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Contemporary Chinese Living Aesthetics and Contemporary Chinese Art History

Liu Yuedi

Abstract

Living aesthetics was understood by most Chinese scholars as a way to bridge the living world and aesthetic activity today. This article discusses contemporary Chinese art from the perspective of the new thinking of living aesthetics. We shall diachronically describe the historical relationship between aesthetics and art and also try to synchronically examine the theory connecting living aesthetics and contemporary Chinese art with each other.

Key Words

contemporary Chinese art history; daily-living aesthetics; elite living aesthetics; living aesthetics; neo-Chineseness art; political living aesthetics

1. Introduction

Living aesthetics(生活美学, Sheng-huo-mei-xue) was understood by most Chinese scholars as a way to bridge the living world and aesthetic activity today. Living aesthetics advocates that aesthetics return to living, explores the aesthetic value of the living world, enhances the aesthetic quality of everyday living experience, and aims to promote happiness. "Today, to echo the call of the world aesthetics for an intercultural turn, Chinese aesthetics is trying to engage itself in global dialogicalism, and, with its living aesthetics in 'Neo-Chineseness,' is making important contributions to the two-way expansion of Chinese and Western aesthetics."^[1] Living aesthetics is considered an important breakthrough in aesthetics, and is being fully developed in twenty-first century Chinese thinking.

Since the 1950s, a more unique relationship between contemporary Chinese art and living aesthetics has been formed. This article discusses contemporary Chinese art from the perspective of the new thinking of living aesthetics. We shall diachronically describe the historical relationship between aesthetics and art and also try to synchronically examine the theory connecting living aesthetics and contemporary Chinese art. No matter the historical description or the theoretical analysis, the keyword is 'living' (生活, sheng-huo). In Chinese language, living or *sheng-huo* is not life in the meaning of *zoē*, which expresses the simple fact of living common to living beings, but it is similar to *bios*, which indicates the form or way of proper living of an individual to a group.^[2]

In classical Chinese culture, there is a natural, delicate relationship between living and "美" (beauty, ranging from the "taste"-interlinked feelings to purified aesthetic perception), and "艺" (art, ranging from the generalized Six Arts in Confucian contexts to the pure art today). In fact, classical Chinese aesthetics is a kind of living aesthetics. This means culture and art in contemporary China are still included in the tradition of living aesthetics and will never be excluded from living, so it is legitimate to study Chinese art history from the perspective of living aesthetics.

2. Political living aesthetics, pre-modernism, realism

The year 1978 was the beginning of Chinese contemporary art. Because of the political situation and the cultural separation from the Soviet Union beginning in the middle of twentieth century it was difficult for Chinese

contemporary art to accept modernity. At the same time, it could not continue the art exploration of modernism started from the early years of that century. So the historical contexts were totally pre-modernist.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, Chinese art was all socialist realism, especially the art of the Cultural Revolution, which was the peak of an overweening realism with Chinese characteristics. Because of the unique cultural shaping force of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese art could only depict the leaders, with images of Mao Zedong dominating, and the worker-peasant-soldier who took part in revolutionary movement. Those images are exaggerated to "lofty, noble and perfect," and they are placed in the background of "red, highlighted and bright."^[3] These historical portraits are unique forms between portraiture and historical painting because these characters had to be placed in historical events and activities in order to obtain the practical significance of revolution.

The credo of "art from but beyond living," originated from the "Speech at the Forum on Literature and Art of Yan'an" that, on the one hand, highlighted art with its source of living as not just the copy and backup of living but as the perfect fusion of living and art, and, on the other hand, identified artworks more concentrated, more typical, more ideal than everyday living. From today's perspective, this is a kind of political living aesthetics with Chinese characteristics. It directly adopted the art theory of Chernyshevsky, the Russian Democrat, and also indirectly had the connotation of local living-stylized aesthetics. With the guide of these aesthetic principles, "an artist should live his every moment of living in battles (political struggles), and take the observation and experience in every moment of his life," and the first expectation of an artist is "the spirit of socialism in his work."^[4]

Interestingly, the art theory of Chernyshevsky, who could not be listed as an important aestheticist in world aesthetics history, has become a generally accepted aesthetic theory in Chinese art theory and practice. The core concept of his theory, beauty is life, was regarded as the norm: "Anything, in which we could see the life that should be according to our understanding, is beauty; anything, that shows life or reminds us of life, is beauty."^[5] There are two famous progressive propositions in the first part of his theory: "beauty is life" and "the life that should be," the latter meaning that beauty shows life and reminds us of life from the angle of art creation and acceptance.

