

No Dream, No Future: A Study on Aesthetic Dimensions of “Chinese Dream” and the Task of Literary Critics*

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This article believes that “Chinese Dream” has three dimensions: First, “Chinese Dream” is the inevitable demands of Chinese reconstruction and it is the deepest desire of Chinese nation since the Chinese modern history. Second, the modernism of socialism with Chinese feature is the process of Chinese modernism. Third, the third theoretical dimension, I believe, is the ideal of socialism. I would like to take the film “Lost” and “Peking Monk” as examples and analyze the specific form of expression. This article is going to indicate in the end that “the revolution of aesthetics” and the assignments of critics, which can be recognized as the intuitive ability, could merge the historical affair and the human nature, which literature comprise, together and deliver deeper analyses and appraise. The mission of critics is not only to distinctly emerge the aesthetic form of the literal works, but also analyze and seize the “aesthetic form” of them, that is to say, their mission is to find the aesthetic meanings of aesthetic expression from commonage in order to achieve the goal of leading and stimulating people ensuing the consciousness and liberation of culture. That is the most important mission and responsibility of Marxist literal criticism and literal critics. This is a rather tough task and refers to the new understanding and attitude to the relative questions of literature and culture. In the eyes of some self-complacent intellectuals, the responsibility for literature and critics is the “aesthetic entertainment” and “spiritual redemption”. The significance of Marxist Aesthetics lies in that it upgrades the general “literal principle” and “aesthetic principle” in to a level of social development and national deliverance, and also it regards whether the literature having the function of cultural liberation as the more pivotal content. The assignment for the critics and litterateurs is to engage and promote the production and promulgate for this significance, the cultural consciousness and liberation.

Keywords: Chinese dream, aesthetic dimensions, the revolution of aesthetics, cultural liberation

The Three Dimensions of Chinese Dream

This September, I went to Yan’an. We visited Fenghuang Mount, Yangjia Ridge, Qingliang Mount, Zao Yard and Wangjia Plain, which were the place of life and work for the top leader of the Central Party. We also went to Nanji Gulf and Hukou Waterfall of Yellow River and gained a deeper and more thorough understanding

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of “Yan’an Spirit”, the special culture of that certain history and the relationship between evolutionary enthusiasm social developments in the process of Chinese modernism. In the museum of Yan’an culture, a short-legged table attracted and shocked me. The guide told me that it is on the simple table Mao Zedong wrote out the influenced and great poem “Snow: to the tune of Chin Yuan Chun”.

In the end of 1935, The Red Army arrived in Shanbei through Long March. At the same time, Beijing (Peking) broke out the “12.9 Student Movement”. During the day from 17th until 25th December, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China hold the The enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau, and formed “The central resolution on military strategy” and “The Central Committee of the CCP about resolution of political situation and the tasks of the party at present”, and then raised The Anti Japanese national united front policy. A new turning of Chinese society was coming. Although the conditions were extremely hard that time, the fresh hope appeared. Mao Zedong, as a sensitive politics, felt this hope and by a simple short-legged table in a farmer’s house in a village of In Northern Shaanxi, wrote the most brilliant poem: “Snow: to the tune of Chin Yuan Chun”

See what the northern countries show:
 Hundreds of leagues ice-bound go;
 Thousands of leagues flies snow.
 Behold! Within and without the Great Wall The boundless land is clad in white,
 And up and down the Yellow River, all The endless waves are lost to sight.
 Mountains like silver serpents dancing, Highlands like waxy elephants advancing,
 All try to match the sky in height.
 Wait till the day is fine
 And see the fair bask in sparkling sunshine, What an enchanting sight!
 Our motherland so rich in beauty
 Has made countless heroes vie to pay her their duty.
 But alas! Qin Huang and Han Wu In culture not well bred,
 And Tang Zong and Song Zu In letters not wide read,
 And Genghis Khan, proud son of Heaven for a day,
 Knew only shooting eagles by bending his bows.
 They have all passed away;
 Brilliant heroes are those, Whom we will see today!

