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Charm and Beauty

—A Comparison of Two Aesthetic Categories in Chinese and Western Paintings

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Abstract: Aesthetics in China is different from that in the West which is centered on the logical approach to the concept of “beauty,” and is highly typified by chewing, tasting, and pondering, a process full of intuition and contemplation. Instead of “beauty,” “charm” is the central category in Chinese painting, presenting a different aesthetic system from that in the western world.

Keywords: aesthetic category in Chinese and western painting; charm; beauty; compare

With the word “beauty” serving as a guide, one tends to be disappointed at the result of his or her attempts to gain an aesthetic experience from the Chinese classics, for aesthetics in China, is different from that in the West which is centered on the logical approach to the concept of “beauty,” and is highly typified by chewing, tasting, and pondering, a process full of intuition and contemplation. Instead of “beauty,” “charm” is its central category, even the forms of discourse employed to depict its notions are full of “charm.” This is well embodied in Chinese art, especially in the field of painting. Therefore, it will be helpful to compare the two categories, “beauty” and “charm,” to make a deeper understanding of the respective aesthetic characteristics in Chinese and western painting possible.

1. The origin of “charm”

As a category of Chinese classical aesthetics, “charm” originated in the period of Wei-Jin and the Southern and Northern dynasties. The Chinese character “韵” (charm) can be found in *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, or with the phrases

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“风韵” (*fengyun*, graceful and charming) and “风韵气度” (*fengyunqidu*, charm and vigorous vitality), “气” (*qi*, vitality). It also appears in the concept of “气韵” (*qiyun*, spirit, style of a work of art) and “体韵” (*tiyun*, charm in body) in *The Record of the Classification of Old Painters* written by Xie He, who is a writer, art historian and critic in the 5th century of China. And later in the subsequent dynasties, it became a very popular word employed to talk about beauty of a poem, a painting or an essay.

Originally, “charm” was a notion put forward by the metaphysical school of the Wei and Jin Dynasty in judging a person whose shape and manners were of fresh and celestial characters, a kind of beauty beyond words and only perceived by the heart. The character “韵” can also be translated to “rhyme” for it is literally used to describe some sound that will linger charmingly in one’s ears. And later in figure reviews, the character “韵” was gradually extended to denote the implied meaning or charm of words or images. Until the Six Dynasties (220-589) when this concept was utilized in the criticism of poetry, calligraphy and painting, the character “韵” was further conceptually extended as “charm in spirit”. “It was Xie He who first picked up ‘charm in spirit’ to talk about art; it is a painting to which ‘the charm in spirit’ was first related rather than a poem,” once observed Qian Zhongshu (1981), a well-known Chinese literary scholar and writer. He points out that Xie He, in his *Guhua Pinlu*, mentions “charm” five times: “charm in *qi*, a kind of spirit resonance”; “charm in spirit and strength”; “charm in the strength of the body”; “charm in his strength and gracefulness”; “charm in his emotion”. This is the start of “relating charm in spirit to a painting.”

Compared with “charm”, “spirit” bears a longer history of being adopted to give comments on art. Take Gu Junzhi for example, “spirit” is repeatedly used in many of his books about painting theories, such as “the indistinct spirit”, “the spirit in mind”, “the

spirit represented by the form”, and “the pleasure of spirit representation” (Gu, 1982, p.5), making “spirit” a core concept at the beginning of the formative years of painting theories. In practice, this word had already been largely applied in the figure reviews in the Wei and Jin Dynasty, and later employed in the criticism of figure paintings. It seems that there is nothing different between the two “spirits” in the above-mentioned two fields, but actually, this similarity is the result of the “intertextuality” between the language and the painting which depict the same object. The same is generally true of Xie He’s “charm” in judging a painting.

In fact, there was no such character as “韵”(charm) found in *Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*, a Chinese dictionary of characters compiled by Xu Shen in the Northern Han Dynasty, but since it was edited by Xu Xuan in the Song Dynasty, the character could be retrieved, to which appended an annotation by the editor, means harmony, showing that the Chinese character “韵” is a noun or an adjective in its traditional sense. There are many examples of “韵” as a noun. In “falling is the mixed sound of different strings, followed by the rising charming harmonious tunes,” a verse line from “*On Playing the Guqin*” composed by Cai Yong, an official and scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty, and “a solitary figure you were, in the coldness of the dark world, with a harmonious tune heard, when the wind whispered to the wood,” a line from “*On Moon*” written by Xie Zhuang in the Southern Dynasty, the “harmonious tune” had the correspondent meaning of “韵”; while in Liu Xie’s *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, the word “韵” refers to “rhyme” in the sentence “if the last syllable of a line takes a different sound from that of its previous verse line, then it is called couplet pattern; if the last syllable of a line shares the same sound with that of its previous line, then it is called rhyme pattern,” but it is similar to “demeanor” or “temperament” in “a broad mind

