

Li Yishi 李毅士: Why We Should Advocate Art 我们为什么提倡艺术

Translated by Wu Tong and Guo Danqing

艺术是国民文化的代表物，一国艺术的进步，便是他的文化进步。当今我国，古有文化，已日趣衰颓，西方文化，我国又不能追及，积极的提倡艺术，以便促进中国文化，岂不是应当的么？这种论调是我国艺人所常喊着的口号，也是社会间所公认，那末，我原本可以不再谈“为什么要提倡艺术？”然而世间每每要人承认一件事的理由容易，要他们内容里真正的相信很难。据现在一般人内心的见解，总觉得当今国难方殷，充实国力，最为要紧，艺术纵和国民文化攸关，无如远水救不得近火。因此他们对于艺术虽口中不说“不要提倡”，实际则不免对他漠视和冷淡了。

Art is representative of national culture. The progress of a country's art represents its cultural progress. In China, a nation of ancient culture, we are in decline and cannot catch up with Western culture. Is it not necessary to actively advocate art to promote Chinese culture? This argument is not only a slogan often shouted by our artists, but also acknowledged by society. So, I could stop here. There is no need to discuss "why we should advocate art". However, it is usually easier for people to admit the reason for something than to believe it from the bottom of their hearts. According to the popular opinion of the day, the most crucial thing is to build national strength when the country faces a crisis.¹ Even if art and national culture are both at stake, saving them is like the grass growing while the horse starves. Therefore, although most people do not deny the need to advocate art, they are still indifferent to it.

我们承认这种见解确有理由，但是他们觉得艺术的提倡，无论是直接或间接，于救济国难方面，也都是很有效用。从直接的效用讲，救国当然以振兴实业为先，而艺术于实业上却可以有许多的贡献。据现在一般人所说的提倡实业，无非是广设工厂和开拓财源的两种方法。惟依我见，我国尽管广设工厂，出货的好和廉总追不上外人，要免外人经济的侵略，全赖国民的爱国心来维持，这种办法，一则不可靠，二则不能持久。

¹Translators' note: In 1931, the War of Resistance Against Japan broke out in China.

We acknowledge that this view is reasonable, but these people feel that the promotion of art either directly or indirectly has been very effective in relieving the suffering of the nation. At its most effective, art's revitalization of industry is certainly the first step to saving the country. But in fact, art may also have many contributions to industry. It is now generally said that the promotion of industry and commerce is nothing more than two ways of setting up factories and extending financial resources. In my opinion, although our country has set up factories widely, the quality and price of goods will never catch up with those of other countries. To avoid the economic invasion of other countries, we entirely rely on the people's patriotism. This solution is not reliable and not sustainable.

至于开拓财源，则又无非是把国产的原料开发出来，去换外国的制作物。这种办法，是犹如一家之中把现款用罄，再把不动产去抵押，恐不免是饮鸩止渴的办法罢！依我所谓提倡实业的办法一方面固然应当采用外国的机械之便，积极增设工厂，一方面却应注意于货物的装璜和式样。货物美观可以不赖国民爱心的维持，引人购买，已可以帮助国货的销路不少，如若我国货物，诚能用中国古式的装璜，我想，或者在外国也有市场可寻。国货推销到外国去，是国人不敢梦想的事，然而我国货物销到外国也曾经屡见，无奈我国商人，不知改良他们的出品，而且每有门户可寻，便群趋若鹜，往往自将市场堵塞。反过来再看外国商品，起初在中国本来没有需要，然而他们竟藉广告的力量，养成现在国中非舶来品不行的情势。从这两件事看，我国今后的实业界，倘若有艺术界中人的帮助，替他们拟样，帮他们宣传，将来中国的制作品畅销到国外，也许还办得到罢！

As for developing financial resources, this is nothing more than the development of domestic raw materials in exchange for foreign production. This method is like a family that uses up all their cash and then mortgages real estate. I am afraid this is like quenching a thirst with poison.² In my opinion, on the one hand, the way to promote industry is to adopt foreign machinery and actively set up more factories. On the other hand, attention should be paid to the decoration and style of the goods. The beauty of the goods is more reliable than patriotism in getting people

²Translators' note: "quench a thirst with poison" is a Chinese idiom-- *yinzhenzhike* 饮鸩止渴. It means temporary relief which results in disaster.

to buy. This could also provide significant assistance in the marketing of Chinese goods. If our goods really can be decorated in the ancient Chinese style, I think, there may be a market in foreign countries. The overseas sales of domestic products is the thing that Chinese people never dared to dream of. Although Chinese products were often sold to foreign countries in the past, Chinese businessmen would rush to seize every opportunity blindly rather than improve the quality of their products, leading to market saturation. In turn, there was no demand for foreign products in China before, but with the help of advertising, they have created a situation in which China cannot do without imported products. From these two things, if our future industry has help from the artists, as in drawing a design and advertising, a great demand for Chinese products overseas is possible in the future.

从间接方面讲，艺术的效用于救国更大。不过这种效用，不能很明显，所以只可以说是间接的。我常比国中事业的进行犹如机器的推动，国民的精神犹如动力的来源煤炭。至于艺术则是燃烧的引火之物，我这个譬喻是有种种的例，可以举出来证明，但因限于篇幅，我不能畅述所见。但今我所愿说的，乃是当今我国国民，虽都深具爱国之心，却因对于救国的意见不一，情绪各别，各人所为也就互有抵触，互相消失其效用。这种情形，是空把国民的精神消散于无形，正如锅炉中的燃煤不得其当。自今以后，我们倘要革除这种弊病，恐非口舌所能生效，也不能静待大家自然的觉悟，还不如借用艺术一类的表现，用情感去行动他们，使全国一致向一条路进行。

Indirectly, art is more useful in saving the country. However, this effect is not apparent, so we can only call it an indirect effect. I often regard the development of the domestic business as the operation of a machine. The national spirit is like a kind of motivation as coal is to the machine. Art is the kindling of fire. There are many examples to support this simile of mine, but for lack of space, I cannot allow my thoughts to linger here. Here, I want to say that although the people are deeply patriotic, because of their different opinions and emotions on national salvation, each of them has done something contradictory to the other and offset its effect. This is a waste of the national spirit, just as the burning of coal in a boiler does not work. From now on, if we want to abolish this evil, words may not work. It also cannot wait for everyone's natural

consciousness. It is better to use performances like art, use emotions to make them act, and make the country move consistently in one direction.

上面所述艺术在救济国难上的效用。虽我自信有充分的理由，然而却不敢望国人大家都能承认。何以呢？这是因为现在艺术界中的成绩，还不能显出他如我所说的效能。不过反过来讲，如若现在的艺术界已在这方面有相当的成绩，那末，艺术的提倡，想必早被人觉悟到，我本文也可以不做了。我们原因为现在中国艺人所处环境恶劣，表现多阻碍，社会少奖励，一切成绩，连自己都不能满意，所以希望大家为艺术救国计，尽量提倡艺术。

The utility of art in relieving a crisis was mentioned above. Although I am confident that there are good reasons for the utility, I do not expect everyone can recognize it. Why? This is because the achievements in the art world cannot yet show its effectiveness as I have laid out. Conversely, if the art world today has already made considerable success in this area, then the advocacy of art must have been realized earlier. I cannot publish this article. In fact, because Chinese artists are now in a bad environment, with many obstacles to their performance and fewer rewards in society, all achievements, even their own, cannot be satisfied. Therefore, I hope that everyone will save the country through art, and as far as possible, advocate art.