The art of socialist realism is absolutely in accord with these four doctrines: 1) beauty is life is the most basic requirement, and it requires that art has to reflect real living; 2) beauty is the life that should be, is higher and should solve the problem of reflecting what kind of living; 3) beauty should show life, requiring artists to reflect the life being lived voluntarily; and 4) beauty should remind us of life, meaning that viewers could be the witness of living in artworks. So, the concept of beauty is life has comprehensively stipulated the essence and attributes of the art of Chinese socialist realism. Literature and art should serve politics, and in Chinese realism this was converted to serve and be accepted by workers, peasants and soldiers, and eventually become a political weapon in their lives. The concept of beauty is life is in an effort to illustrate that living is the textbook of art and, at the same time, stress the need to judge the phenomenon in living. In this way, the living showed in the art of Chinese socialist realism is living by choices, and that preexistent ideology interferes both in living and in art.

This art concept follows the suit of European representation theory that art represents the world, since it requires especially that oil-painting should "depict objects just as they are in nature, and just like what our eyes have seen."^[6] The key is to not let the audience see the related sketch, great strokes, and beautiful picture but the living people and their moods. Guided

with this art theory of vulgar materialism, what we see in Chinese art of that time is mainly politicized life. This is because the everyday living attached to human nature is difficult to represent under the pressure of political consciousness. In contrast, almost all artworks are directly shadowed with the color of political living aesthetics, mostly social themes, from revolutionary activities to working exercise; even the most private life, such as family life, is politically publicized.

For example, in a political poster during the Cultural Revolution, with characteristics of folk New Year paintings, a smiling family of five is actually the interpretation of the words written on the top of the poster: "Chairman Mao Brings Us Happy Living."

The real turning of Chinese contemporary art happened within realism, with not too much help from foreign influence. At that time, oil painting undoubtedly occupied the dominant position. With the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, the oil painters, with deep influence of earlier traditions, began to compose new work. Resisting the subjects of the Cultural Revolution, so-called "scar art," accusing the Cultural Revolution as their theme, and folk art, looking back to native culture, appeared briefly in Chinese art. Interestingly, concerning its orientation of style, the former combined easily with aestheticism of non-political content, and the latter often aligned with the naturalism of non-political form.

However, these artistic tides soon disappeared, and art quickly became art of mannered realism and realistic mannerism. Since then, greater success was found in neoclassical oil painting of the academic genealogy, and then the so-called "living stream" art, though it did not extricate itself from official content. In living stream art, "Tibet Series," by Chen Danqing, had most profound influence. "Tibet Series" rejects the content-dramatization and form-beautification of traditional realism and directly copies Tibetan people into the picture, winning the audience with its profound culture power and on-the-spot touch. And the classic work, "Father," by Luo Zhongli, returns to folk art and presents the photo-realism style of American art. It presents a father's face that bears the suffering of thousands years of Chinese culture to the canvas, replacing political thinking with cultural reflection. Although these artworks of neo-realism found initial success and pulled the realism tradition back to real living, the progress and innovation within art has hinted that the realism model is bound to decline.

As an art concept requiring art to represent typical characters in typical environments, here I give two most typical examples of socialist realism, a piece of popular art created by the masses, and one work by an artist. In the period of the Cultural Revolution, there was a boom of art showing the masses praising the Cultural Revolution. In one piece, a political poster with the characteristics of New Year paintings and modern calendar poster, the parents are about to eat with their children at the table, and their smiles show happy living. Moreover, the unnamed painter's writing on the top of the poster reveals the subject completely: "Happy Living That Chairman Mao Gave Us." It suggests that the family's happiness comes from the leader Mao Zedong, whose picture was placed in the central position behind the family as background.

