

Analysis of the Instrumental Function of Beauty in Wang Zhaowen's Beauty-Goodness-Relationship Theory

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Abstract

Wang Zhaowen chooses an approach to achieve his social ideal through arts and aesthetics and on this basis, he believes that the relationship between beauty and goodness is unified and beauty is subordinated to goodness. He thinks that to emphasize and enrich beauty and to full play the role of beauty will achieve goodness better and beauty is instrumental for goodness. Meanwhile, social ideals which change over the time and goodness in two different interpersonal relationships respectively specify the instrumental content of beauty, making beauty considerably limited while instrumental. This relationship and feature runs through the development process of his thoughts and can also be seen as the starting point and purpose of his aesthetic thoughts.

Key words: Beauty; Goodness; Relationship; Instructional; Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

On the relationship between beauty and goodness, Wang Zhaowen believes that, beauty and goodness have

very close ties. From the initial integrated and chaotic development to the relatively independent development later, they eventually form a dialectical, unified relationship - beauty has relatively independent value and meaning, but beauty and goodness are unified, and beauty should be subordinated to goodness. From the perspective of method, the formation of their relationship depends on materialist dialectics; from the point of view of the content, beauty is both the product of subjective and objective unity and an objective reality, and goodness in practice conforms to what purpose of people (Wang, 1981, p.34). Aesthetic relationship theory deduced from the subjective and objective unity of beauty is the core of Wang Zhaowen's aesthetics theory, but in this dialectical relationship between the unity of opposites, what specific functions the relationship between the two sides has on how to eventually form beauty and how to produce and demonstrate the functions requires in-depth analysis combining his specific points. In other words, "the object of aesthetic subject and the subjectivity of aesthetic object as well as the object relationship and the aesthetics of life relationship in art aesthetics in history, geography and cultural hierarchy" (Hao, 2009, p.9) are the core elements of his aesthetic relationship theory, but how to determine the content, how to connect them with those which are not fully covered by the content of the aesthetic relationship are issues which can't be fully, clearly explained only by aesthetic relationship theory.

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEAUTY AND GOODNESS

If we say beauty mainly points to art and then goodness mainly points to ideology. Although Wang Zhaowen thinks that art and ideology are unified, and he puts great emphasis on the artistic feature of art, this emphasis is conducted under the ideological field. From the initial thought that art is a tool for political propaganda to later

opposing the use of arts to graphic politics, opposing artistic conceptualization, emphasizing the artistic feature, desalinating class ideological color, the artistic feature has never left thought and existed independently. This, on the one hand, is of course caused by the inherent structure of materialist dialectics; on the other hand, it is because Wang Zhaowen's aesthetic theory is to meet the aesthetic needs of the masses (the viewers) and enhance the aesthetic ability of the masses (the viewers) and he takes this as his starting point and purpose. This means that the aesthetic relationship is just a tool to achieve this purpose. The construction of the aesthetic relationship is not just for aesthetic relationship itself, but also to achieve the social function of such satisfaction and enhancement. From this point of view, to determine the aesthetic value and ideological value of art through the likeness of the masses (the viewers) seems understandable. However, to meet the aesthetic needs and enhance the aesthetic ability is not the ultimate goal of social function of art. As he recognizes the instrumental feature of art while he criticizes that art is a political propaganda tool, this satisfaction and enhancement are also instrumental, and it points to the social ideal of art.

If goodness as an artistic ideology is a direct reflection of the social function of art, goodness as a social ideal is the ultimate goal of the social function of art. Applying the artistic and ideological relations, the ideological function of art and social ideals are unified, and the ideological function of art should be subordinated to social ideals. It is not difficult to find out that, as the purpose of an aesthetic relationship to meet the aesthetic needs and enhance aesthetic ability, it actually aims at achieving social ideals. Beauty is to achieve social ideals and that is a tool for goodness. For this reason, the social ideals as the ultimate goal of the social function of art is the final destination of aesthetic relationship and the bottom line to judge art and aesthetic activities. Wang Zhaowen particularly emphasizes the important role of art and emphasizes we achieve social ideals through aesthetic pleasure and entertainment, which are unique in the goodness-beauty relationship different from other relationships. In this process, the stronger the artistic function is and the more perfect combination of the artistic and ideological functions, the more thorough the social function of art would be. Therefore, "an attempt to take art as a propaganda tool to use, he (responsible artist) does not want to violate the laws of art, making his motives go toward the opposite" (Jian, 1998, p.55). This is probably the basis of his criticism of art conceptualization and a typical example of his self-reflection and criticism in his aesthetics theory development.