and exquisite demeanor” from “*Baopuzi: Cijiao*” (be away from arrogance”), an article from *Baopuzi*, the Taoist classic written by Ge Hong from the Eastern Jin Dynasty and in the verse line “when young, I had no temperament to follow the herd; my only love was for hills and mountains” from “Returning to the Fields”, a poem by Tao Yuanming, who is considered to be one of the greatest poets of the Six Dynasties period. The example of adjective “韵” could be found in “someone said that it was not elegant for him to raise horses” from *A New Account of the Tales of the World: Speech*, where it means “elegant.”

Due to the flexibility of Chinese words in parts of speech, “韵” can also be used as a verb. A good example of this point can be found in Yao Zui’s renewed version of *Guhua Pinlu* in which he replaces the word “韵” in Xie He’s “as for the charm in *qi*” by another Chinese character “运,” a verb which literally means “transmit.” This verb feature of “韵” often associates its modifier with an inclination for getting rid of worries and anxieties and seeking after a tranquil, peaceful and pleasant life, thus it has been recognized as an over-new term since the Wei and Jin Dynasty in figure reviews and soon collocated with other words such as “风” (wind), “神” (spirit), and “气” (vitality or energy)” to become new concepts. Though “气韵”(charm in *qi*) is advocated as the first principle by Xie He in his *Guhua Pinlu*, other words like “神韵” (charm in spirit), “体韵” (charm in body), and “情韵” (charm in emotion) can also be seen here and there in his book, which can also serve as examples.

In figure reviews, “韵” (charm) is used more as an independent commentary word free from “the harmonious tune?” For instance, in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* noted by Liu Xiaobiao, there appear the independently used phrases with “韵” (charm) like the charm of a person who is free from vulgarity and the charm of a person of righteousness and elegance (Liu, 1954, p.104), and as for this usage

of 韵 (charm), Xie He (1982), in his *Guhua Pinlu*, adopts only once—attempts to attain charm and elegance (p. 19), but in the context of his use of “神” (spirit), “气” (*qi*), and “风” (wind), the signifier of this “韵” has nothing to do with the rhyme or verses, thus this single use of “韵” to judge a painter has already gone beyond the category of figure reviews as well as music and literature, and developed to be a universalized aesthetic category. Therefore, Xie He’s adoption of the word “韵” (charm) in judging a painting is a significantly revolutionary influence in the history.

2. The “charm” of Chinese painting

“Charm” in painting, initially referred to the mental state of the figures in a figure painting, none of the lines, brushstrokes or any writing techniques concerned. Figure painting is aimed at the representation of “charm,” instead of “form” which is only regarded as a means to attain charm. In ancient China, “charm” was held in high regard by those painting masters and it is the source and national distinction of the Chinese painting art as well as a manifestation of its unique aesthetic value. The use of “charm” in painting is a natural trend for Chinese painting to accomplish its self-consciousness and aesthetic epistemology.

It was Xie He that made “气韵” (charm in *qi*) no longer confined by its context of personage judgment, and elevated it as an autonomous category of art aesthetics and art criticism. In the so-called phrase “charm in *qi* as a spirit resonance”, though “charm” and “*qi*” are both the key points, they don’t enjoy the same hierarchical level, for if there is no “*qi*,” there will be no “charm.” “*Qi*” is somewhat a category of the ontological philosophy, while “charm” is an aesthetic and artistic embodiment of *qi* which, as a philosophical category, occupied a higher position in the Pre-Qin and Han era. Laozi takes “*qi*” the same

as “*Dao*” (Way) for the foundation of the universe and the greatness of nature, while Mencius believes “*qi*” is a kind of vital and vigorous moral force that can be nurtured from the soul and then extended beyond the body to reach through the universe and finally well-integrated into a primal dominated willpower. Later from the theory of natural *yuanki* (life force) developed by Wang Chong in the Han Dynasty to the Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties period, “*qi*” had undergone its huge change and accomplished an inter-promoting relation between its subject and object, thereafter the “charm” in an aesthetic sense had arisen of itself.

