

Modern Chinese Scholars' Perspectives on Zhuangzi's Aesthetics

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Abstract: Modern Chinese scholars of Zhuangzi's aesthetics can be illustrated by the words of Liu Shaojin in *Zhuangzi and Chinese Aesthetics*. The aesthetic significance of the book *Zhuangzi* is not a theoretical summary of beauty and art as objects, but rather, when it comes to its 'Dao', it's understanding of The aesthetic significance of Zhuangzi's book is not a theoretical summary of beauty and art, but a coincidence between its experience and realm of 'Tao' and the aesthetic experience and realm of art. Because of this coincidence, later generations naturally transposed these philosophical questions with aesthetic overtones to the understanding of the aesthetic characteristics of art, thus giving new meaning to Zhuangzi's philosophical propositions. In this sense, people believe that the literary and artistic thoughts and aesthetic theories contained in *Zhuangzi* are not distinguished by the correctness of their conclusions, but by the illuminating, suggestive, and profound way in which they touch upon the issues in the course of their exposition. This suggests that Chinese scholars have a dialectical approach to Zhuangzi's philosophical aesthetics, and that needs a careful look at examples like *Zhili Shu* with a critical eye in modern times.

Keywords: Zhuangzi, aesthetics, *Zhili Shu*

1. Introduction

There are several main quotes from some famous texts of Zhuangzi. The first one is *Knowing the happiness of fish in Zhuangzi from Autumn Water*, this one is mainly about Zhuangzi and Huizi walking on the shore and then arguing about the happiness of fish. Huizi thinks that Zhuangzi is not a fish, so he cannot know the happiness of fish; while Zhuangzi thinks that when Huizi asks him where he knows the happiness of fish, he has already affirmed that he already knows the happiness of fish. This essay mainly expresses the main idea that Zhuangzi would follow the variation and Zhuangzi's aesthetics: the unity of heaven and man [1].

The second one is about *Zhi Li Shu* [2]. *Zhi Li Shu*'s chin was hidden under his navel, his shoulders were higher than his head, his ears, nose, and mouth were facing upward, and his two legs and both sides of his chest ribs were growing together, although he was deformed, he was not only not a burden to the family but could earn money to support the family. In his time, there were many wars, and the monarch conscripted soldiers every year, so Xu hid in fear of being taken to the front [3]. When the conscript came to the village where *Zhi Li Shu* lived, he deliberately walked past the conscript with his sleeves rolled up and strutting in front of the conscript. The conscript looked at him and waved him away. He was able to avoid military service because of his physical defects. Not only did he not have to serve in the army, but he also received a lot of benefits, for example, the

state gave subsidies to the disabled from time to time, and Zhi Li Shu received three jars of grain and ten bales of firewood. This chapter mainly tells us that although he was physically handicapped, he was able to receive the government's relief and earn money to support his family [4].

The third one is about the horse tamer, the potter, and the carpenter all destroying the nature of things themselves, insinuating the restraint of the ruler. Like the ruler, the sage's benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith destroy the nature of man. The wisdom of the horse itself is to rub against each other when happy, and to bump against each other when angry; but give him some shackles and other restraints, and the horse will be unruly and use all his strength to break free from these shackles and fight against people, which Chuang Tzu thinks are the sins of the Bole. By analogy to people, in ancient times, people did not know what to do, they did not know where to go, they frolicked with food in their mouths, they swam with their full stomachs, and when the sages appeared, they restrained the people with benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, which led them to pursue fame and fortune, which Zhuangzi believed was the fault of the sages [5, 6].

2. Zhuangzi's Metaphorical Example and Its Followers

It is worthy to be discussed in the chapter named De Chong Fu, Zhuangzi talks mainly about the spirit of the unity of heaven and man. Zhuangzi said some people with unpleasant appearances and mutilated bodies as examples, but these people are full of virtue, there is Wang Myr who is so full of the inner world that Confucius had to learn from him; Shen Tu Jia's words and actions made Zi Chan feel ashamed; Shu Shan Wu Toe came to visit Confucius on foot and found out the ugliness inside Confucius; Confucius praised Liao Myr to Duke Lu Ai, the disabled man lobbied the rulers of the state and was well-liked by them. Finally, Zhuangzi said to Huizi that Huizi was a counter-example of virtue and was not as good as those disabled people.

