

Searching for Subjectivity in Projection-- The Retreat and Emergence of the "Reality"

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Abstract: The trend of thought of art in the 20th century in both East and West is based on the collapse of their past "subjectivity" and the search for their new "modernity subjectivity". Interestingly, at this time, the East and the West questioned the "truth" and the way of expression they had previously identified, and unexpectedly sought "truth" different from their own in the shadow of each other's past projection. Finally, they arrived at the same place by different routes, which led to the emergence of international art trends

1. The Elimination and Establishment of Western Subjectivity.

1.1 The establishment of the Western modern subjectivity.

Althusser believes that ideology "calls" people through various institutions and discourses, inviting people to have some connection with it, and thus transforms individuals into "subjects". Therefore, the digestion and search of subjectivity is directly related to the dissolution and establishment of an ideology in a certain period.

In the face of several historical tragedies in the 20th century, the once perfect and unified concept of the main ideological subject in the West has begun to collapse, and by the end of World War I at latest, "modern human subjectivity" has begun to take shape.

'Thought and vision' retains overall 'supremacy' through the mainstream of Western classical art history. As a metaphor of human vision, the model of perception 'dark box' pervades Europe, but the introspection on 'pure vision' has always existed in Western countries. In the middle of the 19th century, the classical visual model and the stability of the representation space began to disintegrate, and 'the theory of special neural energy drew an outline for the modernity of vision, in which the illusion of reference was exposed mercilessly. New tools and technologies create a new 'real' world for observers.¹ 'Verisimilitude' has lost the scientific basis for its validity. They began to look for the real 'real'.

'After the middle of the 19th century, there was another Oriental Art craze in Europe, mainly in painting.' 'Van Gogh's later strokes and colour have something in common with the expression method of expressing one's mind directly in Chinese ink painting; the decoration quality of Matisse's works in 'single line flat painting' and Klimt's researching on and learning from Chinese art also show the Chinese art's influences on them. People are more willing to talk about Picasso and Miro's admiration on Chinese art. It is true that modern western painters have developed a totally different idea of Chinese art.' ²

¹ Jonathan Clary, translated by Cai peijun. Technology of the Observer. east China normal University press, 2017, p139

² Li yi, Ten books of the Chinese & western art comparison——the Chinese & western art criticism comparison. Hebei art press, 2000, Introduction p13

1.2 The Western Painting Seeks The Modern Subjectivity In the Retreat of the “Truth”.

"We must question the ready-made syntheses, the naturally accepted generalizations without any test, the connections that derive truth from the outside; we must abandon all the forms and inexplicable forces that we usually use to connect human discourse; their spheres of domination are dark, and they must be deported. To be rigorous, we should not endow them with absolute and natural value, but must recognize that they were initially related to a scattered set of events."- Foucault, *Archaeology of knowledge*³

In the 20th century, the "real" depiction of the "real" world in Western art in the past has become untenable. The new subjectivity calls for a new visual emersion mode.

Abstract painting originated in Europe, which can not refer to the world outside the canvas, can not include a reproductive factor. Abstract painting is based on "the retreat of the reality", adding the meaning of new modern subjectivity to the form elements, such as whether colors, pictures, contours or patterns, or form techniques. After the retreat of the real description of the objective world, it is separated from and related to the natural objects at the same time, which shows that the artistic space is autonomous and has its own purpose. It is no longer just the carrier of information transmission of religion, politics and other ideologies. This past pattern of retreat from the real world attempts to be independent of any ideology and era. There is not another kind of art could be like abstract art, can present the ultimate result of an artist's individuality, spontaneity and correctness of his creative process to an indescribable degree. Among them, the artist's wrist strength, vigor and mood as well as the various decisions in the process of artistic creation, have spreaded out before us more intensely and fully than ever. and the thing that spreads out before us is just the occasionally appearance of the modern subjectivity itself

From the point of view of appreciation, the concept of art has shifted from the aspect of images to the aspect of expression, composition and creativity. Since the function of reproduction is abandoned, the text presupposition and metaphor behind the painting no longer exist, thus its meaning completely opens itself, so that the viewer can not find a fixed meaning interpretation reference system, so that the viewer's interpretation processing gets into a state of weightlessness and loss of direction. the information exchanging of painting based on the Ideological and textual experience is deliberately stopped, forcing the viewer to retreat from the once familiar "reality" into a completely unfamiliar world, forcing the viewer to directly experience the state of mind and body of the artist while he is creating with the corresponding mental and emotional state. This kind of communication in appreciation is the real communication based on the modern subjectivity level that the artists want to create and pursue.

An increasingly integrated culture centered on the industry, the economy, and the state, has been desperately weakening and weakening the subjectivity of human beings. In such a society, personal individual time and spiritual space are disintegrated into fragmented existence by work and information, losing the foundation of subjectivity survival and free growth. This is one of the profound roots of Western world seeking modern subjectivity at this time. Art at this time must be able to re-integrate the existence of subjectivity, to give the growth of the subject a continuous continuity of space and time, must give the subject more opportunities than ever before to express passionate spontaneous and strong emotion. Art at this time is a strong cry for modern subjectivity.