During the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties period, “charm in *qi*” had grown to become a commentary term used to evaluate “the painting form,” grew to be comparatively equal to the “beauty” in aesthetics in western painting. Jing Hao, a Chinese landscape painter and the theorist of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, once observed in his *Notes on Brushwork* on the painting skills of the pine trees, “if a pine painted is found crookedly grown with wildly flourished limbs and leaves, then it will be regarded as a failure to represent the charm in *qi* of the tree...” Jing Hao elaborates on “charm” and “*qi*” respectively and puts forward “six essentials of painting”. “The spirit should be reproduced by focusing the brush on the heart so that the depicted object will be vividly created; the rhythm must be achieved by leaving no trails of the painter so that the painted object will be erected as an unworldly natural image; the thought has to be simplified and purified into some key points so that one will not be distracted from the painted object; the scenery should be found real as in nature and a likeness of it has to be achieved in painting; the brush must be used flexibly and freely, not rigidly confined to the regular guide rules; the ink should be naturally applied with differential layers and properly combined use of lights and shades”, From

the above-mentioned “concentrated heart on brush” related to “*qi*,” the “flexible use” of “brush,” the “unworldly representation with no trail of the painter left” in relation to “charm,” and the “natural talented application” of “ink,” one can discover that the reproduction of both “*qi*” and “charm” seems to rely on the final representativeness of “brush” and “ink.” From the Tang Dynasty on, as for *shanshui* (mountain and water) paintings, the word “*qi*” was usually adopted by critics to judge their ethical value and the use of brush, yet the word “charm” was their choice to evaluate the paintings. Take *Notes on Brushwork* for instance. It writes, “more skilled was Wu Daozi at the brush use than the shaping of the object, by rendering his lines and brushstrokes strong *qi*,” which is an example of adopting *qi* to measure brush use. Jing Hao, in his treatise, also speaks highly of Wang Wei’s writing, “his mild use of ink delicately shows a charm of lofty *qi*.” More example can be found in his comments on Zhang Zao, “his tree and stone are both rich in *qi* and charm. His tender use of brush and ink, the pure unique thought and the simple natural color display are all of super level...” In fact, the brush and the ink mentioned in parallel as a word-phrase here, emphasize more on the latter, so here, Jing Hao uses the word “charm” to talk about the use of ink.

Fan Wen, a scholar from the Northern Song Dynasty can be said to have gained the true enlightenment from the aesthetically categorized “charm” in calligraphy and painting and as a result produced the most penetrating remarks on it. In his *Qianxi Shiyuan* (a collection of essays on poems), he intentionally saves one section to talk about “charm.” He believes that among words such as “originality”, “unrestrained”, “likeness”, “reason or logic”, none could encompass the connotation of “charm” in calligraphy and painting. He says, “Originality is to a calligraphy or a painting, is like freedom from evils to a man, and similar to the fact that there are people of various kinds between ‘a man free from evils’ and

‘a sage’, there is also a large gap between ‘originality’ and ‘charm’; for an unrestrained person, freedom from vulgar desires is only one of the fine qualities, so how can ‘unrestrained’ compare with the ‘charm’ of the perfect? Vividness is a way to ‘likeness’, but if ‘likeness’ can generalize everything, why has ‘charm’ come into the use?” “Take articles for example. Some are elegant, some are magnificent, some crafty, some clever, some classical, some informative, some profound, some persuasive, some fresh, and some archaic. An article in possession of only one of these qualities can secure eternal fame in the world, while the lack of any one of these qualities will lead to no charm; moreover, if these good qualities are integrated and represented in an exceptionally elaborate form, then charm will be its cost. Therefore, a charming work of art must encompass good qualities and is expressed in a simple way with its extraordinary profoundness and infinity hidden behind the seemingly common brush and ink detected and perceived by its spectators” (Guo, 1987, p. 372). In a word, charm is seen in aftertaste, and this aftertaste goes beyond the “brush and ink.”