An example of an ugly yet natural person is Pang Tong in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", Pang Tong was an important strategist under Liu Bei's account, first, he made friends with Lu Ji, Gu Shao, Quan Zong, and others in East Wu mourning. Then in Jingzhou, he joined Liu Bei, who valued Pang Tong so much that he made him his military advisor. In the 16th year of Jian'an, Pang Tong offered Liu Bei three strategies to take Liu Zhang's Yizhou, and Liu Bei chose the middle strategy and followed it. Finally, in the 19th year of Jian'an, Pang Tong led his soldiers to attack Luo Cheng and was shot by a random arrow, and finally hid in the fallen phoenix slope [7].

3. The Scholars' Reflections

This research focuses on the influence of Zhuangzi's philosophical aesthetics on human aesthetics and finds that people are more and more interested in the aesthetics of human personality rather than external beauty, the aesthetics of painting, and other aesthetics in the emptiness of white space rather than opulence, and the aesthetics of poetry and literature in its purity rather than in its decorative appearance. The literature review is mainly about the profound influence of Zhuangzi's philosophical aesthetics on the spirit of Chinese art and the deep and shallow analysis of Zhuangzi's philosophical aesthetics by some scholars.

On the example of Shih's The interpretation of Zhuangzi in the aesthetic vision of Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese scholars, focuses on the study of the results of the aesthetic interpretation of Zhuangzi in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese since 1949, sorting out its lineage, discovering its problems, and examining the experience of how Zhuangzi's thought has been interpreted in modern times and effectively implanted in the construction of aesthetics in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The article writes about the development process of aesthetics in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and also analyzes it from personal examples, with scholars such as Fang

Dongmei, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Ye Weilian as examples, explaining Zhuangzi's theory in terms of human nature, starting from the influence of Taoist aesthetics on the West, and deeply analyzing the role of Zhuangzi's aesthetics in modern times and its influence on human aesthetics.

Zhuangzi had a great influence on Chinese aesthetics, which can be roughly divided into three parts: natural beauty, free beauty, and personality beauty. In natural beauty, Zhuangzi emphasizes that people should not destroy the process of natural development, that everything should be done according to nature, and that they should not sacrifice their comfortable life to pursue fame and fortune. It is necessary to be indifferent to fame and fortune and return to the basics. "Horses, hooves can trample frost and snow, hair can ward off the wind and cold, gnawing grass and drinking water, crossing the feet and land, the true nature of this horse." But people want to detain the horse's head, through the nose, restraint control horse walking, "burn, pick, carved, dire, even with the detention of the environment, braided with soap stacks, the horse's dead 12 or 13 carry on." And then through various means to train it "hungry, thirsty, galloping, plunging, neat, Qi, before the problem of pegging, and after the whip and mackerel, and the horse's death has been more than half carry on." Here is written that Zhuangzi believes that man destroys the natural beauty of the horse, and does not do with the natural beauty of the idea of nature. Zhuangzi affirmed the individuality of man and the unity of man and nature.

In the beauty of freedom, we can see from the saying "When a son is not a fish, he knows the joy of fish" that the beauty of freedom Zhuangzi needs is the beauty of the spiritual level rather than the material level. Zhuangzi wanted a state of unity between heaven and man, just as Zhuangzi could understand the happiness of fish, and this understanding transcends species, so that man and fish have a spiritual connection, just like the transformation of Kun into Peng. Just like Zhuangzi dreaming of butterflies, "I wonder if Zhou's dream is for Hu Die and, and Hu Die's dream is for Zhou and?" Zhuangzi forgot himself, transcended his physical body, and reached the spiritual unity of heaven and man to gain freedom. This is an aesthetic attitude that allows people to put themselves in other perspectives and gain the pleasure of free beauty. Zhuangzi emphasizes that beauty is "not the love of the form, but the love of the one who makes the form". This kind of beauty is the beauty that transcends the body, the beauty that respects the personality, even if how ugly the appearance of the person can be beautiful. This kind of beauty looks at the moral quality and spiritual connotation of a person, rather than judging whether a person is beautiful from the outside. In Zhi Li Shu, it is said that a person is useful because of his uselessness, but when people in later generations understand the uselessness, they will think about whether to preserve his virtue like Zhi Li Shu or to serve the monarch like Pang Tong in the Three Kingdoms period and fall in the fallen phoenix slope. When Pang Tong was in Wu, Sun Quan and Wu refused to appoint Pang Tong because they thought he was ugly, but when he arrived in Shu, Liu Bei, on the advice of Zhuge Liang, appointed Pang Tong as a military advisor. Zhuge Liang knew Pang Tong's connotation and strongly asked Liu Bei to appoint him, which reflected that Zhuge Liang had an aesthetic concept of being able to see through the beauty of personality, fitting the thought of Zhuangzi. The examples of Pang Tong and Zhi Li Shu are two opposing viewpoints. Zhi Li Shu emphasizes that we should preserve virtue, while Pang Tong is not preserving his virtue by serving his monarch with all his might even at the cost of his own life. In my opinion, for contemporary people, Pang Tong's approach is more in line with contemporary values, and he should try his best to reflect his values, instead of being "useless" like Zhili Shu, and enjoying his life freely.

