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## Exploring the Inner Relationships between Modern Chinese Aesthetics and the Confucian Mind-Soul (心性) Framework

*Wei Du*

### Abstract

Modern Chinese aesthetics promotes the utilitarian function of the arts and artistic appreciation via aesthetic education and an arts-infused lifestyle. This utilitarian orientation has not originated from European aesthetics, but rather reflects a localized awareness of the "humanistic enhancement of citizens" through the arts, which, derived from the Confucian tradition, expands on its "mind-soul" theory. This conceptual framework finds its roots in the Song-Ming philosophy of mind and pays particular attention to the cultivation of individual morals and personal character as the essential pathway towards restoring conscience. This positioning of values and valuations, to a large extent, was the inspiration, as well as the traditional philosophical source, for such well-known scholars as Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao, and Zhu Guangqian, who advocated aesthetic education and aesthetic disinterestedness. In other words, it is possible to distinguish an explicit historical continuum between the traditions of the Confucian philosophy of mind and soul, and the conception of modern Chinese aesthetics. With a central focus upon aesthetic utilitarianism, modern Chinese aesthetics can be understood as the "Aesthetics of the Mind," which, in turn, draws upon "ancient Chinese aesthetics." This aesthetic theoretical approach provides the foundation for modern Chinese philosophy, and even constitutes the whole edifice of "Chinese aesthetics." "The aesthetics of the mind," its value positioning, its philosophical orientation, and its keen awareness of localized problems serves as an important reference point for contemporary aesthetic studies in China.

### Key Words

aesthetic education; modern Chinese aesthetics; philosophy of mind and soul; selfish desires

### 1. Why does modern Chinese aesthetics place a strong emphasis on aesthetic education?

One unique phenomenon concerning modern Chinese aesthetics is the fact that the first three aestheticians who established the field in China were at the same time well known scholars, politicians, and educators. Among the four scholars working at the Qinghua Institute of Chinese Studies, two were aestheticians: Wang Guowei and Liang Qichao, while Cai Yuanpei held a prominent position as the Minister of Education in the Republic of China and the President of Peking University. When these prominent scholars discussed the issues of aesthetics, they all emphasized the impact that aesthetic appreciation, the arts, and artistic education could exert on humans and society; therefore, they not only elaborated on aesthetic theories, emphasizing the importance of aesthetic education, but also advocated its implementation. This is a very important characteristic of modern Chinese aesthetics. In contrast, since the establishment of aesthetics in

the eighteenth century in the West, only Schiller promoted aesthetic education, which many other aestheticians either seldom or never concerned themselves about. Hence, limited theories exist on aesthetic appreciation, or the utilitarian function of the arts.

The inspiration and ultimate purpose of Schiller's work on aesthetic education lay in his concern about the wholeness of humanity and its all-round development. Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, and Zhu Guangqian, on the other hand, while they also touched upon the whole development of mankind and the perfection of human nature, paid much more attention to aesthetic appreciation and the social value of the arts, stressing the effect of aesthetic education in purifying people's mind and soul and emotions, and advocating the importance of cultivating Chinese humane moral virtue. While Western scholars separated artistic appreciation from moral development, the above-mentioned Chinese scholars, recognizing the independence of aesthetic appreciation, stressed the inner relations between aesthetic appreciation and the cultivation of morals in order to highlight the ultimate goal of enhancing people's moral virtues via aesthetic education. This phenomenon should not only capture our attention but also prompt us to ponder further: What were the reasons that guided these scholars to be so focused on and devoted to advocating functional values underpinning aesthetic appreciation and the arts, as well as aesthetic education?

As a founding member of modern Chinese aesthetics, Wang Guowei once proposed the well-known principles of "independence of arts, as well as academics," and the "uselessness" of the arts, which were cited again and again by later scholars. But the purpose of Wang's research in aesthetics, at a more fundamental level, was to solve the life miseries of the people, which, to use his own words, "came from 'desire.'" He asked, "What's the nature of life? 'Desire' ruins all."<sup>[1]</sup> With desire, a person becomes miserable, so desire, suffering and life were one. A person's desire not only produced miseries for the people, but also constituted the roots of all evils in society. "Why people are so busy with working day and night? Endless? This is all because of selfish desires. Once a person is born, he will have desire; with desire, he has to pursue; in order to pursue, he has to be concerned about obtaining; when he obtains things, he becomes obsessive; when he loses, he becomes miserable: All people are the same. ... Avoiding suffering is joy; liking the gains makes him afraid of losing/dying; fear prompts fights: In this regard, all people are the same. So, when a person's heart is not satisfied, this is inner misery; the outer misery is societal evils. However, nothing seems to eliminate this evil wanting; is there any other means that can kill this desire? Some say: Yes, that is "the beauty"<sup>[2]</sup>.

