

Li Jinfa 李金发: The Present Situation and the Future of Art Education in China

吾国艺术教育之现状与将来

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现代欧美各国文化之成分，可概言之谓科学与艺术之文化。其成功的根原，是由社会上之科学教育与艺术教育。这两个趋势，就在原始人类，亦已有之，现在犹在野蛮时期之民族亦如之。简言之，科学教育之原因于，要解决生活，战胜环境。艺术教育原因于官能的需要，而创造出一些动作来，去快慰身心，而至于陶冶性情。譬如最野蛮的民族，他们亦要使子弟如何挽弓泅水猎兽采取菓属，生机工作稍宽时，便老老少少围着火堆，婀娜娜的舞起来。拍着瓦器或兽皮制的鼓以资节奏。他们有些是文身的，或以宝石镶在鼻边唇上。兽类的牙或骨挂在身上作装饰。这是可证明凡是民族，都需科学和艺术和艺术生活的。

Generally speaking, Western culture can be described as comprising of the culture of science and art. The basic reason why the West has succeeded is because of its society's education in science and art. These two trends can be found since the early days of mankind. These days, the less developed nations also display such trends. In short, the reason for science education is for overcoming challenges in everyday life and conquering the environment. The reason for art education is due to the needs of the senses. One needs to create some actions to satiate one's mind and body so that one's temperament can be cultivated. Even the most barbaric nation will teach children how to shoot arrows, swim, hunt beasts and forage for fruit from trees. When the need to survive is satisfied, the old and the young will gather around the campfire and dance, playing drums made from tiles and animal hide to create rhythm. Some of them may have tattoos on their body, gems embedded in their noses or pierced through their lips. They hang the fangs or bones of animals on their bodies as decoration. This proves that all nations need science, art and an artistic life.

西洋古代与现在科学和艺术之发扬光大，是尽人皆知，无庸赘述。中国之科学亦发明得很早，黄帝时已有指南针。艺术方面，则商周时代，已有琴瑟石刻等。礼记有十三舞勺，成童舞象的语。但何以西洋人承了希腊文化，更日进千里。而中国则同样跑了四千余年历史，而至今仍是用凡上尺去做乐谱，饮的是河水井水，载物则以人代牛马。现在战争有迫击炮，交通有无线电，日用有热水壶，羊毛衣还是受欧美人之赐。中西文化有同样的发源，结果何以如此其悬殊？就是一个有教育，一个无教育的缘故。比方中国医学上有所发明，就成为秘方。成为某家世代相传的秘制。因之凡什么发明，都不为有系统的研究，那能得到进步？艺术上偶然有天才的创作，亦不过有时代的价值，而无永久性。一方因为研究出来的，无科学方法，不能给后学者以门径。

We are all well aware of how science and art have been promoted in ancient and modern Western countries, so there is no need here for a detailed explanation. Science in China dates to an early age

too. Things such as the compass were invented during the Yellow Emperor's reign (2695–2589 BC). With respect to art, traditional musical instruments – *qin* (琴) and *se* (瑟)¹ – and rock carvings (*shike* 石刻) already existed in the Shang and Zhou dynasties. According to Book of Rites (*Liji* 礼记), 13-year-old children learned literary dance (*wushao* 舞勺), and when they reached 15 years of age they learned the valiant dance (*wuxiang* 舞象).² And yet, why did Western culture develop so rapidly after inheriting Greek culture? Chinese culture was also founded over four thousand years ago, and yet today, we are still using notations such as *fan* (凡), *shang* (上) and *che* (尺)³ to compose music. We still drink water from the river and well, and heavy loads are carried by humans instead of oxen and horses. Now, we must thank the Westerners for giving us the mortars for war, the radio for communication and kettles and woolen clothes for use in daily life. Chinese and Western culture began to develop around the same time, but why have they ended up so differently? The answer is education. For instance, when a new medicine is invented in China, it becomes a secret prescription and is only passed on from generation to generation within the same family. How can we progress if we do not systematically study inventions? There is occasionally a work of genius, but that is only of value to a certain period; it does not last forever. Besides, there are no scientific methods developed for Chinese students to follow.