On this poet, many scholars had written down a lot of critics. However, I want to emphasize here that the significant factor of this poem is the affective impulse of Utopia and the ideal of Communism. “They have all passed away; Brilliant heroes are those, Whom we will see today!” These lines not only possess the sense of eminence of Romanticism, but also holds a Value sense of superiority of being beyond history. From the idea and emotion of this poem, it can be concluded that the aesthetics of Mao Zedong contains a deep factor of Romanism. American scholar Ross Trier wrote in his “A Biography of Mao Tsetung”, “Snow is a poem of natural nationalism, and it is the magnificent mountains and rivers enable Mao such a strong idea that the current china was more powerful and great than any other time during the past 4000 years in history. Mao was trying to unite all people to establish the Anti Japanese United Front. His hero dream put china as his highest job and it was in th time when China faced the most critical time, which was even more severe than the time of Genghis Khan.”

In my opinion, Mao’e poem already contains the basic factor of “the Chinese dream” today we tries to establish and that is to make the revival of nationhood as the main goal and regard the realism as the base of the modern society and build the socialism as the aim of the Utopia impulse. These three cultural genes, under the

different history phase, holds different relationship on the emotional structure, however, the deep structure is the same and stable. That is the mutual foundation of various forms of community and political strategy why the Chinese Communist Party could establish “the anti-Japanese national united front”, “To Jiang Jieshi, the liberation of the country” and “The socialist China characteristics, persisting in reform and opening up”. At first appearance, “Chinese Dream” seems like a simply political slogan, however, if it can be seen from the view of the whole development of Chinese nation in modern times, we all find that “Chinese dream” is a conception full of meanings, and is a ideological phenomena filled with Chinese feature. Theoretically, there are three dimensions:

(1) “Chinese Dream” is the inevitable demands of Chinese reconstruction and it is the deepest desire of Chinese nation since the Chinese modern history. The year of 1895 is a very important year in Chinese modern history and The Northern Fleet failed in the Sino Japanese naval battle just in this year. This battle thoroughly changed the self-recognition of Chinese nation. From then on, “Saving China so that it may survive” and “self-changing” became the basic common sense of all Chinese. Nanyang College, which is the predecessor of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, was built just the year after “Jia Wu naval battle” by Qing government and it aimed to train people who are brilliant in the area of management, law, foreign languages and humanities in order to strengthen China. It is certified by History that either the Qing Government or the National Government established after the Chinese bourgeois democratic revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen which overthrew the Qing Dynasty can not save china. The true change came from until the year of 1949, when The People’s Republic of China was established. The revival of China needs a series conditions and during a long time we should put the progress and strength of the material level as the most important position. For example, the epigraph from Sun Zhongshan to SJTU is “Strengthening our country”. Now, it could be seen only the progress and strength of the material level could not establish, straightly, the revival of China. Only socialism can save China, and that is determined by the specialty of Chinese society and culture. Through 100 years working hard and perseveringly, Chinese Social outlook and Economic production capacity changed thoroughly. Take universities as an example, we own the first-class universities and created unbelievable achievement. The great revival of China is own its possibility and, in other words, it is starting to become a reality. Theoretically, it is the real and social foundation of “Chinese Dream”.

(2) The modernism of socialism with Chinese feature is the process of Chinese modernism and it is the second dimension. Modernism is a complicated phenomena and as well as a progress full of contradiction and bitterness. The socialist modernization with China characteristics is a progress of modernization different from the western modernization. This specialty is determined by history as well as culture. Therefore, we should respect fully the history of the whole Chinese Modernity and develop the Positive role of Chinese culture, including the Chinese traditional culture. It is in this sense that the connection of Marxism with Confucianism and Buddhism played a significant effect. The connection of tradition and modernity creates elements which are different from western world, which can be called “Chinese road” or “Chinese experiment”. The chinalization of Marxism also bases on this point. However, we should discover awaked that we spans to a socialist society from a semi feudal and semi colonial society, and we began the construction of socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics only after the the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. As a matter of fact, the theory it referred is