The above citation from Wang explicitly suggests that aesthetics and aesthetic education can eliminate people's "thought of interests" and the isolation among people, thus to alleviate human suffering, and kill, in part, societal evils. He further elaborates on his vision of aesthetic appreciation: "This is the vision: no hope, no fear, no in-fight, no interests, no others, no me; this is the principle of becoming moral through no constraint. When a person can do this, he enters the saint's

gate; then society becomes a heavenly country.”[3] Wang acknowledged that “uselessness” was the unique function of aesthetic appreciation and the value of the arts. So, he promoted aesthetic education: “Alas, our country is not an arts’ country. All the studies have one big course running through. When offering a course of study, we have to ask whether it has its usefulness or not; when we do a thing, we also ask whether it would benefit anyone. ... But the beauty as a thing, nobody wants! Do you know that the usefulness of uselessness is far superior to usefulness of usefulness? No wonder, no wonder!”[4]

The inspiration behind Wang Guowei’s emphasis on aesthetic appreciation and the arts lay in their utilitarianism or social value. He recognized the evil nature of people, claiming that selfish desire and materialism were the roots of human suffering and social evils, and the best medicine is to transcend being concerned with “personal interests” through artistic appreciation and the arts, i.e. aesthetic education. This philosophy of Wang’s laid the foundation for modern Chinese aesthetics with aesthetic utilitarianism as its most distinctive characteristic, which is still quite influential even today.

In early twentieth-century China, the most prominent scholar of aesthetics was no other than Cai Yuanpei. On May 10, 1919, Cai resigned from the presidency of Peking University, took a train from Tianjin southward. On the train, he met an acquaintance, with whom he had a conversation, which serves to expose Cai’s real motivation for studying aesthetics and promoting aesthetic education. Cai Yuanpei revealed that he had to resign from the school in order to protect “innocent students.” When asked “What are you going to do now?,” Cai answered,

I first will go back to my hometown and pay a visit to my brother. Then I will find a secluded place, and close the door without seeing any guests. Then, I will review German, French, and study English. I will also spend half a day every day to translate and write notes on a history of Western Aesthetics; and do the same with a few other well-known books on aesthetics. This is what I can do for our country. Although largely caused by corrupt government and the evil doings of politicians and militants, I believe the roots of our country’s problems, lie with the short-sightedness of so many people who want quick successes or quick money without any higher moral thinking. The only medicine is aesthetic education.[5]

These were Cai Yuanpei’s thoughts after experiencing huge social changes of the era. In his opinion, “wanting quick success and quick money without any high moral thoughts” constituted the core of the country’s problem at the time, and this problem could only be solved through aesthetic education. This was not merely a one-off thought, but rather inspired his thinking all throughout his life. For example, in his 1915 *Outline of Philosophy*, he wrote, “The swan of mankind nowadays recognized by all is nothing but humanism, ... The biggest hindrance of humanism is selfishness, and the

aesthetic, with its transcendence and universality, is just the right medicine.”<sup>[6]</sup> In the 1920 autobiography, he expressed similar ideas, “...aesthetic education should be promoted. That is because all human evils derive from selfishness. Arts can transcend selfish desires, and have a universal quality.”<sup>[7]</sup> In the above quotes, Cai clearly expressed, 1) The idea that roots of human nature lie in selfish desires and wanting quick success; 2) To cure this social illness, aesthetic education is used through aesthetic appreciation; 3) The reason why aesthetic education can have such unique healing effect lies in its transcendental universality.