After the Song Dynasty, the people who talked about “charm” from the perspective of aesthetics generally followed this logical approach. However, in terms of painting aesthetics, *Wang Yuanqi*, one of the “Four Wangs” in the early Qing Dynasty had developed the aesthetic connotation of this “charm,” which is mainly embodied in the following aspects:

First, he technically improves the remarks on the correlation between “charm in *qi*” and “brush and ink” conducted by Dong Qichang, a Chinese painter, scholar, and art theorist of the later period of the Ming Dynasty, and other people thereafter. He points out, “brush and ink complement each other,

and the five-color use has no second purpose but to achieve the resonant charm in *qi* which undoubtedly is considered as the essential criteria in painting”^①.

Second, he develops Dong Qichang’s requirements of “cultivation” and “charm in *qi*” for painters into an aesthetic pursuit, ie. “Only when having done a lot of reading can one deliver remarks on painting”^② for “though a kind of art painting is, *qi* is well-integrated in books, and *Dao* (way) can be revealed to a sincere heart.”^③

Third, he breaks through the boundaries of different art fields on the basis of “the same rhythm found in both poetry and painting” and “the same method shared by both calligraphy and painting,” and extends charm to an aesthetic criterion for all forms of art. For instance, “music may have something in common with painting; its tone is like the charm of *qi* in painting, its rhythm like the composition, and the pitch like the brush and ink.”^④

Ancient Chinese, according to their ponderings over the harmony between the rhythms of life and those of Nature, communicated with each other about their aesthetic experiences on different arts in order to compose a resonant symphony of Nature, the life and the art, and “charm” is just the embodiment of this resonant symphony in art forms. In contrast, in western aesthetics, “harmony of numbers” is the basis for people to understand forms and induce the universal aesthetic characteristics of different arts. Their focus is to establish for the sensuous experience a rational order which is called “beauty.”

3. The definition of “beauty”

If “charm” is perceived as the core category of Chinese classical aesthetics, then “beauty” can be

① Wang Yuanqi (The Qing Dynasty). *Xichuang Manbi*, Art Series, Volume One, PP65 – 66.

② For Jia Yian. *An inscription for painting at Lutai*. Art Series, Volume One, P68.

③ Ten Paintings for Li Nanhu. *An Inscription for Painting at Lutai*. Art Series, Volume One, P69.

④ For Liu Huaiyuan. *An Inscription for Painting at Lutai*. Art Series, Volume One, P73.

regarded as the basic category of western classical aesthetics. In the history of western aesthetics, many attempts have been made to define “beauty,” most of the primary ones involving art, for in the context of western traditional aesthetics, the beauty of art in itself is the refined form of beauty.

W. Tatarlciewicz (1990), a polish aesthetic historian, induces three concepts of beauty from the western aesthetic theory. A) Beauty in a broad sense. This concept is originated from ancient Greek, referred to a raw or original beauty. Because included moral goodness, ethics and aesthetics are also its concerns. B) Beauty in aesthetic judgment. This concept involves the objects that are associated with an aesthetic judging experience, including the psychological outcome, color or sound. It has become the basic meaning of beauty in European culture. C) Beauty in form and hue. This concept is only limited to the objects within the range of sight, thus, only lines and colors can be regarded beautiful. The Stoic scholars once adopted partially this concept of beauty, yet in modern times it is only used in daily language (pp.165-166).

The ancient Greek artists pursued how to embody their ideal beauty, and philosophers also displayed a keen interest in “beauty.” Though Plato had repeatedly questioned “what is beauty” and ended with no definite answer, the enthusiasm and passion in exploring “beauty” never abated in the philosophical world. The Pythagorean school believes that the principles of “number” dominate over the whole universe. At first, they used “number” to interpret music and then applied this logical approach to expound all the other forms of art and finally all the phenomena of the universe, seemingly having discovered a dialectical principle that could be adopted to interpret all the laws of the universe. A classical elaboration on this principle was conducted by the disciple of this school, Polyclitus, a sculptor, in his *Canon*. He writes in his book, “the