Another example is "Tiananmen," by Sun Zixi, in 1964. The subject of this painting, of course, is again happy living, and it is a "photograph" of three generations of a peasant family standing in front of the Tiananmen. The grandfather occupies the central position of the picture, and, according to the male chauvinistic ideas of that time, there is no grandmother in the picture. However, the real father of this happy family is not the grandfather but Mao Zedong, shown in the portraits of Chairman Mao in the painting's background. And in the big country background of this small family, there are People's Liberation Army military guards on the right, ethnic solidarity

on the left, and the blue sky and white clouds as a symbol of communism in the future.

3. Elite living aesthetics, modernity enlightenment, and modernism

After the decline of socialist realism, Chinese contemporary art still developed in its own aesthetic logic, trying to find a new direction of art creation within realism. But the real impact on contemporary Chinese art was brought by external power. As an important "other," modern art in the West gave a great shock to Chinese contemporary art. From the 1985 New Wave art movement to the China Modern Art Exhibition in 1989, modern art had almost become the only goal for Chinese avant-garde artists, and it also produced an important, irreversible influence on other types of art and artists.

Though modernism still dominated the power of discourse, Chinese avant-garde art had already taken the stage of historical context. An important social feature of this historical phase is the artist as an individual began to separate from the nation and assume their independence from the national identity. The pattern of dualistic opposition between elite and mainstream culture was formed. At the time, the subjectivity philosophy of Germany philosopher Immanuel Kant was lifted up as the construction basis of Chinese modernity.

As a rational expression form of sensibility liberation, aesthetics fever spread over China, and aesthetic concept found popularity. Artists were inspired to pursue both artistic autonomy and aesthetic consciousness. The 1980s has a special meaning for contemporary Chinese culture, and modernity got its revival in China. "Aesthetic education instead of religious" in the May Fourth Movement had shown the unique characteristics of Chinese modernity construction. But it never faced religious issues, as in Europe, but faced the problem of aesthetic modernity before the problem of social modernity.

The task of modernity is not finished yet in China. Under the complexity of modernity, Chinese art continued its tradition but was required to bear a secular salvation function. In the 1980's, modernists regarded themselves as social legislators at first, and a special field and system of self-discipline culture was formed in art circles. And because aesthetic modernity had become the guide of social modernity, the aesthetic and artistic function, as a counterforce to political ideology, could be uplifted in the era of reform and opening up. Modern art took its stage in this historical situation and initially fitted closely with aesthetic modernity, then formed a subtle combination.

Avant-garde art gradually emerged with another kind of counter-aesthetic attitude. Chinese avant-garde appeared at the time that European avant-garde had already ebbed, turning towards post-avant-garde, because it initially was opposed to political ideology and then faced the challenge of market ideology. The market system is what European avant-garde wanted to kick back; paradoxically, Chinese avant-garde artists, since political pop had become more and more the conspiracy of the market system, had given up the role of legislator and become the living interpreter of themselves. An inner transformation of art creation from public space to private space had occurred and, for now, the opened private space gradually returned to some kind of mixed space of public and private.

From the view of art history, art innovation had already appeared outside of the mainstream of realism before the 1985 art movement. "Spring Snow," by the famous painter Wu Guanzhong, in 1979, implied the spring of Chinese contemporary art. In the same year, his article, "Form Beauty of Painting," aroused strong repercussions in art circles. In this article he stressed that the art with "the rule of form beauty" is actually the "art," and it directly questioned the dominant representation art.^[7] This article brought forth a

great debate about purified language. Art theories discussed in this debate were those we mentioned earlier, self-discipline of art and aesthetic purification. What is interesting is that this discussion of form indeed was non-formalization in Chinese context, and colored with countering traditional ideology and mainstream art.