Since the artistic and ideological functions are unified, the ideological function and social ideals are unified and the ideological function subordinated to the social ideals, the important role of the social ideal is self-evident: what kind of social ideals we have will lead to certain kind of artistic ideology and thus affect art.

What is certain is that, Wang Zhaowen's understanding of the social function of art has undergone a process of development and change: During the war, the need of art makes him understanding of art limited to a propaganda tool with a strong political overtones; with the end of the war, social stability and the in-depth theoretical research of artistic creation, the function of political tool is gradually diluted and he turned to emphasize the aesthetic characteristics of art itself. By then, he believed that art should meet the aesthetic needs of the masses (the viewers) and enhance their aesthetic ability so as ultimately to achieve the ultimate goal of social and human development. Although in different times the means to achieve this goal is different and the understandings of this goal are not the same, Wang Zhaowen's artistic creation, theoretical research and social ideal have always been around this goal. Meanwhile, in the development of the times he continued to deepen and clear this goal and finally chose to achieve it through art and aesthetics. On this basis, his so-called ideological function of art is also changed and evolved, and along with the conversion of revolutionary ideals, class ideals, political ideals, he finally chose the social ideal with the guidance of Marxism and with the purpose to achieve the goal of socialism and communism and the approach to achieve this social ideal: through art and aesthetics under the guidance of Marxism.

This is the theoretical source and basis of all his propositions that life experience is the source of art, not advocating studies from the concept to concept, emphasizing the unity of opposites in art, opposing one-sided mechanistic and subjectivism, emphasizing the unique law of art, opposing to graphic political with arts and conceptualization and sloganization of art. His aesthetic theory belongs to typical Marxist aesthetics, which is the foundation to evaluate the value and contribution of his aesthetic theory. From this perspective, it is very accurate that he is referred to as "a builder and pioneer of Chinese Marxist aesthetics" (Liu, 2005; Jian, 2009). On this basis, he also emphasizes the use of comparative research methods to critically absorb artistic and aesthetic achievements of ancient and modern, with particular emphasis on critically carrying forward the Chinese traditional art and aesthetic theory, absorbing folk art experience, making our own theory have strong national characteristics while applying Marxism, which also provides experience for us to learn from on the exploration of Marxism in China and the construction of a new Chinese aesthetic theory.

2. THE INSTRUMENTAL FUNCTION OF BEAUTY

It is probably because of this characteristic of Wang Zhaowen's aesthetic theory, beauty in the face of goodness

becomes instrumental and goodness itself has complex content and then there are conflicts between beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness as well as conflicts between different goodness, and then in a more limited scope, it confirms the instrumental function of beauty.

For the conflict between beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness, Wang Zhaowen's understanding is very clear. In our lives, beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness objectively exist. Reflecting in the art, they should also be present at the same, and therefore he opposes art whose content is one-sided ugliness and badness and art which conceptualizes beauty and goodness. Based on materialist dialectics, he believes that art should not only reflect beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness which objectively exist in our lives, but also understand and realize beauty and goodness by revealing ugliness and badness, that is to achieve "the conversion of ugliness into beauty" in art. He believes that the sculpture by Rodin, *Heaulmiere*, is a typical representative, and in theatrical performances, we should reject those naked sensory stimulation or bloody scenes. Even to express the cruelty and evil of aggressors, we should use artistic techniques, by exposing their cruelty and evil to educate the masses (the viewers) longing for a better society. Ugliness and badness in art has become a tool to achieve beauty and goodness, but this does not materially alter the relationship between beauty and goodness. By exposing and criticizing ugliness and badness in art, we can produce an understanding of the great, noble revolutionary cause and long for a better society. In such aesthetic pleasure, we strengthen our rejection of ugliness and badness and pursuit of beauty and goodness. With the theory that consciousness reacts to practice, it produces dynamic reaction on the life, production and revolutionary practice, thereby helping to achieve the ideal society. Although beauty and goodness are unified in art, for goodness, especially for social ideals, beauty here still has obvious instrumental function.