由此可见教育是成了文化兴衰的关键了。

Owing to this, education has become the key to a culture's future.

吾国近年来鉴于欧美的物质文明，已知道科学教育是什么一回事。在上者顶力提倡——如蔡子民先生之创立中央研究院——在学小子，亦津津有味。现在虽然还没有大发明或小发明家出来贡献，但将来科学基础好了，诚然是可以救中国之贫弱的。但是中国的艺术教育，怎么样不是相形见绌吗？

In recent years, our country has understood what science education is by looking at the material civilization of the West. Those at the top advocate science education. For example, Mr. Cai Jiemin established Academia Sinica.⁴ Students enjoy learning at this institution. Although there are no

¹ Translator's note: *qin* (7-stringed) and *se* (25-stringed) are two different forms of the zither. (See: Huidi Ma and Er Liu, *Traditional Chinese Leisure Culture and Economic Development: A Conflict of Forces*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 42.)

² Translator's note: When performing literary dance, children will hold a traditional instrument similar to a flute (*yue* 籥); while in valiant dance, children will hold a weapon. The two kinds of dances show the distinction between civil (*wen* 文) and military (*wu* 武). (See: Xing Chunru 邢春如, *Zhongguo yishu mantan - zhongguo wudao fazhan gaikuang* 中国艺术漫谈——中国舞蹈发展概况 [A Talk on Chinese Art: An Overview of Chinese Dance Development] (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe), 2015, (ebook) unpaginated.)

³ Translator's note: *Gongche* notation (*gongche pu* 工尺谱) was the popular system for notating music between 16th and early-20th centuries. *Fan*, *shang* and *che* represent three pitches in the Jiangnan variant of the *gongche* notation. (See: Alan Robert Thrasher, *Sizhu Instrumental Music of South China: Ethos, Theory and Practice*, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV), 2008, 89-90.)

⁴ Translator's note: Cai Jiemin is the literary name for Cai Yuanpei, the Chinese educator and president of the Academia Sinica. He is said to have great influence over the development of science in China through promoting science education. Academia Sinica was established in Taipei and was considered as "the highest academic research institution of the Republic of China" at that time. (See: Gao Pingshu 高平叔. Cai Yuanpei's Contributions to China's Science. In *Chinese Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology*, edited by Fan Dainian and Robert S. Cohen, 395-417. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996)

inventors yet, neither young nor great, standing up to make contributions, it will surely serve to provide underdeveloped China with a better scientific basis. However, would not art education in China be outshone by science education?

中国人的爱好艺术，确是一种好天性。从前的文人起码要懂琴、棋、书、画、诗、词、歌、赋。只可惜都是“好古敏以求之”。千载一例，毫无演进。至今写字要仿魏碑，宋体。图画只要唐伯虎吴道子才是好的，绝对不肯信任现代的作家，亦是中国新艺术不振之一大原因。现在国内几位中国书画家，尚得他们的信仰，多系因为“笔近六朝”，“神乎汉魏”以视西洋之数年新兴一派，真不禁哑然。此外大多数人，自己无艺术之审查力，总以为凡古代的总是好的，新的就是可怀疑的。这是很大的错误。犹之乎西洋中古（Moyen-age 或称黑暗时代）时代的作品，很多是不堪入目的。若一样的“敏以求之”岂不是发生危险。常有人很高兴的对我说，某地某庙有很古的石刻，栩栩如生，神工鬼斧。我不禁掩口作葫芦笑，我知道横竖不过是一座茄蓝或菩萨——原来我是最不喜欢中国雕刻的，因为没有一坐雕刻能给我们兴盛。