With the tide of the modern art movement, talented artists emerged from the 1985 art movement, casting off their national custody of real identity, and tried to complete the social responsibility of modernity in spirit and temperament. In a high-profile way, they advocated to construct humanism in their art and self-described as a cultural elite. They brought so-called rational painting into the dominant art form and pushed so-called stream of living advertising non-rationalism into an undercurrent, though both art forms took the attitude of the elite. Therefore, not only in themselves but also in others' eyes, the historical responsibility carried by these artists were already out of the range of the art itself; these artists tried to become the legislators of contemporary Chinese society and to realize the enlightenment modernity in China together with humanistic intellectuals.

Leading participants of the 1985 art movement commented that the "1985 art movement is a kind of Chinese humanism. I think those humanists had ideals and ambitions. And they had strong attitude. But these were soon changed, and became a kind of cynicism."^[8] Artists of that time, whether they accepted realism or surrealism, tried hard to bear some kind of philosophical creed in their painting language. And it was criticized as thought over means, content over form. After the 1990s, however, Chinese art did not fully complete the task of enlightenment modernity; radical artists began to accept post-modernism, thus starting another art practice of "De-enlightenment."

After the iconic China Modern Art Exhibition, the artists in turn put forward the slogan of "cleaning up humanistic spirit."^[9] Escaping from the sublime had become a common choice, and artists gradually deconstructed the grandiose narrative of rational painting. At this turning point, the confrontation between classicism and modern art was the most important thing, which is completely different from the hybrid tension between modernism and postmodernism in the 1990s.

According to the reflection of those artists, the relationship between classical and modern is not so tense, "in fact, 'classical art' and 'modern art' have the same origin of language...what we should get rid of is the dependence art put on humanism, and walk out of the questing for the meaning of art, and turn to the solution of art problems."^[10] An artist deeply laments that his continuous art transformation from the 1980s to the 1990s was identified as the transformation from a rationalist with noble spirit to "a person without belief, a person of cultural nihilism. And this is the real proof of role switch during the period of two generations.

This means that this generation of artists had consciously abandoned the role of the enlightenment elite, and turned to that of professional art producer. They hated to bear anything beyond art itself in art, and thought that art was nothing but a game. In this way, Chinese contemporary artists had shifted from the one-time legislator of popular enlightenment to interpreters of their own lives. At the same time, they as individuals had completely become independent from national restrictions, but also were separated from the masses. They had become ordinary people that only focus on personal living. A kind of daily-living aesthetics revealed its veil, which is fundamentally opposite to elite living aesthetics.

4. Daily-living aesthetics, postmodernism, and 'contemporarism'

In the 1990s, with the tide of post-modernism, the concept of aestheticism

constructed in the 1980s began to collapse in mainland of China. At the same time, Chinese contemporary art had gradually integrated itself into globalization, and its creation not only related to its own internal condition but also to a new trend of international art. Post-modern art had steadily become the mainstream and formed a certain degree of integration and conflict with the previous modernism. It could even be said that, from realism, modernism to postmodernism, Chinese contemporary had experienced hundreds years art history of Western art in a very short time, and these art traditions still coexist in China nowadays.

Since the early 1990s, official art, academic art, and avant-garde art have formed a structure of three streams simultaneously in China.

The social reason for this lies deeply in the radical change of Chinese culture itself. From cultural integration (political dominance) to cultural dichotomy (elite culture breaking away from politics) to the "three kingdoms of culture" (elite culture, mainstream culture, and popular culture), this situation contributed to the tripartite confrontation and co-existence of socialist realism, modernism, and avant-garde art.

This was most conducive to the development of Chinese contemporary art. "The big one dominating" had gone forever. For now, there was something new, on the one hand, academic art and avant-garde art are becoming much closer, academic art has become edgy, and avant-garde art gets its support from academy. On the other hand, official art and avant-garde art seem to have formed a conspiracy; contemporary avant-garde art has become the global trademark of mainstream culture. The newly established Institute of Contemporary Chinese Art has absorbed most avant-garde artists of international influence; they had held a group exhibition at the National Art Museum of China. It seems that the avant-garde art of the last generation has been museumized in new era.