However, the conflict between beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness not only appears between the aggressor and the aggressed. In people's daily lives, there are often similar conflicts and we also have the conflict between fish and bear paw. What is written in *Mencius* that "fish is what I want while bear paw is also what I want; I can't have both, so I have to give up the fish and get bear paw. Life is what I want while righteousness is also what I want; I can't have both, so I have to give up life and maintain righteousness" clearly points out the conflict between different goodness in our lives. Some scholars believe that this kind of conflict between different goodness could happen to one person and also may occur between people and it "means that the good things that people desire to obtain have conflicting tension contradiction so that it is impossible for people to simultaneously obtain them". The consequence is bound to be that "one can only get part of the good things that

they want and avoid part of the bad things they want to avoid." (Liu, 2013). This tendency to get goodness and avoid badness is easy to understand literally, that is to choose goodness and avoid or even eliminate badness. However, avoiding the badness does not mean there is no badness and eliminating the existing badness does not mean there will not be new badness coming out. Or even the ways to eliminate badness contain good and bad ways. For the revolutionary cause of solving conflicts between the enemy and us, insisting the guidance of Marxism and eliminating the invaders to eliminate badness invaders generated has logical and practical rationality. In this process, beauty may be the incentive between goodness and badness, just as Socrates once said, "those who regard the same things as pleasant objects would therefore compete and even become enemies due to the differences of opinion." (Xenophon, 2000, p.68) When solving this problem, since beauty is subjective and through the dynamic reaction of consciousness, it may play an indirect instructional role in solving the problem of goodness and badness.

If we look at the relationship between beauty, goodness and ugliness and badness by combining with what utilitarianism emphasizes that we should distinguish them through their quantities and their primary and secondary position in quality, not to mention beautiful food, beautiful appliances, beautiful people and country and national peril, even it is even so difficult to distinguish faith and life simply in the number. Therefore we should first start from a qualitative point of view to distinguish their different meanings. This is close to what contradiction theory says, to seize the important aspects of the main contradiction, because this is the key to decide the nature of things. In front of goodness and badness with different natures, the content and role of beauty as a tool are different. Therefore on the occasion of national peril, numerous righteous people with lofty ideals rose revolution, including picking up the art as a "weapon" to promote revolution and improve revolution; once we eliminate foreign aggression and enter social development, in addition to praise the great achievements, art is also used to promote democracy and reflect current problems.

For the result of the conflict between different goodness in daily life, "it is more like people therefore are bound to encounter some badness that they hate than they therefore cannot get all the goodness they want." (Liu, 2013) It still has to follow the principle of contradiction to seize the important aspects of the main contradiction. However, unlike the relationship between ourselves and the enemy in aggression, everyday life is a relationship within the people, which determines that we cannot use the same way to handle the relationship between goodness and badness as we treat the aggressors in revolutionary way. More importantly, since the conflict between different goodness within people cannot be handled through destroying the subjects to eradicate badness,

beauty has considerable rationality and necessity in solving this problem. Regardless of whether beauty really can solve the problem of goodness and badness among the people, at least by means of the tool of beauty, we are able to directly recognize and criticize the relationship between goodness and badness, allowing the masses to handle the relationship between goodness and badness in their thoughts and emotions with their understanding and judging of goodness and badness. As is different from revolution with the relationship between ourselves and the enemy, the content and orientation of beauty, as a tool, have correspondingly changed. This change is what we have previously analyzed that Zhaowen's change of understanding the social function of art and social ideals as well as a change in the instrumental function of beauty.