Pythagoreans observed that music is a harmonic unity of opposing factors, fitting together numerous limiters and the unlimited, coordinating the inverse” (Zhu, 1979, p.33). “The combination of variants” and “the coordination of the inverse” is “harmony of numbers,” and this harmony is beauty. Therefore, the success of a work of art “depends on many number ratios” (The Teaching and Research Section of Aesthetics, Department of Philosophy, Beijing University, 1980, p.14). The Pythagoreans introduced these aesthetic criteria in music to other fields of art such as architecture and sculpture to further examine the relationship between the effect of beauty and numeric proportion and finally they put forward some norms about the forms of beauty. A) Objects proportioned according to the golden ratio, i.e. the upper side and lower side, the left side and right side, the longer side and the shorter side should reflect the golden ratio of 1.61821, to be regarded as attractive; B) “the most beautiful solid figure is the sphere, and the most beautiful plane figure is the circle”(The Teaching and Research Section of The History of Foreign Philosophy, Department of Philology, Beijing University, 1961, p.36); C) the beauty of the human body also depends on whether its different parts are ideally proportioned. Polyclitus, based on the image of Achilles, the Greek hero, sculpted a bronze statue named *Doryphoros*, also called the *Spear Bearer* which, through the athletic physical texture and proportion of each part, vividly represents his aesthetic principles that are known in his *Canon*. On this sculpture, the body of Achilles is leaning most on the right foot, with his left foot relaxed, a “relaxed-standing position;” in his left hand, there is a spear, in line with his tensed right foot, while his right hand hanging leisurely beside in coordination to his left foot, showing the perfect balance between tension and relaxation, creating a dynamic image of harmony. This kind of a contrapposto pose has been repeatedly applied in classical arts.

W. Tatarlciewicz (1990) claims that the Pythagorean theory of form beauty was a “great theory” in European aesthetics(pp.167-173). Exactly, the application of “the harmony of numbers” in interpreting beauty has reflected the mutual adaptability between aesthetic experience and reasoning logic, especially demonstrated the thinking features of western aesthetics that are different from those of Chinese aesthetics featured by “charm” based on intuition and experience. For ancient Greeks, beauty is a word used not only for the finite and material objects of perceptible forms, but also for those infinite and formless things. It serves as a connection between the measured and the unmeasured, between the human world and nature as well as its gods (Wreen, 1998, p.238). Therefore, the “beauty” in form is always kept in close connection with the “true” nature in the essence of the cosmic world.

Compared with western “beauty,” the “charm” in aesthetics of Chinese painting, as the products of the communion between the subjects and objects, cannot exist free from the feeling of its subjects. Yet, the “beauty” for Greeks, has the property of objectivity. Plato believes that beauty lies in its “idea,” and W. Tatarlciewicz (1990) observes, “it was somewhat proper to translate ‘idea’ to ‘form’, for in everyday Greek speech, ‘idea’ means phenomena or shape” (p.340). So, “idea” as “form,” on the one hand, takes on the basic meaning of “form,” a correspondent word of “content,” and on the other hand, contains an intrinsic intention for the object which manifests a kind of spirit paradigm. In other words, it is a non-physical but substantial form, and it is a rationalized form and formalized reason.

Plato writes in his *Philebus*, “many people think that my beauty of idea is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in a painting... in reality, I mean the straight lines and circles, and those plane or solid figures composed of them, drawn

with compasses, rulers or setsquares, because I am sure these graphics are not only relatively beautiful like other objects, but also perpetually and absolutely beautiful by rendering people a kind of particular pleasure (Tatarlciewicz, 1990, p.47). Plato’s observation connecting the absolute beauty with the simple geometric graphs seems to indicate a particular essential nature of aesthetics in western painting. For instance, the modernist painting represents its “self-discipline” in an abstract visual form, which involves platonic objective aesthetic logic. Therefore, for western aesthetics, the gap between its “tradition” and “modernism” is not as big as is thought.

Different from Plato who develops “absolute beauty” based on his “idea” theory, Aristotle induces “ideal beauty” according to his aesthetic judging practice. He points out that a painter “should render an object better than its real look, for an artist must improve what is true about the original model.” “The attempts to imitate the true presence of the object” (Zhu, 1979, pp.74-78), as a result, will help gain the ideal beauty. The ideal beauty is beautiful because it more closely reflects the intrinsic nature and the law of the world. So “ideal” is not a random subjective illusion, but a natural trend to follow the natural law, not only a representation of the universal truth, but also a justification for human intentions.