Cai’s ideology was inherited by Zhu Guangqian, who wrote at the beginning of *Aesthetics Explained*,

I believe firmly that the reason why Chinese society is in such a mess is not due to its systems; it is because the hearts of most people are bad. I believe strongly that emotions are more important than rationality. To clean people’s hearts, a few words from some moralists will not be enough. Instead, we must start with ‘cultivating the mind and soul of people, setting up higher and purer life goals other than just being rich, having clothes, or holding high government positions. To purify a person’s mind we must first beautify a person’s life.<sup>[8]</sup>

*Aesthetics Explained* was written in 1932, after the “9.18 Japanese Invasion,” and “12.8 Incident.” Zhu himself said that was “a crisis year” for China. But he also said that to talk to the youth about beauty, is to save their souls. He even complained that “The worst root problem of our Chinese nationality lies in putting too much emphasis on personal selves and homes” which led to scattered sand in the whole society, rather than unity and strength; Chinese people were all suffering from “the psychological disease of selfishness without shame.”<sup>[9]</sup> And in order to cure this disease, no other means than aesthetic appreciation and arts could do the job, because only people could go beyond selfishness and materialism and learn to appreciate arts, and then people’s minds could be purified.

Liang Qichao, though not directly citing western aesthetic theories, inherited the “usefulness of uselessness” from Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and singled out this philosophy as a necessary visionary perspective. He argued that people should abandon being overly concerned about personal interests and do things based on the soul’s “intuition” and “passion.” He explained that the concept of “usefulness of uselessness-ism” was “the artisticalized life, replacing mankind’s selfish interests with the arts and emotional-ism.”<sup>[10]</sup> He also focused on Chinese people’s “selfishness” and “materialism,” and advocated the use of artistic spirituality to overcome personal desires. From this line of thinking, Liang proposed “interesting” education, similar to aesthetic education.

A crucially important aesthetic question arises from the above discussions: Since using arts and aesthetic appreciation to “get rid of selfish desires” was part of the thinking of all of the above mentioned famous scholars, from where exactly did they find inspiration and come to realize the utilitarian function of

the arts and aesthetic appreciation?

From the history of modern Chinese aesthetics, Wang Guowei's writings in the beginning of the twentieth century (1903-1908) first clearly elaborated on "beauty," "aesthetic appreciation," and "arts" as something beyond personal interests, or disinterestedness. In his article, "Confucius and His Aesthetic Education," Wang points out that mankind's misery came from "desire," desire led to wanting, and wanting resulted in over-concerns about interests or material gains, which, in turn, produced inner misery, and which, in a society, were evils. Therefore, in order to eliminate misery and societal evils, the "desire" must first be eradicated, and the best medicine for the eradication of desire is "beauty." Then he continued to elaborate on the reasons behind the above thinking: "What is beauty? This is something that does not have an interest value to us. When a person is appreciating beauty, he does not know this action will lead to any direct interest for himself. The great philosopher in Germany, Immanuel Kant, believes that the pleasure of beauty is Disinterested Pleasure."[\[11\]](#)

The "disinterestedness" discussed here resembles what Kant discussed in *The Critique of Judgment*: Aesthetic appreciation does not involve interests and the pleasure derived from aesthetic appreciation is disinterested pleasure. However, Wang continued to claim that both natural beauty and man-made beauty could "enable people to reach the state of desirelessness," which led to the topic of aesthetic education. He maintained that in the west since Aristotle, scholars all promoted aesthetic education to supplement moral education. In addition, he thus explained Schiller's theory of aesthetic education that "when exposed to beauty, a person's emotions are enhanced, thus gradually distances themselves from vulgarity, shallowness, and negativity. ... Because aesthetic appreciation leads to a high spiritual state of disinterestedness, material desires would die, leading to the birth of morality."[\[12\]](#)

The key here is that the disinterestedness as a psychological and consciousness state somehow is changed into the function of aesthetic appreciation or beauty. Kant's original meaning was that pleasure brought about by aesthetic appreciation did not have a connection to the awareness of interests, but in Wang's article, it was changed into aesthetic appreciation transforming minds beyond personal interests, and therefore liberating them from material or physical desires, thus entering a moral high ground of desirelessness. Then, Wang used the same reasoning to read and explain Confucian "(learning) starts with poetry, develops into etiquette, and ends with music," from which Wang came to the conclusion that "in teaching, (we should) start with and end in aesthetic education."[\[13\]](#) This misreading of disinterestedness, consciously or unconsciously, became the basis for aesthetic education, which transformed a theory of aesthetics into a theory of aesthetic education. It is worth noting that, since then, Chinese aesthetics has inherited and continued to promote Wang's understanding, in effect, taking this line of thinking as given. Of course, when philosophies and theories experience cross-cultural encounters, some misinterpretations may be unavoidable. The question is: What were the cultural and philosophical motivations behind this misreading? This is

what I shall explore next.

