

PROF PAN Gong Kai:

Dear experts, dear friends, good afternoon. First, my thanks go to Dr Ho for his invitation. Here I would like to spend a very short time explaining the issues of modernity associated with Chinese art. This afternoon, Prof Chang Hsin Kang said the notions of East and West were new to the 20th century. The notion of East versus West denotes dynamics between two cultures. As you know, the 20th century culture evolved with this multi-dimensional system of East and West, tradition and modernity. Chinese fine art is part of this and it's a very sensitive part of it. So if we want to study the modernity of Chinese culture, it will be very interesting to dissect a sparrow, i.e. the Chinese fine art.

So far, when we assess the 20th century fine art, we are still faced with a lot of baffling issues. We feel bewildered. On the timescale, 20th century fine art of course should be modern, but is it modern in qualitative terms? The consensus is that the modern part of the 20th century fine art can be traced back to the Juelan She founded in the 1930s in Hangzhou and more representative of the modernity is the experimental fine art that came about in the 1980s. It's closely related to the western fine art which is a Chinese version and a Chinese offspring of the western fine art.

This has caught much attention and is now considered part of the international fine art scene. This is not incorrect. However, it only accounts for a tiny fraction of the 20th century art. 95 or 98 per cent of art is of the 20th century. What did they do? Were their works meaningful? Are they still meaningful today? These are the questions and with these questions in mind, we explore the evolution of the fine art.

The question sprang from a basic bewilderment, using western morphological language to analyse and examine the Chinese fine art, but the result is we can't do that with exception of the fraction of artists who rose in the 1980s. In other words, the efforts made, the sweat and toil put in by the Chinese artists could not give them a position in the international art scene. The auctioneers, the companies did not acknowledge them or acknowledge them as a continuation of tradition. In my opinion, this is quite a big issue. In other words, using the western rhetoric that

morphological language, we cannot depict and delineate the Chinese fine art in modern Chinese fine art, so how are we going to approach it?

One thought provoking point which was mentioned by Prof Lin in his talk just now, Prof Lin talked about the protestant ethics, cultural elements and individuals in the West that gradually evolved into an impetus which drove the western economy.

Mode in the studies of modernity is very essential. However, in the countries like China, those are still in the developing stage, for example, in Japan, the Japanese art, how to define it? How do you characterise it? As Prof Lin said, China did not have the transformation of its own culture. The entry of China into the modernisation process was a result of being coerced into it on the impact of western influences. Now our attention has been turned from mode to the world.

There is the main representatives of the dominant trends in the 21st century Chinese art, almost invariably worked out strategies to counter this challenge from the West and those trends, those schools were closely relevant to events that were products of the events, although they could not be fitted into the western formula and after these events came to China under duress of western guns and gun boats, the implantation of modernity in China created a degree of consciousness in China. That consciousness is awareness of cultural pressure from the outside world. These people were coerced into reacting to such impact and this behaviour in my opinion, was a key link in the migration of the transmission of western events into China.

It's different from the spontaneous modernity in the West, in Europe and America. Our proposition is that this transmission of modern events, which led to mutation, we should use this as a benchmark on which to examine the creations, the works, efforts of different schools of Chinese fine art, whether or not they represent modernity. This viewpoint of course has to be thrashed by the experts and scholars. That's why we held a seminar in April together with Prof Chang of City University of Hong Kong. So events became our focus of attention.

I think Prof Lin knows much more than I do, in modern events, it's very hard to identify the essential nature of events. If there's a commonality to all these events, maybe mutation is one. It may be wrong, but that's

the consensus among experts and scholars. If mutation is the common essential nature of events, then the transmission and ignition can give us a perspective from which we can reach the level of consciousness. This is a dumbbell-shaped diagram or schematic. On the left-hand side is the original modernity in Europe and America. There are two levels. At the bottom is the physical level, physical layer. Society and economy. Above that is the aesthetic modernity. At the conceptual level. Between these two layers there's a hotly debated issue, which is disharmony, conflict, alienation and mutual criticism between the aesthetic modernity and social modernity.

By using this basic concept, we can examine the 20th century fine art. The only form of art that can fit into this formula is the new wave post-1985 in China. It's consistent with the anti-social modernity structure. In the middle, on the right-hand side is the acquired modernity in response to the influences from the West and there is a relationship between the artistic level and also social transformation level. These two levels are not contradictory. There's no dichotomy between them.

As Prof Chang said earlier in the traditional mindset of Chinese and in terms of requirements of the current state of society, homogeneity tends to be emphasised. So the dynamics between these two levels, on the right-hand side, are less confrontational when compared to the dynamics on the left-hand side.