quite complicated and needs further study. We could interpret and explain this modernization with Chinese characteristics in the view of sociology, economics and politics. Scholars have done such kind of research, however, this article tries to expand on the terms of Aesthetics. From the view of Aesthetics, the progress of modernization is a phenomenon of "Modern Tragedy", and furthermore, people have to bear the spallation from reality and stand the force and barbarity in the sake of development and progress. As regard to the human being, if they are urging to the development as well as criticizing the bitterness brought by the mode of production of the capitalism, they have to make their own thoughts in the terms of ethic and sprite. Documentally, Marx and Engels made the explanation in two texts: one lies in the "Hegel's Philosophy Comment Preamble" and there Marx indicates that "when the old institution still holds its power to the world and the freedom is still the sudden thoughts from the individual, that is to say, when the old system itself still believes its rationality, its history is tragedy. When the old institution still struggles with the mew world as the present world system, the mistake made by it is the world- history mistake, instead of individual one. Therefore, the extinction of old institution is tragic." Another documents lies in the discussion on Ferdinand Lassalle (a socialism theorist and dramatist)'s work, and Engels points out straightforwardly in the letter to Lassalle and regards the "conflicts between the historical certain claim and the impossibility of its achievement" as the root of tragedy in fact, it is not the mistake made just because of the hero's intellect or ethics, and still it is not because of the craft used as a tool to fulfill the aim. Marx uses the phase of "Modern Tragedy". The tragedy of modern history lies in that the history itself is a combination of rationality and in-rationality, and it is the contradiction-unification of the new and the old, the progress and the lagged. Besides, "history is no more than the activity of alive people pursuing there own aims." As the subject of history, human being is the undertaker of historical tragedy. Therefore, in the eyes of Marxism, the modern tragedy is not only the revolution or abstract of history; it is full of humanity and meanings. History is neither the mystery of fate, nor the ration-God. It is the relationship of staggered realities and it fixes the limitation of history and subjects. Furthermore, it could be called as a tragedy, also because it is a kind of certainty and it always points to the ration, progress and affirmation. History always advanced with the "evil" and humanity gets its exceeding from the negation and limitation. We should recognize that Williams and Eagleton developed their tragedy ideas from Marx and Engels' tragedy conception. The Marxism tragedy could awake people from the reality and cause any unidirectional value judgment into superficiality. Furthermore, the bitterness is the testimony of human's subjection, which is a meditation and critics for the hedonism of the post-modernization. However, it should be emphasized all the time, Marxism Aesthetics is not the ethics criticism, and it is the compassion to the "Mundane World", because the tragedy's bitterness and struggle indicates the "evil" and kindness of each individual. Due to the extra emphasis on the materialism and the progresses, during the procedure of Chinese modernization, "evil" and the inhumanities are mistaken as the good and the benefit.

Over the passed one hundred years, although China went through the social environment with most tragic implication, owning the profound tragic masterpiece, in the theory we are lack of deep discussion on tragedy, tragedility. This phenomenon deserves attention and ponders from the academia.

(3) Third, the third theoretical dimension, I believe, is the ideal of socialism. In another words, it can be named as the ideal of socialism. There is a significant conception in the Marxist tradition and it is the pursuing to

human's ideal society and it refers to ultimate concern and metaphysics. The meanings of life will be different with or without this concern and aim. Referred to the relationship between the “Chinese Dream” and the “Utopia”, or between the “Utopia” and the “cultural construction of Socialism with Chinese characteristics”, it is should be realized that there are a lot of theoretical works to do, due to the current mistakes and chaos. If these chaos and mistakes can not be clarified, the understanding of Chinese dream will remain sacrificial.

It is true to say that the Marxism is the precious deposits. The Marxist Aesthetics can surely be recognized as the self-examination for the current reality and arts. However, it is not omnipotent or sole. Especially for the time and culture Chinese people faced, the most signification of the Marxist Aesthetics is the value we can self-fell, in stead of the outer life or tradition, even or the abstract ration or judgment to the mortal beings.

The philosophy before Marx, from Plato to Feuerbach, indicates to the meditation of ration, however, Marxism inducts a dimension for the “future”. The history is not merely abstract, but a specific procedure brought by subject practice. Therefore, Marx got his famous lines: “The philosopher merely explains the world, but the most important thing is to change the world.” The ideal of Communism, which takes “human's libration and freedom” as its goal, surpass the limitation of Capitalism and as well do not fall into the simple conceit. It keeps as a procedure of practice in current world and the procedure can be divided into two ways. One is the demission for the future and the other is the animadverting to the passed. Therefore, Marxism, in the dimension of the future, does not “design a kitchen for future”, as the utopian socialism does. They make the reality as the foundation and take part in the reformation of society, which differentiates from the romantic and abstract Utopia. In this sense, Ernst Bloch named is as specific Utopia. Jameson also regarded Marxism as a kind of “Utopia Project”. Under the belief of the future being “the nature of objects” and “possibilities of existence”, Jameson inherited Marxist Historical dialectics and developed a negative Utopia ideology, which keeps distance from the reality. Alike, out of the positive affirmation, Eagleton directly pointed out that Marxism is a developed ethic or Utopian theory of socialism, rather than the materialism.