## **2. The inner relationship between aesthetic utilitarianism and the Confucian mind-soul framework**

Modern Chinese aesthetics accentuated the refining and purifying effect on human minds and emotions through aesthetic education. This refers specifically to reforming national consciousness leading to the rejuvenation of the whole nation. This kind of aesthetic thought followed traditional Confucian ideology, from its *Great Learning – Notes*,

The great learning aims at bringing out people's virtues, fostering reformation among people, and helping people reach the ideal world. ... In ancient times, those who wanted to promote and endorse people of honesty, integrity and high morals, must first govern well their own countries. In order to govern well their own countries, they must first manage well their own families and relatives. In order to manage well their own families and relatives, they must first cultivate and enhance their own morals and spirituality. In order to cultivate and enhance their own morals and spirituality, they must first institute the right mindset. In order to institute the right mindset, they must be honest. In order to be honest, they must attain clear thinking. ... Only after exploring the reasons and roots behind things can a person reach clear thinking; only with clear thinking can a person become honest; only with honesty, can a person have the right mindset; only with the right mindset can a person enhance his morals and spirituality; only with high morals and spirituality can he manage well his family; only after managing well his family can he govern well his country; only after governing well his country can he keep the world safe and peaceful.<sup>[14]</sup>

This is the well-known "Three Cardinal Guides" and "Eight Items." In the Three Cardinal Guides, "advocating high virtuous people" is the core. The "Eight Items" are all about one central idea: personal moral enhancement.<sup>[15]</sup> In other words, the central core of Confucian philosophy was the development of personal morality, which constituted both the foundation and the purpose of everything. In Song-Ming Neo-Confucian theory, this philosophical approach has become synonymous detailed elaborations. Therefore, the "disinterestedness" of the modern western aesthetics attracted the attention and discussion of the above-mentioned Chinese aestheticians – their emphasis on aesthetics was not for the purpose of perceptual knowledge, nor understanding the nature of "beauty" and "arts." Instead, they wanted to use the functions of aesthetic appreciation and arts to "correct" thinking and enhance morality, and ultimately reform the nation's people mentality. In this sense, aesthetics was transformed into aesthetic education theory, with much more emphasis on its utilitarian function in reforming society than western aesthetic education would suggest. Underpinning this approach were traditional theories of mind and soul, especially the Lu-Wang mind-soul theory.

The theory of mind and soul was formed during the Song and Ming dynasties, "created by Cheng Hao, and completed by Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming"[16] While Lu and Wang did have differences in their theories, they both acknowledged the existence of prior mind- soul, namely "mind-soul is Li (理, reason)" (Lu Jiuyuan), "Outside of mind-soul, there is no Li (理, reason)" (Wang Yangming), and they both proposed developing the spiritual and moral high ground as a way to expose the mind-soul, which, in its original state, fostered "humanity, justice, propriety, and wisdom." Chen Lai thus commented, "Lu Jiuyuan believed that any man has prior morals and reason, which he called the original mind-soul, which acted as a moral guide, inspired moral feelings, and therefore could be understood as a humanistic mind-soul (This may affect the original translation but it does make more sense in English). Because man was born with this mind-soul, it is the conscious that he knows without concern and does without learning. All of mankind's immoralities are caused by "losing this initial mind-soul," therefore, all learning should focus on protecting this initial mind-soul in order not to lose it." [17] The source of immoral actions was "selfish desire" or egoism. Therefore, all the efforts should be devoted to eradicate this selfish desire, which was elaborated by Wang Yangming.

Wang said, "Human heart-soul is heaven, and root. The initial heart-soul encompasses everything which embodies heaven originally, but it is now concealed by selfish desires, and thus loses its heaven. The *li* of heart-soul is the bottom of the valley, which is now filled with selfish desires. Therefore, we now plead to the conscience, getting rid of the concealment, then, the initial heart-soul is restored, and heaven and bottom are back to their original state." [18] Here Wang expressed three layers of meaning: One: human heart-soul is *li*; Two: human heart-soul is concealed by selfish desires, leading to the loss of morals; and Three: pleading to the conscience is for the purpose of eradicating this hindrance of selfish desires so that the initial heart-soul can be restored. In short, what Wang Yangming's philosophy of mind advocates is knowledge and action two-in-one state of mind, to reach conscience.