Since the 1990s, there have been three kinds of mainstream art in Chinese contemporary art. The first was political pop art, and its orientation was satirizing ideology. The second was cynical realism, and its orientation was escaping from the sublime. The third was initially new generation, then contemporary conceptual art, performance art, and installation art; their basic orientation was returning to daily- living. If political pop art was the remembrance and the loan of the past political living aesthetics, cynical realism was then the definite denial of elite living aesthetics. And the painting of neorealism initially proposed the new road of returning to daily- living; finally this road was fully expanded in various media of contemporary art. In a broad sense, all these three kinds of art were related to daily- living in that political pop art juxtaposed political living and daily- living, cynical realism rebelled from the elite living to daily- living, and contemporary art forms thereafter regarded daily- living directly as daily- living. These three kinds of art dominated the three types of daily- living aesthetics.

Chinese political pop art, taking American pop art as an example, combined political ideology and pop art style. Contemporary art critic Li Xianting first named political pop accurately: "after 1989, artists of 1985 Art Movement had given up their serious metaphysical attitude, turned to politicalized pop art and held the banner of deconstructionism. They had created much works with the themes of Mao Zedong and other political subjects in an humorous and jesting way."^[11] Wang Guangyi was one of them. When he juxtaposed posters of the Cultural Revolution with logos of world-famous brands, the critics consistently found that this was a radical criticism of commercial society through traditional political criticism. However, the artist himself took his work as post-pop art to solve the problem of the commodity economy. The purpose of borrowing images of the Cultural Revolution was to mock up and tease modern commodity economy. At the same time, this also implied that the context of Chinese contemporary art had shifted from political

language to business language. And political pop art was just in the process of changing.

Cynical realism was another kind of art language. Artists looked at reality and living in a cynical, scornful, and ironic way. These artists absolutely no longer believed in traditional political values. They also no longer believed in any new value system, and that they could no longer afford the enlightenment role of saving the society but could only be true to their own living and do some helpless salvation for their own existence. So the boring feeling of existence was a true portrayal of artists' living state. Fang Lijun always enjoyed describing images of a Beijing bald man but truly revealed the internal state of the figures: sucking in the huge changes of the era but adopting a negative cynical attitude towards the world. Artists wanted to escape the sense of crisis in the era of value transition. In fact, figures in his paintings had a unique history association with rogue culture and hooligan humor in the Chinese tradition.

As political pop art and cynical realism had become classic in Chinese contemporary art, art orientation with more vitality was returning directly to daily-living. This kind of "new generation art in essence was a reflection of urban culture and commercial culture, and it turned the idealism of avant-garde art into the secularism based on personal experience. Academic skills and moderate cultural attitudes had become the buffering agent between culture confrontation."[\[12\]](#) And this kind of art represented a mainstream style between the center and the periphery. This road included two paths. The first, academic path, neorealism with the representative of Liu Xiaodong, was considered a new school of art between classical realism and local realism and an example of tactfully combining the new wave art and academic art. In their works, indoor and outdoor space unambiguously showed the significance of ordinary living, and were a credible reality, rejecting any interference of imagination, thus forcing viewers to look attentively at the reality of their own existence.

The second path is the new figurative image, with the representative of Zhang Xiaogang. Images in his "Big Family-Ties of Blood Series" have the most Chinese character in foreigners' eyes. In this series of works, single eyelids, oval faces, Chinese tunic suits, photographs of a whole family precisely meet the cultural imagination of foreigners for "this kind of person." In the graphic language of "old photo and carbon painting, there indeed is a certain aesthetic pursuit of Chinese common people, such as emphasizing the generality and blurring the individuality, implicit and neutral but poetic, etc."[\[13\]](#) For now, these two paths of neorealism still attract many artists to take part in and explore more than political pop art and cynical realism.

Contemporary Chinese art has come into a new phase of globalization in which either the new literati of pre-modern, modern abstractionism or contemporary art of postmodern style could have their own space. We could summarize this new trend of diversity as "contemporarism" in a special Chinese context, because pre-modern, modernism, and postmodernism are integrated in the Chinese art practice of some kind of contemporary character.[\[14\]](#) It should be pointed out that, in China at present, experimental art has already extricated itself from the bondage of easel painting and gone towards the new world of concept art, performing art, installation art, and so on.