The German philosophy Jaspers described the non-spiral life of modern people, in his book the spirit of the times condition, as “this time comes finally: in the world of individual's direct and real life, there is nothing made by the individual himself for his own purpose. Everything comes for temporary need and is thrown after use. The environment turns non-spiritual. Day work goes its own way, no longer being part of life of the worker. All these indicate that people lose their own world. Human are thrown into a situation of vagrancy and lose the emotion which can connect the passed and the future. Human are no longer human. The generalization of this life order will bring severe outcome and that is to turn the real life of human beings into a kind of implementation.” The European scene in 1930's described by Jaspers is happened and felt by every individual at the present time. To sum up, the contribution of Marxism, or Marxist Aesthetics, lies in that it indexes the tragic concept and indicates the possibility of a better world. It is the possibility of re-being public discourse for the Marxist Aesthetics in this era full of anxiety for the future.

To sum up, in my opinion, the connotation of Chinese Dream can be understood in three dimensions. They are closely connected and the third one is the core and foundation. This is why Chairman Xi insists on the emphasis on the study of Marxism. As a Marxist, the courage is needed to believe in Marxism and the wisdom is also needed to develop Marxist Aesthetics under the condition of globalization.

“Country and City”: An Example of “Chinese Dream”

It is a little strange to contact the recent film “Lost” directed by Zhou Xiaowen with the “Chinese Dream”. However, in the essential sense of literary criticism, I believe “Lost” is a piece of work sharing the inner connection with “Chinese Dream.”

The English name of the film is “Lost”, which means being astray and collapse. This film applies the style as “on-the-spot record” and manifests the fate, emotion and the way to deal with the realities of the lower people in Chinese society. This is about a broken dream of a country girl. The heroine Lily is a country girl from the northern Shaanxi province and her father died and her mother hates her for she is a female. She is a migrant worker and at the present time works in Shenzhen, a very big city in the southern China. Her dream is to open a noodle shop, as she owes the workmanship of making noodles, and becomes a true citizen. She pays out all her efforts; however, the dream can not come true exactly. On the contrary, the distance between her and the dream became farther and farther, and is engulfed by the cruelty of the metropolis.

Lily, like her name, is an excellent migrant worker and her tragedy originates from her naïve love. She fell into love with a truck driver from Hong Kong and she treated him with the tradition owned by her hometown and self-devoted to him, a stranger in the metropolis. She is pregnant and allows the lover to imprint a dragon, which shares the same Chinese pronunciation as the lover’s name and can be regarded as a token of slavery, tattoo in her body. However, when the baby is going to come, the father disappears and never comes back.

Lily gives birth to the baby and suffered a lot. She loses her labor value for taking a baby: she can not return back to her former job, can not be a waitress, or even can not find a whore master who is willing to buy her baby. Lily is pushed into an extremity, however, a more terrible thing happens and the baby is diagnosed with an inborn heart disease and would die without the timely cure. In the procedure of raising the operation fee, RMB 80,000, Lily experiences all the evil from the low level of the metropolis, but she still maintains her kindness and tolerance. Her dream never dies in spite of the hardness.

The film “Lost” gives us a chance to survey a country girl who still holds the unsophisticated country rules and tradition and therefore, the gap between her and the modern metropolis is huge. The tragedy of Lily lies in that she can not see the gap and tries to treat the world, full of traps and venality, with her own value and mode. The result is that she can not enter the world: she can not become a citizen and can not raise her baby. The beloved baby was a pride for Lily, for it is the testimony of her love with the Hong Kong boy. No matter how hard she tries, the chains oppressed by fate still seize her. Meanwhile in this tragedy, it shows that the most precious goodness, like trust and the childlike innocence, is still reserved in Lily’s heart, which is hard to find in the modern citizens. Her image shows a beauty and a light of ideal. There is a series of scenes: Lily goes to a competition held by a rich man in order to find a wife. She is chosen for her beauty and simplicity. However, the rich man refuses to marry a mother after knowing her baby, and gives her RMB 5,000. Lily refuses to take the money and returned it back through a crack under the door. Even in such hardness, she does this without struggle and hesitation. We could feel a kind of sanctity, which has disappeared in the modern society. The existence of a Utopia can be found in the image of Lily, although it is so rare. It exists as a kind of spirit or a weak vowel and moves us like a tragedy.