In other words, if we use the western formula to describe the Chinese modernity of art, we will see that it is not fitting. The middle part of the dumbbell is the transmission from left to right, when it reached China, it ignited mutation. There's a key link in this process. It is the awakening of elite intelligencers.

This way we can bring the 20th century Chinese fine art into the broad context of international events, otherwise there's no place for modern Chinese fine art. It will always be hanging around on the periphery. It will always be in an adaptive mode. For example, when we want to discuss Huang Binhong or Wu Guanzhong, Lin Fengmian, they all had very important places in the history of art, but were they traditional artists? Were they contemporary artists? Were they artists who have nothing to do with modernity?

In the study of the art history over the past two decades, people have avoided answering this question, but if we can't answer this question, we can't really define the nature of the 20th century Chinese fine art. Without a clear identification, without clear definition, how can a 20th century fine art be studied without properly studying 20th century Chinese fine art, we can't really do anything about the 21st century.

However, having said that, I need to explain that this basic perspective we have is a perspective of the nature of the different schools of Chinese fine art in the 20th century. It's not a value judgment. But to compare and contrast the artistic value of these works is a separate matter. I think we need to first characterise it, to see if it is modern or not. Then we can lay the ground for our deliberation on the future of Chinese art.

I don't know if it's correct. I stand corrected. With this hypothetical framework we have divided the Chinese fine art into four parts. The awakening of the elite Chinese intelligencers driven by the desire to save the nation, there were two trends. One was the integrationism represented by Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian. It was a mutation of the western culture. It was an indigenisation of the western modern artistic structure. The second line was westernism. Westernism was an implanted component. Now these days, works of this sort have the highest price tags.

The third line was traditionalism. Traditionism used to be defined as non-modern school, like Wu Changshuo, Qi Baishi, et cetera, but when I look at them from today's standpoint, the works they created were the works created after they were confronted with the challenge from the West. They were original in their works. Of course this viewpoint is very unique and needs to be debated.

The fourth line was populism, because China suffered humiliation. The Chinese people wanted to save the nation, wanted to rise so the elite intelligencers, be it Communist Party, Kuomintang, Dr Sun Yat Sen, they all proposed that the masses needed to be awakened, educated, so populism was actually a combination or mutation of the western values with some Chinese ingredients added.

If we combine these four isms, we will have the modernity or modernism of Chinese art. This is a new novel viewpoint that we have fabricated and it's open for discussion and debate.

Now I'm going to quickly show you some slides explaining the representatives of these four trends. Integrationism was initiated by Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiao to transform China with western thoughts and the artistic representative was Xu Beihong and the other one was Lin Fengmian. They both were guided by Kang Youwei's ideology to fuse Chinese and western cultures.

The second trend was traditionalism. Traditionalism, the most salient representative was Chen Shizeng. After he returned from his studies in Japan, he wrote a book called Study of China's Literati Paintings. He reiterated the value of Chinese literati paintings. His proposition was very strategic, so although he drew traditional paintings, but his statutory was closely related to modern events, but before him, there was Wu Changshuo, but there was nothing in black and white recording Wu Changshuo's interface with the West, but he was aware of the existence of the western system.

The other artist was Huang Binhong and he made huge contributions to the art of Chinese paintings. One of his friends, however, Fu Baoshi, was very conversant with western art and friends like Fu Baoshi had a strong influence on Huang Binhong and Huang Binhong once even wrote a letter to some western people and Qi Baishi, another artist, through Chen Shizeng was indirectly by western influences.

Another one was my late father, Pan Tianshou. He was good friends with Wu Dayu and Lin Fengmian. His philosophy was that you can draw western paintings. I will carry on with Chinese paintings. We have two routes to take and we are both committed to revitalising Chinese art. So his was strategic traditionalist choice.

Westernism was a small camp. That was represented by Juelan Society in the 1930s. Ni Yide was a representative of Juelan Society. They became very left wing and before 1949, he became military representative taking over the National Art Academy when the communists took over the power, populism started with Lu Xun, the author and the emerging wood print and wood present was used as a means to educate the public.

The key event along the line of populism was the publication of Mao Zedong's speech at Yan'an art and literary forum. There was a photo of that forum in Yan'an. These are wood print works related to populism and they served to educate the public. After liberation, after 1949, the works of populism abounded because it was dictated that specially in the 1950s and onwards, it was dictated that artistic works must reflect the lives of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Since the Cultural Revolution, up to now, the modern art trend of China has been all the rage and these are media reports of this trend.

If we measure it against the criteria of consciousness and awakening, all these representatives can be included in the realm of modern Chinese fine art. Thank you.