An Analysis of the Research Categories of Aesthetics in Contemporary China*

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the direction in which aesthetic research in East Asian countries should move forward through the analysis of Chinese aesthetic research trends that have developed discussions about aesthetics into a grand de-bate called aesthetic popularity (美學熱).

“Aesthetics” was received relatively early during the modernization process in East Asian countries, but due to its conflicting characteristics of “ambiguity” and “inclusiveness” that created obstacles to its development it could not obtain its status as an academic discipline. Meanwhile, aesthetic

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research in China today has grown rapidly and maintains a world-class level in terms of scale and research performance. This paper inquires the background of the development of aesthetic research in China and subsequently analyzes the research trends of contemporary Chinese aesthetics in five categories to examine the status of current aesthetic research.

**Key Words:** Aesthetics, East Asia, Research categories, Aesthetic popularity (美學熱)

### 1. Introduction

The aesthetics, which is the focus of this research paper, was established in the course of the modernization process of academics, but its academic identity became blurred due to the drawing on various disciplines such as literature, art science, media science, etc. This ambiguity is even more evident in East Asian countries such as South Korea and China, for which the study of aesthetics is an adopted discipline that originated in the context of western philosophy. Although the conflicting characteristics of ambiguity and inclusiveness of aesthetics were originally contradictory to the traditional academic structure of East Asia, the aspect of its inclusiveness recently led to a unique and independent development that follows a different course than the development in West. To provide a direction for aesthetic research in East Asian countries, this paper examines the issues of acceptance and development of aesthetics studies in East Asian countries, and analyzes the trend of China's aesthetic research that has led to *aesthetic popularity* (美學熱).

In order to achieve the above research objectives, the object of the research, which is the academic identity of aesthetics itself, must be clarified first. Aesthetics as a modern discipline was established by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762). He intended to distinguish it from the "history of aesthetics" by giving it a clear academic purpose, research subject, and methodology that would fit the modern academic system. From the 16th century on, the European academic system, which prior to this was administered by the theological seminary, disengaged itself from the Catholic authority and developed into a university type consisting of the four independent departments of theology, law, medicine, and literature. In the 17th century, the departments of theology and literature were debating the idea of nature, which
led to a further division of the literature department\(^1\) and the emergence of philosophy as an independent discipline influenced by the spirit of enlightenment in the 18th century.\(^2\) After the mid-18th century, philosophy largely consists of three areas: theology, practical studies, and poetry. Kant's three major criticisms – the Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of Judgment – were eventually unified by Hegel. The issue of obtaining truth based on recognition and sensory experience mentioned above resulted in debates between empiricism and rationalism, and ultimately, the issue of emotional awareness, which had been obscured by human reason since ancient Greek philosophy, could be re-illuminated.\(^3\)

By the 18th century, until when the history of academic studies had been dominated by human rationality, the possibility to establish an independent science of "human emotions" began to emerge when human emotions, which had been regarded as something irrational or unreliable, began to receive attention again. Leibniz (1646-1714) here can serve as an example, as he sought to establish the issue of expression of the senses in one complete theoretical structure under the principles of unity that rationalists pursued at the time.\(^4\) Johan C. Gottsched (1700-1766) pointed out that emotional knowledge could not suffice as an independent discipline because it did not conform to the demand of a self-contained universal theory of knowledge. However, Baumgarten suggested the need for an independent discipline on emotional recognition and aesthetic experience when he revealed the possibility of establishing 'Ästhetica' as an independent discipline in his book "Reflections on Poetry" published in 1735. Here, human recognition of an object is largely divided into clear recognition and confused recognition.\(^5\) Baumgarten presents representation, figuration, or con-

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1) For more information, see: Schmidt-Biggemann Wilhelm, Thodizee und Tatsachen: das philosophische Profil der deutschen Aufklärung [Theories and facts: the philosophical profile of German Enlightenment] (Germany: Suhrkamp, 1988), 61-72.

2) For the specific process how the school of philosophy is separated from the institute of literature, see: Immanuel Kant, Horst D. Brandt, and Piero Giordanetti, Der Streit der Fakultäten: Auf Grund des Textes der Berliner Akademie-Ausgabe (Germany: Meiner, 2005).