It is certainly good that the Chinese posses the innate quality to love art. In the past, literati (*wenren* 文人) should at least have knowledge of the four arts – the stringed instrument (*qin* 琴), the strategy game of Go (*qi* 棋), Chinese calligraphy (*shu* 书) and Chinese paintings (*hua* 画) – and should know how to write in the four forms of poetry; verses (*shi* 诗), ditties (*ci* 词), songs (*ge* 歌) and odes (*fu* 赋). Unfortunately, their skills were all developed in the same way by “appreciating, learning and diligently and carefully imitating the styles from the past without innovation.”⁵ When people write calligraphy nowadays, they will imitate the stele style from the Wei dynasty (386-534) (*weibei* 魏碑) or the Song typeface (*songti* 宋体). They only appreciate the painting of Tang Bohu⁶ and Wu Daozi.⁷ What’s more, modern artists are never trusted, a major reason for the sluggish development of Chinese New Art. A few calligraphers and painters in China are still respected, mostly because they “write in the styles similar to those of the Six Dynasties”⁸ (*bijin liuchao* 笔近六朝) and “paint in the styles similar to those of the Han and Wei dynasties” (*shenhu hanwei* 神乎汉魏). They do so in a way that these styles are contrasted with Western art movements, in which each movement emerged within several years. I cannot help but laugh at such opinions. Apart from that, most Chinese have no aesthetic judgment. To think that the old is always good and the new is always to be regarded with suspiciousness is a huge misunderstanding on their part. Take the works from the Moyen Âge (also known as the “Middle Ages”) as a contrasting example; most of them are eyesores. It would be risky for Western artists to “diligently and carefully imitate the styles from the past” as we did. I am often told that there exist

⁵ Translator’s note: The original text is a quote from Confucius: *haogu, minyi qiuzhi* “好古，敏以求之”. There has been much debate on the interpretation of *haogu* “好古” and *min* “敏”. Here the sentence is translated to adapt to the context of the text and the purpose of the author. (See: Chen Daqi 陈大齐, *Lunyu yijie* 论语臆解 [A Tentative Interpretation of the Analects] (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1996), 142-143.)

⁶ Translator’s note: Tang Bohu (1470-1524) was a famous painter during the Ming dynasty.

⁷ Translator’s note: Wu Daozi (ca. 680-759) was a famous artist during the Tang dynasty.

⁸ Translator’s note: Six Dynasties (A.D. 220-589) refer to the period between the Han and Tang dynasties. It is a period with great achievements in cultural arts. (See: Albert E Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization*. (Yale University Press, 2007), 1.)

some vivid ancient stone carvings (*shike* 石刻) that are praised as uncanny craftsmanship in some temple somewhere. I often laugh in my sleeve, because I know that it might be nothing more than a statue of *qielan* (the monastery's tutelary deity 茄蓝) or Bodhisattva. I have never been fond of Chinese carvings, since none of them can lead to the prosperity of art.

现在中国的艺术教育，可以学校为中心。但以我的观察所得，实是一个失望的现象，和前途的危机。

Art education in China today could have been school-based. Observing the current situation, it is indeed a very disappointing one, and one that is a crisis for the future of literature and art.

最高的艺术教育机关，当然是各艺术大学，视环视一周，没有一个是可满人意的。或许他们派别太多，把文艺复兴运动的势力分散了。但做领导的教师，不能不认明自己的责任，时自警惕，方不致教出一班一班的不成熟的学生，又带着使命去教另一般的生徒。如此传递下去，岂不是貽毒无穷。

It goes without saying that the highest institutions for art education are the art schools and universities. Looking around (in China), none of them appear to make the cut. This is probably because there are too many factions, decentralizing the force of renaissance. However, the leading teachers must recognize their responsibilities, and be wary of allowing classes of immature students to graduate, who will continue to teach other students as their mission. If we pass on knowledge in this way, it will cause endless harm to the future.

图画方面，现在则有东洋式的西洋画流行宇内。学生在校三四年，除学些写静物及风景之外，不会画一头一脚，就此收手糊口去了。将来历史上那里会有天才出现呢。故办学者以后应注重基本工作，——人体描写——养成专门作家，不应侧重速成的学校教员。在舞蹈方面，差不多没有过专门人才。但遍地的“毛毛雨”，“可怜的秋香”，居然很受庸众的欢迎。但在有害美性的人看来，真有些难过。假使她们老老实实穿着中国古衣，长袍大袖，婆婆一下也好了。奈偏要学西洋舞法，额上还加上三盏小电灯，如麻雀般东西乱跳，真使人气塞啊。在音乐方面，有同样的现象。原因于指导人才太少，好好的一个西洋乐器，他们奏上一个“梅花三弄”，真大杀风景了。补救之道，要使学生能个个看谱，能使用乐器，则将来不难人才辈出。