Because of their explicit connection of "heart-soul" is *li* (reason), emphasizing the domineering function of the heart-soul, the Lu-Wang School of thought and logic naturally use the internal motive (motivation) as the base on which to make moral judgment. Chen Lai, when discussing Lu Jiuyuan's concept of "just judgment," thus commented,

Lu Jiuyuan believed that judging whether a person is moral (a gentleman) or immoral (a villain) should not be based only on whether this person's actions were in accordance to some guidelines or rules; instead, we should investigate this person's inner motive, and make a judgment concerning whether his actions were based on moral standards because only actions based on moral standards can be called moral. This is what the "just judgment" means. "Yi" is moral motivation while "Li" is selfish motivation. Lu Jiuyuan believed that if the motivation were moral, then the actions would be opposed to egoism. In other words, moral standards are



complete opposites of egoism. Therefore, what the “Yi and Li debate” needed to resolve was not eliminating any actions that were intended to make contributions. For example, in Confucian thought, activities/actions to enrich people and strengthen the country should not be eliminated; what must be eliminated is selfish motivation.<sup>[19]</sup>

The above line of argument stresses the importance of purity of motivation, which was most obviously presented in Wang Yangming’s works. He pointed out explicitly: “Here I declare: In today’s scholarly pursuits, knowing and doing are two separate things, so there may be a thought, which is not moral, but because it is not put into practice, then no prohibition takes place. I today claim the ‘knowing-doing as one’ theory, which means that as soon as a person initiates a thought, this is action. If this initiation is not moral, then we must defeat this immoral thought, and do it thoroughly, and completely eradicate that thought from the mind. This is my declaration of the principle.”<sup>[20]</sup> Here, Wang Yangming required those who were learning that immoral motivation be eliminated as soon as it appeared; otherwise there would be no conscience, and so no moral actions. In addition, in Wang’s thinking, “Li” (reason) is also achieved in the heart-mind. Out of filial piety, you would be concerned about your parents’ living conditions (too cold or too hot), “This is the condition of your pious heart and soul. In other words, you must first have pious heart and soul before this condition comes into action.”<sup>[21]</sup> In Wang’s mind, a person must first have a moral heart, which enacts moral emotions, which leads to moral actions. Once this moral heart was concealed by “selfish desires,” even when those pious actions were done, they were hypocritical actions, which would not lead to moral perfection. Chen thus commented, “... regardless of how perfect the manner and etiquette are, the moral motivation (in heart and soul) is true moral perfection. ...In Wang’s mind, the philosophy of no ‘Li’ outside of the heart-soul puts emphasis on no ‘morality’ beyond heart-soul. Having moral awareness of moral motivation is the root of morality, therefore, good behavior/action does not come from the external but from the internal, and judgment of behavior or thinking should both focus on exploring the inner root.”<sup>[22]</sup>

Based on the above philosophy, Wang accentuated the importance of “integrity” which confirmed Xunzi’s “integrity before morality.” He said, “some stressed efforts of ‘integrity/honesty’: integrity is the heart-soul itself; the process of restoring it is the efforts of being honest. ...*Great Learning* advocated ‘honesty/integrity’ being the precursor of ‘the correct heart-soul.’”<sup>[23]</sup> In other words, the whole personal enhancement lies in this “integrity,” because this “integrity” is what Wang Yangming’s “initiator of thoughts” meant, which was also the core of enhancement efforts. On the one hand, “integrity” is the true heart-mind itself; on the other, it is also a thought, a motivation, and an attitude. So, it connects to knowing and doing. Only with high morals initiating honest motivation and attitude could there be true moral words and behavior. The “thinking honesty” is the opposite of “personal desire,” or selfish desires. Therefore, “thinking honesty” was to eliminate “personal desire,” eradicate selfish desire, and

egoism.

At this point in the discussion, it is evident that in modern Chinese aesthetics, aesthetic utilitarianism has clear inner connections with the Confucian framework of mind and soul. First, both are theories that privilege values, focusing not on the subjects per se, but how they obtain and realize these values and their significance. Li Zehou thus remarked, "In Chinese philosophical debates, there have not been many focusing on issues of 'being' or 'ideas'; rather the focus has been on 'how', which is really a major characteristic of Chinese applied Neo Confucian philosophy. Its angle, pathway, problems, discourse, as well as ways of thinking are nothing like Greek philosophy."<sup>[24]</sup> In this way, modern Chinese aesthetics, while partially influenced by western aesthetic theories, draws upon their concepts, aesthetic appreciation, and values affecting human beings. But they also focus on the wholeness of personal spirituality, especially the functions and values needed to develop moral personalities. Hence, modern Chinese aesthetic theories are, on the whole, still localized, both in relation to the theoretical framework and methods of contemplation.