It owns a symbol as the very beginning of the film: on the heavy road full of trucks and drivers, a young and weak girl walked through with a 8 months pregnancy, just like walked in a forest full of steel and apathy. She

looked so weak and disharmony and the trucks turned as moving stone, giving not a least mercy and reply.

The director designed three different ending to respond the beginning. One of the ending is that the writer was moved by Lily and wrote her story out to find the help from society. Three months later, she got the RMB 80,000 for the operation and went back to Shenzhen. However, their meeting was in the prison. Lily was rested for drug trade and finally she was routed by the reality. She cried: "I had a dream that one day I could open a noodle shop and earned a lot of money, and then became a citizen. Now I have a dream that I would be executed by shooting and hope my baby never knows he has such a mother."

The second ending is that Lily gave up the reality. Three months later, the writer went back to Shenzhen and found Lily servicing her old husband. At that time, Lily is not the Lily and she is a person without Utopia and lost her charm. She told the writer that she could find the only way by sacrificing herself. Now she is a citizen. However, is this submissive woman still the Lily from the Northern Plateau?

The third ending is even more tragic. Three months later, the writer went to Shenzhen, and brought the good news that the RMB 80,000 was raised. However, Lily told the writer in the tone of coldness that the baby died and she never needed the money at all. The phone was hanged up and leaved us in deep melancholy.

"Lost" is a complicated movie and forces us to consider what kind of dream is our dream? What kind of dream is worth us to chase in China?

The Responsibility of Literary Critics

Let us go back to the Northern Shaan'xi. In May of 1942, during the roughest phase of the war against Japan, Mao Zedong held a conference in Yan'an and delivered a profound speech "Talks at the Yan'an Forum of Literature and Art".

During the passed 72 years, the understanding and explanation of the speech never keep silent. In fact, as a core document, Chinese Marxists shaped their own theoretical mode. Although this theory involves a pre-maturity, its academic value and historical effects can not be denied.

In the year of 2008, not long after American Financial Crisis, the English famous Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton reviewed his life as a literary critic in an interview and reviewed the series of questions referred to the modern development of Marxist literary criticism. These interviews were published by Verso in the year of 2009 and named as "The Task of the Critic". Eagleton indicated the task of the critic is to serve the common people. It is the feature of Marxist literary theory and criticism to discuss issue of literature at the crisis of the society. The literary criticism should be the conscience of time and it can merge the historical events with the humanities as well as deliver deeper and further analysis.

The task of the critic is not only to present the aesthetic form of the literary works, but also to lead and motivate the cultural consciousness and liberation of common people, by analyzing the "aesthetic form" and strengthening positive meaning of public aesthetic activities. In the book of "Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism", Terry Eagleton wrote, "The paramountcy of a Marxist critic is to devote into and lead the liberation of public culture." As a matter of fact, as early as in 1942, Mao had already thoroughly discuss this issue. He pointed out at the very beginning: "which is our core? I believe our issue basically is a question for people and a question of how to do fulfill it." It is a tough task indeed. For it is referred to a new understanding and attitude of literature and arts. For some intellectuals who profess to be above worldly considerations, the task

of the critic is to “appreciation of the beauty and entertainment” or “spiritual redemption.” The signification of Mao’s talk lies in that it elevates the general literary theory and aesthetic theory up to the level of social development and national redemption. The key meaning of arts is to liberate people. The task of the critic is to devote into and stimulate this cultural consciousness. Therefore, the Kant-like conception and standpoint of “non-utility of beauty” or “arts for the sake of arts” could not help to understand Mao’s talk and its value in academy and the history of Chinese modernization.

Literature and Arts, as the form of culture, play an important role in the procedure of establishment of cultural leadership. Mao’s talk coincided with the thoughts brought by Remond Williams in 1960s, which both consider the question in the term of “cultural theory of revolution”. As we all know, from Williams to Eagleton, the English Marxist critics combine the Marxist literary criticism with English literature study and shaped “England school” and “England theory”, as the most important school after “school of Frankfurt” and “school of Althusser”. In my opinion, the success of England Marxism lies in: facing the significant question of reality, adopting the way they can achieve, devoting into the people’s cultural liberation and being a participator of “common experience. Meanwhile, the England Marxists possess adequate academic accomplishments, and own the capability to upgrade the expression to the level of “Aesthetic” which the literature and arts should possess. As the theorist occupied in the filed of Aesthetics and Literary Criticism, it holds a meaning for the Chinese revival and the development of Society, via our explanation and criticism, which should be the value of all what we devote ourselves to.

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