A search of the Internet on the topic of Zhuangzi's contemporary values yielded a total of 110 articles before August 22nd, 2022. From the literature found, the main focus is on the spiritual value of Zhuangzi's philosophical aesthetics to contemporary China at different levels. The contemporary value of Zhuangzi's aesthetic freedom thought and its contemporary value is summarized in the example of Li Yuan's Zhuangzi's aesthetic freedom thought and its contemporary value. Based on

contemporary society, she proposes the aesthetic value of the thought of aesthetic freedom in terms of nature, aesthetic creation of aesthetic art, and personal personality, i.e., it is conducive to the construction of modern ecological civilization, provides methods of aesthetic art creation, and promotes the perfection of human personality [8].

4. Theories of Fang Dongmei, Xu Fuguan, and William Yeh

Fang's philosophy and aesthetics of "life" undoubtedly accepted the influence of Western vitalist philosophy, especially Bergson's and Whitehead's "organismic ". He identifies his philosophy and aesthetics as the science of "universal life." Fang Dongmei repeatedly mentions that Zhuangzi's doctrine synthesizes Confucius and Laozi" [9]. Zhuangzi is a combination of Taoism and Confucianism, and he pushed the ideas of Taoism and Confucianism to the pinnacle, the pinnacle of ancient Chinese philosophy.

This shows that he sees everything in the world as alive, and there is a certain connection with the natural beauty in Zhuangzi's aesthetics, and both emphasize the important idea of life and the unity of heaven and man. No matter where one looks at it, no matter how big or how small the matter is, everything is harmonious and everything should be unified. They both believe that letting life's individuality and the value of life itself reach unity is the great beauty of the world, the true harmony. Zhuangzi advocates emptiness and nothingness, which, in the eyes of Mr. Fang Dongmei, is called spaceman. Zhuangzi focuses more on "the interaction with the spirit of heaven and earth alone", and Fang Dongmei can understand the mystery of Taoism and Zhuangzi, he said, "Once we talk about Taoism, we feel that we have entered a new world, like a magical dream." This has a certain influence on the aesthetics of modern paintings, which need to be left blank so that they can reflect the beauty of the painting. Nothingness can give people a sense of beauty that is indistinguishable from reality and unpredictable.

Xu Fuguan starts from the theory of human nature to explain that Zhuangzi's artistic spirit is an artistic spirit of "art for the sake of life" [10]. Xu Fuguan, a representative of Neo-Confucianism and one of the Four Gentlemen of the Manifesto, systematically draws on the teachings of the hundred schools of thought to explain traditional Chinese thought to foreigners, using new perspectives and ideas to interpret Confucianism. In his book, *The Spirit of Chinese Art*. In the second chapter of his book, *The Spiritual Embodiment of Chinese Art - The Rediscovery of Zhuangzi*, Xu Fuguan argues that the highest concept established by Laozhuang is "Tao", which combines Zhuangzi's beauty of freedom and personality, and advocates that people should achieve the unity of heaven and man, the combination of spirit and body, and the realm of forgetfulness. Then he further elaborates by combining the views of other sages: for example, he believes that Zhuangzi's unity of heaven and man is like Laozi's ignorance and desirelessness, they are not against all human desires, but let people recognize themselves to their ignorance, to do everything to restrain themselves, to be modest in every step; desirelessness let people not to pursue some nebulous things, let themselves reach a kind of trance -" In a trance, there is an image in it". In his *History of Chinese Human Nature*, he compared the ideas of Zhuangzi and Confucianism and found commonalities between the two, in that Daoism is about the experience of life, but does not center on oneself, but emphasizes the integration of the self with the objective world, finding direction in nothingness, and blossoming into the brilliance of life. Xu Fuguan thus fuses Confucianism's idea of entering the world with Taoism's idea of leaving the world, embodying the search for one's value while treating the external world as an important step in sublimating oneself.