Second, the development of moral personality is central to the Confucian framework of mind and soul and modern Chinese aesthetics. From the Confucian perspective, this is known as "inner-sageization." This relates to the philosophy of the mind. Modern Chinese aesthetic studies is also concerned with examining moral personality and the moral and spiritual high ground. Scholars such as Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, and Zhu Guangqian all regarded aesthetic education as the path to character and moral education. Even Zhu, who was most influenced by western thought, studied diligently to prove the inner connection between aesthetic appreciation and moral enhancement.<sup>[25]</sup> As to Liang Qichao's Interested-ness-ism, he actually directly attributed it to moral "responsibility," rather than a morality problem.

Third, for the purpose of the development of moral personality, both the Confucian framework of mind and soul and modern Chinese aesthetics pay attention to the means of curing the inner disease of the people, viewing it as the fundamental way towards rejuvenating the nation. Wang Yangming, in his Response to Nie Wenwei, argued directly,

Later generations did not know much about the enhancement of the conscience, instead they were involved in infighting for personal selfish gain. They all have their own selfish hearts with shallow and narrow biases, using insidious and phony techniques. They are too many to mention. On the outside, they would claim that they were kind hearted, but behind the scenes they would do things that were nothing but egoistic, vulgar and pretentious. They are good at back stabbing and robbing others' for their own gain, but poor at fair competition and good morals; they become dangerous at slandering others and pretend to hate evils, yet they are jealous of the talented as being self-righteous, and prefer decadent self-indulgence. They curse, and steal, even from their

own families, without feeling remorse in their own backyards. This world is just so huge with so many people, so how can we view it as one entity? Then no wonder the country is fragmented, with endless evils and disasters! This humble person sincerely prays to the heaven and saints: please have you seen conscience? Because only after we become morally enhanced can the society be saved.[26]

These thoughts were echoed everywhere in the writings on aesthetic education by Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao and Zhu Guanqian. In addition, both the Confucian framework of mind and soul and modern Chinese aesthetics attributed the societal evils to "selfish desires." Wang Yangming thus remarked,

The hearts of some villains are already so segregated and close-minded that no kindness can enlighten them. Even those who have not acted upon their own selfish desires, they never cared to hide them anyway. When they acted upon those desires, they would hide their own possessions, attack others, making others furious, then they would do anything and everything, including killing and hurting their own family members. This is where conscience has died. So, those without selfish desires, while they may have narrow minds, can still practice kindness and thus become "big" people. Those with selfish desires, though self-important, are just narrow-minded villains. Therefore, "big" people are just those who have eliminated selfish desires, demonstrated bright morality, and restored the heaven-world as one, nothing more. They cannot add anything more to anything outside of the mind.[27]

Feng Youlan thus commented on these remarks, "Neo Confucianism often regards 'selfish desires' as the villain, and also as the roots of all evils." [28] This line of thinking has had a great impact on modern Chinese aesthetics. Its ultimate goal is to exterminate "selfish desires," whether it is argued from the perspective of the philosophy of mind, or from the modern aesthetic education. These two perspectives even use similar language in their descriptions of selfish desires or discussions of this mental disease among Chinese people, drawing upon similar characteristics, for example, "selfish interests," "utilitarianism" (Lu Jiuyuan), "selfish desires," "egoism" (Wang Yangming), "desires," "self-interests" (Wang Guowei), "ego-centrism," "desire for quick money," "selfish and self-interests" (Cai Yuanpei), "selfish desires," "material desires," "calculation" (Liang Qichao), and "selfishness." "vulgarity" (Zhu Guanqian), and so on. From these examples we can find that modern Chinese aesthetic utilitarianism, with its focus on issues of the mind, not only has much in common with, but also is the continuation of, the Confucius framework of mind and soul.