According to what was seen at "Get It Louder," the exhibition of young artists in September 2010, the contemporary art form of youth culture indeed highlights the trend of returning to living. And there are three kinds of returning to living. The first is to specify daily-living as art and it is a renewing of the ready-made of Dadaism. This kind of art requires players to "make living as art directly because living itself is art. For instance, a young

photographer picks up household garbage at a suburb of pulled down houses and takes photos and transfers them to art. The second is to deny art to living, such as the art group that organized collective activities as "Forget Art." In one of their art programs, "Longquan Bath Center," the art group changed a bath center into an artwork but hopes everyone involved forgets they are staying in the artwork. The third, more conceptually, is to equate daily-living to art directly, such as "What We Need Everyday," a work created by a young artist for two months. In this work, the artist finished a piece of work with an idea for each day, through which he experienced that living itself had been sculptured. Citing these latest artworks is not to say that these art explorations are successful but to say Chinese contemporary art has embarked on a more open path of truly contemporary character. We are looking forward to their future.

5. From reflecting living to upgrading living to returning to living

From political living aesthetics to elite living aesthetics to daily-living aesthetics, from realism to modernism to contemporarism, we have already seen that there have basically been three kinds of living mode in thirty years of Chinese contemporary art: reflecting living, upgrading living, and returning to living.

For the so-called reflecting living mode, realism is its matching art. Socialist realism with Chinese characteristics reached its crescendo in the Cultural Revolution art and still had influence in the early 1980s. The theory for this reflecting living mode lay in the realism theory of beauty is living itself. But in art practice we have seen that not all but only politicized living could become the object of realism. Politicized living has the characteristics of non-daily-living, and it is politicized from content to theme. So it is the so-called political living aesthetics, and just the product of German esthetician Walter Benjamin's aestheticized politics.

For the so-called upgrading living mode, modernism is its matching type of art. Some kinds of realistic art with modern characteristics are also generally included in its scope. The theory for this upgrading living mode is aestheticism. This is because, according to the aesthetic conception of Kant's non-utility, art is always beyond living and with its own autonomy, and even denies, rejects, and subverts the daily-living. In this sense, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno proposed modern aesthetics of art autonomy; indeed this corresponded to the art thought of the era. According to this mode, art's denial of daily-living has become a law, and the elite living it wants to show is also a kind of non-daily-living because this kind of living has been aesthetically utopia-ized in Chinese artworks.

The so-called returning to living mode is the common pursuit of various types of contemporarism art. The theory for this mode is aestheticization, namely the combination of aestheticization of daily-living and routinization of aesthetics. According to this mode, the daily-living is routinized living, not politicized living or elitist living. So, this kind of art of contemporarism could be called true daily-living aesthetics. In a certain sense, this kind of aesthetics rejects the traditional non-utilitarianism and gets the basic orientation of life-styles of the masses, and shows the new culture scent of contemporary China. Comparison between these three kinds of art-living mode is illustrated as follows:

Type of art	Relationship between art and living	The nature of living	Trend of art in art history
Realism	Art reflects living	Non-routinization of political living	Politicized
Modernism	Art denies living	Non-routinization of elite living	Aesthetically utopia-ized

Contemporarism	Art returns to living	Routinization of daily-living	Life-stylized of the masses
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6. Neo-Chineseness art towards living aesthetics

When using the framework of pre-modern, modern, post-modern to explain the history of contemporary Chinese art, we can find it is established in the context of the West. Of course, the diachronic accumulation in these three historical periods synchronically appear in Chinese contemporary culture. This accumulation is close to the identity of collective unconsciousness in Carl G. Jung's psychology. In fact, these three kinds of art conception can find plenty of followers in the current cultural context. Moreover, the above description is always trying to grasp two basic clues: the vicissitudes of art and the evolution of aesthetics, and their historical interaction and relation.