4. The “Beauty” in western painting

The criteria of painting during the European Renaissance was established on “Ideal Beauty,” and further developed when humanistic thought was introduced. Raphael can be regarded as the greatest master representative during this period. His masterpiece *Sistine Madonna* is a perfect representation of these beauty criteria. First, in character modeling, Raphael renders one of the main figures, the virgin, the perfect western classical

beautiful look based on which, he makes some subtle changes in shapes—the brows slightly higher above the brow bone, which shows a streak of solemnness in her beauty, highlighting her heavenly position as the central figure. On her right, the cardinal humbly looks up, opens mildly his mouth which is hidden behind his beard, and somewhat timidly stretches his right hand to point outward, showing his awe and veneration for the heavenly virgin, while with his left hand, he attempts to tighten his collar, indicating he is filled with excitement. On the left of the virgin is her maid who wears a humble smile on her face, close to a more earthly beauty for the trigonometry part of her facial features is represented in a much flatter shape. Second, the proportion of the virgin's body is evidently idealized. Compared with the flanked minor figures, the holy son, and the cherubs, who are all created in a common body proportion, the virgin is produced in an ideal head-body proportion that is supposed to be owned by the immortal—for a female, the eight-head body is very extraordinary. The most excellent part is Raphael's unique skill in shaping the figures. He skillfully presents the virgin in a dynamic shape of "S" with the movement and the motion of her garment and the furrows on it which successfully avoids the clumsiness that might be caused by the uncommon head-body proportion. (The garments of minor figures on the left and right are in stasis.) Third, notice the layout of the entire painting. Apparently, Raphael adopts contrapposto in shaping his dynamic figures and extends this use of dynamic balance to the whole composition. None of the curtains, the minor figures on her sides, and the supplemented two cherubs are arranged in mirror symmetry, but still a visual balance can be gained through the negative form changes produced by the movements of the figures in such asymmetry. Besides, Raphael's color palette is also calculated and all the parts with the same use of chiaroscuro form triangles—the bright yellow areas of the

cardinal's garment, the body of the holy son, and the sleeves of the maid; the red areas of the cardinal's upturned sleeve cuff, the virgin's under-robe and her upper outer garment; the olive-green areas of the heavy curtains on both sides and the maid's outer garment; and the dark brown parts of the cherubs' wings obviously coordinated with the large areas of darkness above. If the above-mentioned triangles were outlined, they would visually tell the spectators that they themselves are also placed in a harmonious dynamic balance.

Evidently, all these arrangements are aimed to render the painting a state of "form" close to art which is regarded as the best embodiment of the "ideal beauty" in painting.

Before the British empirical aesthetics arose in the eighteenth century, this kind of objective thought had been taken as the foundation of western aesthetics which was studied directly around categories like uniformity in variety, proportion and harmony. "Far more venerable than the concepts of 'fine art' and 'aesthetic', 'beauty' has been, traditionally, the dominant concept in aesthetic theory, art criticism, and ordinary aesthetic discourse" (Stolnitz, 1992, p.185). In Renaissance and Neo-classical aesthetics, the concept of "beauty" is, according to the scientific logic, even abstracted as the specific rules in each of the arts. In those times, the discussion on aesthetics was often "little more than technical manuals. Moreover, they were usually devoted to just one of the arts or to some genre" (Stolnitz, 1992, p.187).

The specified "harmony" of the uniformed variety in classical aesthetics was challenged in the eighteenth century. Empirical aestheticians often exemplified the invalidity of the nature of this "beauty." Against "proportion," Burke (1958) writes, "Turning our eyes to the vegetable creation, we find nothing there as beautiful as flowers; but flowers are almost of every sort of shape, and of every sort of dispositions... How many birds are there

that vary infinitely from each of these standards (of proportion), and from every other which you can fix, with proportions different, ... and yet many of these birds are extremely beautiful” (pp.94-95). And against “uniformity in variety,” Kames(1788) points out that this definition, “however applicable to one or another species, is far from being just with respect to beauty in general: variety contributes no share to the beauty of a moral action, nor of a mathematical theorem (to) define beauty as rising from beautiful objects blended together in a due proportion of uniformity and variety, would be too gross to pass currently” (pp. 324-325). Against “utility” or “fitness,” Stewart (1810) comes up with a scheme much like Wittgenstein’s “family resemblances” to explain the word of “beauty” and refutes logically. Given objects A, B, C, D, E, he points out that A may have a quality in common with B, B with C, C with D, and D with E, “while, at the same time, no quality can be found which belongs in common to any three objects in the series” (p.217). Thus Stewart explains that the meaning of “beauty” has so broadly used that no same quality can be identified in “beautiful” objects, therefore it is nearly logically impossible to reach a definition applicable to everything that is “beautiful.”

With the weakening of the belief in metaphysical “objective beauty,” the aestheticians of the eighteenth century began to turn their interest in the aesthetic experience which involved both subject and object to explore the source of beauty, a little bit resembling the oriental aesthetics.