Fourth, both philosophies believe that the process of eradicating selfish desires is actually the pathway towards the

purification of the mind or emotions. The Lu-Wang school proposes either the discovery of the original heart and soul, or the restoration of the initial mind through the direct or intuitive methods of expelling impurity. For example, Lu Jiuyuan's method of self-enhancement is to "sit quietly to let the mind purify,"<sup>[29]</sup> while Wang Yangming believes that "the shape of mind" is somewhat too vague or too unsteady, so the self enhancement efforts should focus on getting rid of the concealment of selfish desires. He believes that the same is true with emotions, "happiness, fury, sadness, fear, love, disgust, desire are seven kinds of emotions, and everyone has these seven emotions, but the important thing is to make the conscience aware. ... The seven kinds of emotions in their natural state can all be utilized by the conscience. While they may not know the difference between good and evil, they do not have impurity. When emotions have impurity they become desire and will conceal the conscience, which will then be covered and disappear. If this can be 'broken,' then it will become simple and transparent."<sup>[30]</sup> This is to say that the seven kinds of emotions themselves are not good or evil, but once there are wants, then "desires"<sup>[31]</sup> emerge, which become "the concealment of the conscience" and must be eliminated. Motivation without actions must also be eliminated. Only through this can a person restore inner fluidity. Modern Chinese aesthetics is the same: Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao all discussed aesthetic education and interestedness, with the purpose of eliminating desire from emotions, which will become purified, noble, without personal impurity or practical purpose, thus transforming into pure emotions.

Here, we have found the deep academic and cultural reasons for the misreading of Kant's "disinterestedness" by the modern Chinese aestheticians. The above discussions have explained that Kant's "disinterestedness" is the method of awareness in aesthetics, i.e. aesthetic appreciation and judgment does not involve the consideration of interests; rather this is a description or a general phenomenon of the state of sensibility. But Wang Guowei and other modern Chinese aestheticians take this disinterestedness as the function within aesthetic appreciation itself. In other words, aesthetic appreciation can help people rid themselves of egoistic thinking, transcend beyond personal emotions, and enter into a state of purity and nobility. Thus, on the one hand, disinterestedness in aesthetic appreciation has become the special function of beauty and arts, and on the other hand the subjects of such experience are transformed into humans who are selfless, desire-less in their life with the right attitude and motivation awareness. From the viewpoints of the philosophy of mind and soul, this kind of aesthetic theory seems to take aesthetic education as an enlightenment process of restoring the original mind, and enhancing emotions and morals. It is rooted in western aesthetic "disinterestedness," but its deep layers of philosophical and cultural meaning lie squarely with the Chinese traditional philosophical theory of the mind and soul.

The above discussions reveal why at the beginning of twentieth century, the first generation of modern Chinese scholars chose to study aesthetics. In addition to inheriting the Confucian framework of mind and soul, modern Chinese aesthetics has focused on the inner integration of aesthetic appreciation with

morality, aesthetic education and moral education as the necessary pathway towards reaching the moral high ground. First proposed by Kant, and later elaborated upon by Schiller, some scholars still argue for the independence of aesthetic appreciation and the arts. However, these Western philosophers do not discuss personal enhancement and their perspectives on the question of aesthetics are quite different from morality, or from the morals as explained in the theory of the mind and soul. However, the superficial connection between aesthetic appreciation with moral enhancement motivated the first generation of Chinese scholars to elect to study and introduce into China aesthetic theories from the west. This false connection further formed the basis for their own aesthetic studies as well as their promotion of aesthetic education. In short, the above two explanations reveal the modern inheritance from and continuation of the traditional Confucius theory of mind and soul.

From the above discussions, although the problems facing modern Chinese aesthetic theories, especially concerning the utilitarianism of aesthetic appreciation, were very different from the issues that traditional Confucius theory of mind and soul sought to solve, the former did use, directly or indirectly, the terminology and discourse of traditional aesthetic theories. The cores of both traditional and modern theoretical orientations are remarkably similar. Through the careful analysis of the philosophical thought of Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao and Zhu Guangqian, we can see clear evidence of the inheritance and continuation of the Confucius framework of mind and soul. Their aesthetic theories exhibit, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, connections with the traditional philosophy of the mind and soul. Even when the research methods of some aestheticians may show more similarities with the Qian-Jia School of Thought, in the area of values and concerns about societal problems, these modern Chinese aestheticians certainly demonstrated their passion for the Confucius theory of mind and soul.

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#### Endnotes

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[1] Guowei Wang, *On the Dreams of the Red Chamber*, edited by Yao Xinming & Wang Yan, *Collected Works of Wang Guowei*, Volume 1, (Beijing: China Academic and History Press, 1997), p. 2.

[2] Guowei Wang, *Confucius & His Aesthetic Education*. Yao edited by Yao Xinming, Wang Yan, *Collected Works of Wang Guowei*, Volume 3 (Beijing: China Academic and History Press, 1997), p. 155.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 157-159.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[5] Cai Yuanpei, "Conversations at the Tianjing Railway Station," Cai Yuanpei Research Institute, *Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei*, Volume 3, (Hangzhou, Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education Publishing House, 1997), p. 630.

