non-instruction encourages imagination. Oppositely,

imagination is derived from or inspired by something you have seen or learned before. Genuine creativity is born naturally from mastering. However, too much rule following in my view is also problematic. It seems that we have to learn not only from rule following, but also from trial and error and play. I assume that both Western and Chinese approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Thus, in my teaching I use a blended approach. When I teach painting, I will not ask students to copy my painting or to follow my instructions step by step. What I will do is help them to do research (from books, pictures, computer website, real objects, or their own photographs). I will ask students to choose what to paint according to their own interests. I will ask them to figure out which colour(s) is suitable to apply for their paintings. I will teach them how to paint by demonstration. Then students have to learn by practicing – to adjust the controlling of water, colour, timing and bush stroke… What do we need to teach? We have not only to teach technical skills but also to develop the student's observation, perception, sensibility, and judgment. For example, in one of the drawing and painting classes, students were asked to draw birds, ducks, and geese. Finally, we ended up with everybody's unique picture – each student's idea and emotion was expressed through the painting (see Painting 10). In addition, art educators are challenged by the claims of critical issues such as: imitation and maturity, beauty and pleasure, painting and photography, and so forth. In other words, art educators are challenged to have good judgment.

Teachers' Judgment

During most of the past century, we were caught up in the cultural wars between modernism and postmodernism which have challenged our understanding and judgment of art and life. In my opinion, as a consequence of the cultural conflicts, we find ourselves

now living in an unhealthy and chaotic environment. People's value systems in art and life change rapidly. Something we have valued for a long time, may no longer be credited. For instance, natural beauty and pleasure have been rejected from many art creations since the last few decades of the twentieth-century. (Wendy Steiner, 2001) However, the age of cultural theory may be slipping behind us. (Eagleton, 2003) Now as an art educator, within the context of my own practice, I would try to 'cultivate my garden', I would put renewed effort into giving freshness to my art teaching. I would emphasize the importance if not the primacy of drawing and painting in order to produce an epiphanic enjoyment of the creative process. It is so encouraging to hear more and more students say that "I draw with pleasure!" or "I want to become a painter when I grow up!" Here I present to you a 'flower' from my garden!

Painting 11   *Claudia Lam, Canadian Ducks, mixed media on paper, 2006*

Conclusion

There is much that Chinese aesthetic theory can contribute to the development of Western art. By the same token, there is much of value that China can learn from the Western tradition. Historically, Western art has had a strong influence on China. For instance, one significant tradition that has persisted in the West is the concept of the artist as hero. This idea finds its expression in the Romantic period where many literary artists cultivated their public image as proud rebels against societal norms. Their willingness to explore beyond the boundaries of conventions was considered bravely heroic and contributed to their celebrity status. This image of the artist arguably still motivates contemporary artists. The artist as eccentric, deliberately defying social norms is another variation on this theme.

This romantic idea of the artist may be another factor that has pushed Western artists to go to extremes in their art and to continue to experiment with ever more outrageous performances. The positive aspect of this phenomenon has been to elevate the status of the artist to that of celebrity, to create a larger audience for art, and to energize the exploration of new technique, style and subject matter. The downside has been the apparent erosion of a moral centre. A positive outcome of the interchange of ideas between Chinese and Western tradition might be to retain the explorative energy of Western art controlled by the internal discipline of Chinese aesthetics.

Presently, we are kept in chaos caused by the cultural conflicts between the camps of extreme modernism and radical postmodernism. In other words, we are enmeshed in problem created by the ambiguous postmodernist interpretation and the application of egotistical individualism. In this regard, we might consider another era of apparent chaos

and moral confusion. During the eighteen century, the ground literally shifted during the disastrous Lisbon earthquake which partly inspired Voltaire's satire, *Candide*. In the novel, the frustrating search for certitude in an ever shifting moral universe was, in the end, met with the human response that we 'must cultivate our own gardens.'

So too, in the contemporary art world where the ground is in constantly shifting the appropriate response may also be to 'cultivate our own gardens.' By this I mean that we should approach art and art education with the aim of *training* ourselves to be good human beings by *tuning* the self to live harmoniously with other people and in harmony with the earth within the eternal cosmos. Indeed, we might find that certain harmonious outcomes might be realized through the exchange of ideas about Chinese and Western aesthetic traditions.

Painting 12   *Chan Chung-shu,* **The Gap # 18,** *watercolour on paper, 2001.*

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