Matisse claimed in Paris that the "inherent truth" of art must first be liberated from the external form of the object. And Mondrian's goal is to achieve a "pure relationship" of art, these relations in the past paintings has been camouflaged by the particularities of the nature, these particularities can only prevent the audience from discovering from the art the universal and absolute things.

Interestingly, Pan Tianshou, a master of traditional Chinese painting, wrote in his "History of Chinese Painting" (published in 1936): "Western and European paintings, in the last thirty or fifty years, have exerted their utmost efforts to give play to the pure aesthetics of lines and colors, and

³ Michael Ledger. *Reconstructing Abstract Expressionism -Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, Jiangsu Phoenix Art Press, 2014, p 1

have tended to be oriental and idealistic." In the search for the modern subjectivity, Western painting has found the root of the East.

Paul Kelly has been immersed in Chinese poetry and thoughts for several years. The oriental characteristics in his paintings, in turn, profoundly influenced Zhao Wuji, who devoted himself to Paris in search of his "self" before the formation of his style, so that Zhao Wuji could return to his own cultural foundation in the West. This profound subjectivity search affords much food for thought.

And there is also another way of "truth" seeking, that is about the artist's own feeling and the "subject" of the art work. For example, Francis Bacon. "In this situation, the artist who tries to picture the sufferings of mankind risks producing something which, however authentic his feelings, seems to dramatic him rather than his subject; it is as if he were congratulating himself on his compassion."⁴ This art creating manner is very different from the traditional western art which is always has certain grand theme. And this situation is the same in the art critical area.

2. The Elimination and Establishment of the Oriental Subjectivity.

2.1 Searching for Modern Subjectivity in China

In China, the "subjectivity" of the once mature feudal society collapsed in the Western artillery gun. From the beginning of the New Culture Movement, China has also begun to seek its anti-feudal "modern" subjectivity.

In the 20th century, a series of political processes and the May 4th Movement in China made China begin to 'fight against Feudalism' and tried to abandon its previous illness and looked for its new body, that is, Modernity. Reflected in all areas of culture, it was a criticism of the traditional thinking pattern. This was the same in art. Xu beihong, as the representative, tried to 'combine the traditional ink technique with the realistic figure modeling he learned in Paris'⁵; 'Kang youwei, Chen duxiu absolutely negated the Chinese traditional literati paintings and its theory which was different from the western realistic painting. After Kang youwei had traveled all over the western countries and saw the realistic works of the Renaissance, he wrote articles highly rated the paintings in the Song dynasty which has the realistic tendency. He thought the reviving of the traditional Chinese painting rooted in the court painting of the Song Dynasty.'⁶

2.2 Chinese Painting Seeks Subjectivity In The Emergence of The "Reality".

The idea of "divorcing from reality" is one of the foundations of Chinese painting. However, the "no pursuit of likeness in appearance" in Chinese painting has been criticized and impacted since twentieth century. Many controversies at that time indicated that the concept of Chinese culture and painting was in a state of chaos, the old subjectivity of Chinese civilization had been dissolved, and the new subjectivity has not yet been established.

"If it remains unchanged, Chinese painting should be extinct. Are there any people in the country who can be hero in the context? Is it the new era for a kind of new art that could combine the western and eastern art theories?" Kang Youwei's remarks were the voice of many knowledgeable people who advocated innovation at that time.

In order to distance themselves from the traditional Chinese painting theory, countless Chinese painters began to seek the new subjectivity of Chinese modern culture and Chinese painting in the study of the West. At this time, the mainstream of learning from Western painting, regardless of the subject matter or design strategy, all require "reality" (referring to the Western use of three-dimensional, perspective and other methods of reproduction of the objective space), no longer

⁴ David Sylvester, *About Modern Art -critical essays 1948-2000*, Pimlico, Random House, 2002, p174

⁵ Michael Sullivan, translated by Chen weihe and Qian gangnan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China* (Volume I) Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2013, p137

⁶ Li yi, *Ten books of the Chinese & western art comparison——the Chinese & western art criticism comparison*. Hebei art press, 2000, Introduction p15

satisfied with the traditional Chinese painting concept that the "real" is some distances away. The process of searching for the subjectivity of Chinese painting has been accompanied by intense controversies over the study of the West and the preservation of the Oriental tradition. Interestingly, at this time, the West had gone through the period dominated by the academic school in which the "reality" is advocated, and had already reconstructed its own modern subjectivity in the shadow projected by the Chinese tradition. At this time, China had doubts in its own tradition and tired to reconstruct its own modern subjectivity in the shadow of the Western tradition.

In 1924, Cai Yuanpei, speaking at an exhibition held by Chinese students at the Rhine River Palace, said that, just as the West has absorbed certain elements of Chinese painting since the Renaissance, Chinese artists must now learn from Western ideas and art. Young artists and designers at the exhibition declared that ancient Chinese art needs to be reorganized, that the Eastern and Western art theories needed to be reconciled and restudied, and that the future new art needed to be created out of them.