[6] Cai Yuanpei, "Outline of Philosophy," Cai Yuanpei Research Institute, *Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei*, Volume 2, (Hangzhou, Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education Publishing House, 1997), p. 340.

[7] Cai Yuanpei, "Autobiography," Cai Yuanpei Research Institute, *Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei*, Volume 3, (Hangzhou, Zhejiang: Zhejiang Education Publishing House, 1997), p. 674.

[8] See Zhu Guangqian, "Aesthetics Explained," Zhu Guangqian Complete Works Editorial Board, *Complete Works of Zhu Guangqian*, Volume 2, (Anhui: Anhui Education Publishing House, 1993), p. 6.

[9] Guangqian Zhu, *Socrates in China – On Chinese Nationality and Chinese Culture's Weaknesses*. Zhu Guangqian Complete Works Editorial Board, *Complete Works of Zhu Guangqian*, Volume 9, (Anhui: Anhui Education Publishing House, 1993), pp. 298-300.

[10] Qichao Liang, *On "Doing What Is Known Undoable"-ism and "Usefulness of Not Having"-ism*, Zhang Qingxing (ed.) *Complete Works of Liang Qichao*, (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1999), p. 3415.

[11] Guowei Wang, "Confucius & His Aesthetic Education," p. 155.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[14] *Great Learning – Notes, Thirteen Classics* (Zhejiang: Zhejiang Ancient Works Publishing House, 1998), p. 1673.

[15] Feng Youlan thus commented, according to later Confucius scholars, the Three Cardinal Guides really have only one core guide, and that is bringing out and advocate highly virtuous people. "Reformation" was actually the method of "bringing out and advocate virtuous people." "Reaching the moral perfection" is the ultimate goal. This is true with the "Eight Items," all pointing to one core: "enhance and cultivate personal morals and spirituality." All the other items are the steps of personal enhancement. The so-called "reaching perfection" is the ultimate goal. A person can perfect his morals only after he has served the society, in other words, a person cannot help others until he has perfected himself. In short, here "advocating people of high virtues" means

“personal moral and spiritual enhancement. These concepts combined are the central core of Confucius. (See Feng Youlan, *A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy*, (Beijing: Beijing University Press), p. 155).

[16] Feng Youlan, *A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy*, (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2010), p. 247.

[17] Chen Lai, *Song-Ming Neo Confucianism* (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2011), p. 207.

[18] Wang Yangming, *Instructional Notes*, Volume 2, annotated by Wu Guang et al. *Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Ancient Works, 2011), p. 109.

[19] Chen Lai, *Song-Ming Neo Confucianism*, (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2011), p. 226.

[20] Wang Yangming, *Instructional Notes*, pp. 109-110.

[21] Wang Yangming, pp. 285-286.

[22] Chen Lai, *Song-Ming Neo Confucianism*, pp. 285-286.

[23] Wang Yangming, *Instructional Notes*, p. 40.

[24] Li Zehou, *Analects of Confucius – A Today's Interpretation*, (Tianjing: Tianjing Social Sciences Press, 2007), p. 39.

[25] I discussed this issue in *The utilitarianism of aesthetic appreciation: on the researches of modern Chinese aesthetic education*, Section Two, Chapter 4.

[26] Wang Yangming, *Instructional Notes*, p. 90.

[27] Wang Yangming, *Great Knowledge*, Volume 2, annotated by Wu Guang et al. *Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Ancient Works, 2011), pp. 1066-1067.

[28] Feng Youlan, *Life Philosophy*, (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), p. 143.

[29] Zhu Xi, *Quotations of Zhu Xi*, (Beijing: China Book Bureau, 1986), p. 1264.

[30] Wang Yangming, *Instructional Notes*, Volume 2, annotated by Wu Guang et al. *Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Ancient Works, 2011), p. 126.

[31] In explaining Wang Yangming's emotion theory, Zhang Dainian thus remarked, “having emotions without the heart means emotions are for the material things but not for the self, then there is no harm.... When the emotions ‘attach’ to the self, then anger arises. If there is anger, but no selfishness, it is still not desire.” Zhang Dainian, *Outline of Chinese Philosophy*, (Nanjing: Jiangsu Education Press, 2005), p. 430.