However, under the Western value system, Chinese modernism is bound to become homogeneous of Western modernism, just as Arthur C. Danto wrote in "The Shape of Artistic Pasts: East and West."^[15] Is that the case? When we use these loanwords to explain Chinese art, it is more like labeling Chinese art. More importantly, Chinese characteristics of Chinese art lie not in what they are labeled but in what Chinese characteristics really are behind the label. How should we talk of them in our own words? In the last one hundred years, it seemed that schools of art theory could only be proposed in the West. And in a more pessimistic view, theory in the West and practice in the East was also widely recognized. There was rarely an art theory that really explained Chinese art.

Through the dialogue and communication between the East and the West, the concern on Chinese contemporary art mainly focused on its inherent double tension: one is tension between the global and the local, the other is tension between modernism and postmodernism. These two problems are also what in contemporary Chinese art gets most attention from the international circle of aesthetics.^[16] Since the globalization is not equal to Westernization or Europeanization and Americanization, the challenge that globalization brings to contemporary Chinese art is how could Chinese artists create Chinese art with Chineseness?

Aiming at this problem in my papers published in the International Yearbook of Aesthetics 2009 and other magazines, I have put forward the art concept of neo-Chineseness construction, and living aesthetics can be considered as one of intrinsic fundamental goals of Chinese contemporary art: of a construction from neo-Chineseness.^[17]

The reason why contemporary Chinese art needs to reconstruct Chineseness lies precisely in the lack of Chineseness. The thirty years of contemporary Chinese art from 1978 to the present could be briefly summarized as a process from de-Chineseness to re-Chineseness, and it also is the historical process of contemporary art from de-contextualization to re-contextualization. This is because, in the pulling of Western contemporary art, contemporary Chinese art had gradually lost its own context and, under the guidance of self-consciousness, it is now gradually returning to its own context. Interestingly, this kind of re-Chineseness or re-contextualization has happened in the era of globalization.

Contemporary Chinese art develops more and more synchronously with the world. At the same time, the value of Chineseness construction is more and more revealed. Being the true Chinese art has been the basic demand of most Chinese art nowadays.

However, there are all kinds of paths to construct neo-Chineseness in the new historical context. I could just say returning to living aesthetics is the most practical and short-cutting one. This is because so-called living

aesthetics can be used to strike back traditional concepts of art autonomy and can still lay its foundation on Chinese tradition.

In Chinese classical culture, there is always the tradition of aestheticization of living and routinization of aesthetics. In the view of Chinese classical culture, aesthetic and art, art and living, aesthetic and living, creation and appreciation, and appreciation and criticism are interconnected, and they constitutes a kind of intimacy without barrier. Chinese classical aesthetics is a living kind of living aesthetics, and the living of those who retaining Chinese classical aesthetics is a kind of "living of good taste."^[18]

From a distant view, the research paradigm of Chinese classical art history also shows some kind of cultural turn. The classic style studying seems to have declined, and the correlation between art history and the society, the cultural context, has received more attention. It has something in common with the new art history that just emerged in the West. From a close view, Chinese art of nowadays never provides an aesthetic utopia as the art of east Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and always walks on a more practical path with social concern, and gradually returns to living world. Now, one of the mainstreams of contemporary international aesthetics also returns to everyday-life aesthetics, from aesthetics equals to art philosophy for nearly half a century. It is precisely because "We see art, at least partly, in terms of Everyday Life Aesthetics, and we see Everyday Life Aesthetics, at least partly, in terms of art."^[19]

Viewed from our local living aesthetics, Chinese art should return to the so-called Chinese experience, and Chinese artists should create Chinese art of neo-Chineseness, from which we could see the spirit of our own culture and nationality. Chinese esthetician and art theorists should construct art theories of neo-Chineseness, and justly explain and interpret Chinese contemporary art and culture.

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Endnotes

[1] Liu Yuedi, "'Living Aesthetics' From the Perspective of the Intercultural Turn," in Liu Yuedi and Curtis L. Carter, eds., *Aesthetics of Everyday Life: East and West* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 15.

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