In his "Taoist Aesthetics and Western Culture," Ye Weilian finds that some Western poets have a highly similar concept of writing to the Taoist view of aesthetics, drawing on the aesthetic doctrine of Zhuangzi's Taoism. Ye Weilian emphasizes that man is a part of nature and should develop by nature, which is the same as the natural beauty in Zhuangzi's aesthetics, where things that are

formed naturally and occur naturally are the most beautiful. According to Ye Weilian, the two most central ideas of Taoism are to follow its nature and to rule by doing nothing. This is like some Western poets who write verses that describe things directly, are unadorned, and respond to the connection of things themselves, which is what Taoism calls emptiness, reflecting the real world. At a time when Chinese culture was in crisis in the twentieth century, Ye Weilian stepped forward to express his love for Taoist aesthetics in his Chinese landscape poetry, and his poems are based on nature rather than on people's subjective thoughts, in line with the idea of seeing things as they are. He also believes that viewing things as they are in the aesthetic experience of Chinese poetics and that if one view objects with one's own experience or emotions, then this is an additional element that amounts to interfering with the properties of the object itself, and does not achieve the natural beauty of Zhuangzi's aesthetics of going with the flow of nature [11].

As a poet, he is considered to be "a true poet," but as a scholar, he has achieved even greater prominence, "making a new assessment of his local cultural tradition as a cultural marginal" and "He is "a leading figure in the field of comparative poetics. The Taoist aesthetics in William Ye's selected poetry is not only about the following nature but also about the unity of heaven and man, and he believes that Chinese poetry is very clever in expressing "I" everywhere without writing "I", which gives a sense of immersion, as if "I" has been fully present. This gives people a sense of immersion, as if "I" have been completely integrated into the world of the poem, and everything is one.

On New Year's Day 1958, Xu Fuguan, together with Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, and Zhang Junmai, jointly issued the "Declaration for Chinese Culture to the World", which some people had believed since the end of the Qing Dynasty to be the end of life of Chinese culture, however, it blossomed again with the efforts of philosophers from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This approach has a historical basis, just as during the literary review period, Western philosophers revived the Greek spirit that had been dormant for a long time. Greek culture had once died out after the Peloponnesian War, and even Rome, which later inherited Greek culture, also perished. The Greco-Roman spirit, which seemed to be an idea abandoned by the times, was picked up again by Renaissance thinkers more importantly, with fresh blood, thus dominating the development of the world for centuries to come. This is the same as the meaning of the Declaration of Chinese Culture to the World. Chinese culture did not perish after the fall of the mainland, and it is a tribute to the world that Chinese thought can shine in combination with the current trend of the times and that Chinese thought is indispensable to the world.

These overseas Chinese scholars themselves have gone beyond their study of a particular sage to do research for the revival of Chinese culture and to prepare for the world. It is precisely because they have combined the knowledge of the hundred sages with their research that Chinese philosophical and aesthetic thought has been truly revived and has truly gone global.

5. Conclusion

Zhuangzi's aesthetics has great inspiration for real life. Zhuangzi opened up a new realm from the inner personality to the outer, to obtain true freedom. Zhuangzi emphasizes that one must first meditate, constantly reflect on oneself, master one's changes, understand external changes, have a mind that encompasses all things in the world, achieve a state of unity between heaven and man, abolish the relationship between subjective and objective opposites, emphasize the idea of the oneness of subject and object, and achieve a state of forgetfulness of both things and self. Confirmed, it is conducive to the construction of modern ecological civilization, provides methods of aesthetic art creation, and promotes the perfection of human personality.

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