The “aesthetic attitude,” that is, the direct response to an object free from individual desires, stressed by Shaftesbury and Edison, is exactly a resemblance of the concepts in Chinese classical aesthetics, “*zhixun*”, or “*zhizheng*”, a term put forward by Zhong Rong, a Chinese literary critic during the Southern Dynasty period, which means to directly describe your feeling or response at the object rather

than to intentionally quote from the previous masters. It is such a perspective, similar to phenomenology that contributes to the contemporary turn of western aesthetics.

Only by fully understanding the definition of “the nature of beauty,” established on a set of form rules in traditional western aesthetics, can one gain a perception of the revolutionary definition of “beauty” in modern and contemporary aesthetics. In effect, it is a rebellion against the form rules, an extension of the measurement for the worth of “beauty.” Thereafter, beauty, like loftiness, ridicule, and ugliness, is merely one of many aesthetic values. For contemporary and modern aesthetics, “aesthetics is on progress... It used to be assumed that the key concept was beauty and that the judgement of taste is an assertion to the effect that a particular item is beautiful... The predicate ‘X is beautiful’, as expressing the response of a nature-lover, means something different when it is understood as a critical verdict. So how about replacing ‘beauty’ with ‘aesthetic value’” (Mothersill, p.156)?

With the phenomenology of aesthetic experience as the representative, modern and contemporary aesthetics highly intensify the value of the mutual relationship between the subject and the object. As a representative of phenomenological aesthetics, Ingarden (1973) emphasizes more on the human initiatives in their aesthetic experience. He believes that a work of art is filled with spots of indeterminacy, and thus is an undone aesthetic object. When a spectator employs his or her imagination to fill those indefinite gaps, this work of art then is specified to be an accomplished integrated aesthetic object (pp. 61-64). The works of art not joined by aesthetic perception are in a non-sensuous state, and only when added by aesthetic experience can they become a perceptual existence. Thereby Ingarden focuses on aesthetic recreation in the process of art reception, laying a foundation for the aesthetics of

reception.

However, phenomenological aesthetics doesn't advocate abandoning totally the objectivity of the aesthetic object or the subjectivity of aesthetic judgment. Dufrenne (1987) points out that when Ingarden claims the concretion of the aesthetic objects is a process of imagining conducted by the aesthetic subjects to fulfill the "indefiniteness," his focus is that this practice must be faithful to the work, but this is far from enough, for whenever we see Venus de Milo, it is unnecessary for us to imagine it being a complete female figure as was done by Ingarden. Actually, the incomplete statue, just like Rodin's torso statue, has nothing lost but is presented adequately, magnificently, and perfectly (p.143). Dufrenne believes that the aesthetic objects themselves are the necessarily embodied sensuousness of the aesthetic perception in a work of art. This sensuousness is not what the spectators consciously create, but something spontaneously produced in the process of perception. The object itself through perception can present a meaningful world; it is the center of sensuousness and a component of it, therefore, it is neither an objective object nor an abstract concept, but an "expressed world" representing the communion of the subject and the object. Here, some affinity can be detected between phenomenological aesthetics and Chinese classical aesthetics.

Of course, it should be noted that the aesthetic attitude based on the dualism in western aesthetics is

obviously different in its essence from the Chinese aesthetic thinking of harmonic integration. In its phenomenological sense of the creation subject, the dominance of reason and logic over the intuition and prior knowledge is still a sort of reflective action, and from the perspective of intentionalism, the subject possesses full initiatives and actively determines the realization of the art, but in contrast, the aesthetic perception in a Chinese context is completely a "pre-reflective action." Under the premise that the world is material and substantial, Chinese classical aesthetics asserts that the subject and the object of the created work should be harmoniously integrated into one to attain the peak of the artistic conception similar to that of a religious experience, demonstrating a universal adaptability of indistinctness, variety and harmony in human needs. Thus, in methodology, Chinese aesthetic spirit is represented by its denial of the intentionalism. First "it is *qi* that makes an object charming," then "it is the charming object that attracts the spectator," so the subject is touched by the existent object, rather than to create beforehand intentionally an object in his or her mind.

This directly results in the difference in the aesthetic demands of Chinese and western arts: with the "artistic conception" as its ideal, the aesthetics of Chinese painting seeks "spirit resonance"; while with "art model" as its ideal, the aesthetics of western painting pursues "beauty of the art."

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