In the field of painting, Asian-oriented Western paintings are now in vogue. Students studying at schools for three or four years learn nothing about painting the human figure; they only draw still objects or landscapes. Then, they stop their study and graduate to raise their family on painting. In this way, will there be great masters in the future? Therefore, the educators should focus on fundamental works and cultivate specialized painters of “human figure drawing” rather than providing a crash course for training teachers. Then, in the field of dancing, there has been few specialized talents. However, the widespread dance music “Drizzle” (*maomaoyu* 毛毛雨) and “The Poor Qiu

Xiang" (*kelian de qiuxiang* 可怜的秋香) are incredibly popular among the common people.⁹ This situation is discomforting for people who are particular about aesthetic appreciation. It would have been acceptable if they dance wearing Chinese traditional clothes with robes and long sleeves. However, people persist in learning the Western way of dancing. They decorate themselves with three little lights on their foreheads and dance like a sparrow. How infuriating! The same thing happens in the music field. Because of the lack of guiding talents, people play Chinese classical music like "Three Variations On Plum Blossom" (*Meihua Sannong* 梅花三弄) using Western instruments which are made and meant for Western music. It is such a killjoy. If we are to solve this, we should make every single student develop the ability to read music scores and to play Western instruments. In this way, it will be easy for us to have men of talent come out in succession in the future.

民众更毫无的陶冶，蛮野无文而至于道德丧乱者多，衣服褴褛，连 *pittoresque* 性都没有。民众之有无道德与害美性，是与一个民族文化与俱来的。吾以是更对文化抱悲观。

The public are even more uncultivated. Most of them are so rude and uneducated, even abandoning their morality. They dress in rags without any sense of *pittoresque*. People's morality and their inclination for aesthetic appreciation are closely related to the national culture. Hence, I am pessimistic about culture to a higher degree.

今后之艺术教育，惟有希望大学院居领导之地位。对于错误的时加以监察矫正及给艺术教育机关于物质上相当之补助。所筹备之艺术大学，博物馆，设法早日演说，由单数而及多数。派遣专门人才出国研究考察庶可集其大成，为文艺运动之原动力。贫苦之艺术家，时加以供养，以期造就。

We can only hope that the universities will play the dominant role in the future of art education. In doing so, we should supervise and correct errors and provide substantial subsidies to the art institutions. For art universities and museums, we should manage to give speeches about their constructions as early as possible and gradually expand their number. We should send special talents abroad to study and investigate art so as to integrate its advantages. This can be the original motivation of the literary and artistic movement. Also, we should assist poor artists, and help them to succeed in this way.

国内历代的古物，要加以整理，限制再流入外人之手，为国家无穷之损失。

⁹ Translator's note: These are two dance music composed by Le Jinhui. The "Drizzle" was the first popular music of China done in February 1927. It became popular rapidly after being published. (See: Wu jian 吴剑, *Heri Jun Zilai: Liuxing Gequ Cangsang Shihua* (1927-1949), 何日君再来: 流行歌曲沧桑史 (1927-1949) [When will you come again: History of popular songs (1927-1949)] (Beijing: Beijing Book Co. Inc., 2010), (ebook) unpaginated.)

Importantly, we should organize the antiques of our country's successive dynasties, preventing their leaving China. Such an outflow of antiques will cause an incalculable loss for our country.

对于民众要尽力鼓吹艺术教育，使他们于生计疲乏之余，得到精神的慰藉。有戏院给他们看戏，有公园给他们散步，有博物馆给他们瞻仰，有铜像给他们纪念，有学校给子弟学习，每年有展览会以资研究……如此则十年以后，必大有可观。一切设施想当局早有成主，故不赘述了。

Also, we should try our best to advocate art education to the people so that they can find spiritual solace in the fatigue of living. We need to make sure there are theatres for them to enjoy dramas, parks for them to walk through, museums for them to reverently observe, statues for them to commemorate, schools for their children to learn in, annual exhibitions for them to study...In doing this, in ten years' time, we will have undoubtedly made significant progress. As all proposals about constructing art education should already have their formed plans, it is unnecessary to say anything more about it.