3. All Roads Lead to Rome.

This interesting change in the moment when the East and the West find themselves in each other's past projections is just like the decline of the Yang and the rise of the Yin in the Eight Diagrams.

Zong Baihua was the first Chinese theorist to define "reality" for artists. His interpretation of the concept of "reality" eventually brought together Eastern and Western ideas. His theory of defending traditional Chinese painting theory put forward in 1934 raised the debate on traditional Chinese painting to a new height. This is highly consistent with Kandinsky's aesthetic thoughts, especially his emphasis on "internal needs" and "improvisation".

Modernist painting of the East and the West, trying hard to look for subjectivity through the "reality" retreat or emergence is far-reaching, and ultimately makes the East and the West art converge. Between the East and the West, some artists moved forward while some moved backward, and some to the west, some to the east. The comprehensive of the Eastern and Western art, became the common development direction of Eastern and Western artists.

Taiwan's May Art Fair and Hong Kong's artists spreaded the modernism of Chinese art to the world, creating a unique sense of identity through art, demonstrating their efforts in the process of establishing subjectivity. In 1957, at the Sao Paulo Biennale, an artwork of Yuichi Inoue (a Japanese calligrapher) which is a piece of abstract calligraphy work caused a sensation, along with Pollock, Klein's works, his work has been collected into the "History of Modern Painting" by the British critics. Westerners believed that he had built up an abstract framework in the East.

Fu Jingshan, a famous art critic, recently commented on Zeng Xiang, a representative of modern Chinese calligraphy. He said that it would be a great task to compare the works of Zeng Xiang and Pollock. There is the implication of phenomenological reduction in the creation of both of them. It is believed that any kind of art, whether traditional or not, should be interpreted with modern theory. Just like Gadamer's theory of "Effective History", whether tradition is good needs us to see its effect in the modern.

Perhaps, as Professor Su Liwen put it, "For the first time, all of today's Eastern and Western artists have found their point of agreement on what is "reality", and this problem is much broader than the field of art."⁷ Perhaps the "subjectivity" which has vanished the distinction between the East and the West is just "the modern subjectivity" that the East and the West had once been pursuing through denying themselves' traditional subjectivity. They search for subjectivity in the shadow of mutual projection at the beginning and finally come to the same goal.

Just as Professor Michael Sullivan said: 'When Chinese art is going to the west, western art is also going to the East. In the final analysis, they may share common ground.' 'In 1932, Tao lenglue wrote: impressionism' pays attention to the tendency of strength and line.....emphasis on exclusive

⁷ Michael Sullivan, East-West Art Fair, Shanghai People's Publishing House Century Publishing Group, 2014, P. 278.

subjectivity.’ This is the main character of Chinese calligraphy, which is a typical art of Chinese culture. It’s very interesting. In addition, ‘Zong baihua described China’s space consciousness as something that western art just began discovering, while Pan tianshou noticed in 1926 that European painting is turning to the spiritual taste of the East.’⁸

Wallinger believed that empathetic impulse and abstract impulse are the sources of human art, which may be a summary of our pursuit of “reality” in the 20th century and that is the ‘common ground’ of the Chinese and Western art. According to the research results of Neuroaesthetics in recent years, the visual brain regions that responds to representational and abstract art are even distinguished precisely. The ‘visual brain’ responsible for visual art appreciation is divided into v1-v5 areas. ‘We can get a general rule: compared with narrative or representational art, the response range of abstract works of visual brain is relatively small.’⁹ ‘When the audience faces the non-representational paintings, the reactive area is limited to v5, while when watching the representational paintings, the reactive area is not limited to V5, and V1, V2, V3, V4 play a role together.

Wallinger defined abstraction as ‘the deepest inner connection of all living bodies’.¹⁰ Under the influence of Western abstract paintings, Chinese calligraphy, which already had the nature of pure abstraction, profoundly considered on its nature and trying to build a more ‘modern’ abstraction form. Modern calligraphy ‘is not a general pictograph, but a combination of painting and calligraphy realized by artist’s heart image.’ ‘In modern calligraphy, the artistic image must express the artist’s aesthetic feelings refined and sublimated from the real world by means of hot abstraction (emotional gushing) and cold abstraction (rational analysis).’¹¹ ‘In the 1980s, ‘American art critics praised this combination of painting and calligraphy: ‘this new type of calligraphy makes Americans gape. It has colour, shape, artistic conception, and Chinese characters.’¹²

In the 20th century, Chinese and western visual arts show the retrospect of abstract and representation in the exploration of ‘reality’, which are very valuable art events in the history of art. They provide historical materials for further exploring the similarities and differences of Chinese and Western art and the essence of human art.

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⁹ John Onians, translated by Mei nafang. Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki, Jiangsu Phoenix Art Press, 2015. p235.

¹⁰ W. Wallinger, translated by Wang caiyong, Abstraction and Empathy, Liaoning people press, 1987, p34

¹¹ Fu jingsheng, Chinese modern calligraphy image, Paris pacific press, 2005. p141

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