3. THE LIMITATION OF BEAUTY

Based on the affirmation of the instrumental function of beauty, it is also necessary to discuss the problem of the limitation of beauty. The reason is that the instrumental function of beauty is constricted by goodness, which means that beauty should be created, disseminated and play its role with the constraint of goodness. Once the constraint is broken, the relationship between beauty and goodness will have subtle change. This change will have different expressions in the relationship between the enemy and people and the internal relationship among people and will have a different role in the construction of the relationship between beauty and goodness.

For the revolutionary era that Wang Zhaowen experienced, goodness of the social ideal, as the official ideology, also plays a role of constraining and unifying beauty and it also requires beauty to play its instrumental in the beauty-goodness relationship. This is no different from other social forms. The problem is that, the goodness then itself is not the representation of the social ideal of all social members and not even the main social members; therefore, for those workers and peasants who are not covered, this goodness does not have the necessary reasonability and even has badness which damages and hinders their legitimate interests and legitimate demands. In particular, this badness and the badness caused by the invaders jointly work on the workers and peasants, making their fundamental right to life under severe threat and even without any protection. Under such circumstances, the goodness of the social ideal that workers and peasants pursue and the goodness of official social ideal and the badness of invaders have formed a huge conflict. This is different from the conflict between fish and bear paw and it is a conflict regarding survival and development. It represents legitimate pursuit of the most fundamental rights of the survival and development for the workers and peasants. Goodness of this social ideal can be achieved by revolutionary tool and also by the instructional function of beauty. The instructional function of beauty therefore

is defined by goodness of this social ideal. It can not only directly show this goodness, but also strengthen this goodness by criticizing the goodness of the official social ideal and exposing the badness of the invaders. Otherwise, the beauty does not have the legitimacy and inevitability so that it would be difficult to exist in the goodness of social ideal of the workers and peasants. We can say that, the limitation of beauty has such qualitative characteristics.

When the relationship between the enemy and ourselves in the revolutionary era has been eliminated, the relationship between people has changed into a relationship within people. In this case, goodness of the social ideal is consistent to the maximum extent. However, this does not mean that everyone's understandings and concepts are the same all the time; it does not mean that all the badness has been eliminated. Behind this consistent goodness, there are still conflicts between fish and bear paw. This goodness-badness relationship still follows the principle of trending to goodness and avoiding badness. However, at this time the badness is different from the badness which damages and impedes legitimate rights and legitimate aspirations in nature, but is more inclined to "lack of goodness" (Leibniz, 2007). Choice in the conflict between various different goodness is not as clear-cut as the choice between goodness and badness, and then it had to resort to value judgments, namely "in the conflict of various different goodness to make choices to prevent oneself from unacceptable serious damage and badness" (Liu, 2013). Furthermore, when everyone is attempting to trend to goodness and avoid badness in the conflict of different goodness, preventing badness becomes the bottom line of trending to goodness. Once the lack of goodness is effectively prevented and digested, badness caused by it will be effectively prevented and digested. In this process, beauty may not only be a tool for value judgment, but also make up for the lack of goodness in some aspects and to some extent through its own artistic quality and even directly become part of the social ideal. Like what Schiller argued, "aesthetic people" are complete human beings who have achieved the highest freedom.

SUMMARY

In summary, beauty in Wang Zhanwen's beauty-goodness relationship is limited and instructional. His purpose of exploring the beauty and emphasizing the aesthetic properties of art is not only to develop and promote arts and aesthetics or meet the aesthetic needs of the masses (the viewers) and enhance the aesthetic ability of the masses (the viewers). More importantly, it is to achieve the goodness of social ideals of different historical stages. Seizing this point, we can find that many contents of Wang Zhaowen's aesthetic theory show consistent context. This context is not only the performance of his intellectual development, but also a clue to link various

contents in his vast corpus of twenty-two volumes of works. It is in order to achieve goodness of the social ideal that Wang Zhaowen specially selected and emphasized the approach of beauty and conducted a profound and vivid study on beauty and art itself, which is what we must emphasize when analyzing the instructional function of beauty, otherwise there may be a misunderstanding of using goodness of social ideals to digest beauty.

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