3) The structure formation process of the new European knowledge between the 16th and the 17th century and the establishing process of aesthetics as an independent discipline were discussed in detail in the following article by the author. Hee-Jung SEO, “The Knowledge Structure and Establishment of Aesthetics in the Modern Era in Europe,” Humanity and Art 4, no.2 (Winter 2017): 89-108.


ceptualization as judgment criteria for different recognitions. If the object emerges as a figuration or is established as a concept, it means that the object has been dominated by human rationality. Baumgarten also defines this 'confusing perception' as a complete one composed of each perceived representation. This can be the case where the characteristics of continental rationalism stemming from Descartes were revealed. In the end, Baumgarten wrote his first book "Reflections on Poetry," that illuminated that "intuition" is superior to imperfect "emotional recognition", and due to its completeness humans can feel pleasure.6)

Hereby, Baumgarten proclaimed the establishment of a new discipline of aesthetics – the study of human emotions – and stated: "The purpose of the aesthetics lies in the integrity of sensuous cognition, such as 'Qua Talis'." (Aesthetica §14) Here, "Qua Talis" is a basic principle that can no longer be divided, and thus, Baumgarten took it as "the integrity of recognition through human emotion."7)

To sum up, Aesthetica was written in the process of transition from the former academic system centering on the seminary to modern studies, and has its clear academic purpose and standards for the establishment as a science of emotion. On the other side, China and other countries in East Asia had no choice but to accept foreign studies while maintaining their own unique academic systems, causing significant confusion in the norms, purposes, and methodologies of the academic disciplines. “Aesthetics” is a typical example, although it was relatively early introduced in East Asian countries during the modernization process. However, in most East Asian countries academic development was inevitably hindered by failing to obtain its academic status or clear academic identity. However, the study of aesthetics in China has attracted so much attention from the beginning that it has sparked nationwide debate on aesthetics: aesthetic popularity (美學熱). Furthermore, China has grown into a great power for aesthetic research. Not only is aesthetics being taught as a basic curriculum in almost all universities today, but there are also the largest number of aesthetic educational institutions, aesthetic research centers, and

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6) Ibid., §655

aesthetic research personnel in the world. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the current status and background of aesthetic research in China as a successful case in the development of aesthetic research.

2. The Analysis of Research Trends of Aesthetics in Contemporary China

This year is the centenary of Chinese aesthetics; hence the contemporary Chinese aestheticians reflect on its development after its arrival in China. There are already some studies in this field, such as a general introduction to the contemporary Chinese aesthetics, or the studies on the representative thoughts of aestheticians who have made significant contributions to the development of aesthetics, etc. However, studies on the overall development of aesthetics in China are still relatively rare. This thesis divides the results of the studies on this topic into five groups: the aesthetician-oriented, the category-oriented, the structure-oriented, the Chinese-Western comparison-oriented and the history-oriented approach. In addition, there is also a large number of problem-oriented studies of aesthetics, but their work resembles a collection of essays without a central idea. Therefore, they are not included in this reference. The basic statement of this study is that the process of "building and development of aesthetics in East Asia as a modern academic branch" is a process of the time-oriented transformation, and of the accumulation and structural development of various aesthetic theories. Hence, this study concentrates on the structure-oriented and history-oriented study results of aesthetics, while referring to the aesthetician-oriented ones. However, the apprehension of the category-oriented study results of aesthetics from a certain perspective is not approved.

1) The Research Status and Literature Review of Aesthetician-Oriented Studies

The aesthetician-oriented research method is quite common in studies about establishment and development of the aesthetics discipline in China. Most of the his-
tory-oriented studies also adopt this method. This thesis mainly refers to *Chinese Aesthetics in the 20th Century* by Wu Zhixiang, *The Overview of the Study of Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* by Zhao Shilin, *The Value Evolution of Modern Chinese Literary Theories* by Tong Qingbing, and *The Criticism of Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* by Guo Yongjian. The first three are focused on the study results of the first two generations of aestheticians active in the late Qing and republican era China, e.g. Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, Lu Xun, Lü Wei, Zhu Guangqian, Li Zehou, Cai Yi, and others. *Chinese Aesthetics in the 20th Century* concentrates mainly on the new aesthetic concepts proposed by the first-generation aestheticians, or their original interpretations of existing concepts. The author quotes from these aestheticians to generalize the central idea of these concepts, thus expressing aesthetic ideologies directly by their own words. In particular, the book involves a very explicit explanation of the thoughts of the Chinese aesthetic pioneers such as Liang Qichao and Wang Guowei. For example, according to the author, Liang’s aesthetic ideas can be summarized in three concepts, namely, "mind force", "emotion", and "state", i.e. “annihilate the slave in the mind”, “the secret of the universe”, and “only the heart-created state is real” respectively. As a matter of fact, many books of contemporary Chinese aesthetics published in the 2000s have adopted the above expressions. In his *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics*, Zhao Shilin talks about aestheticians that are mainly the participants in the “discussion on aesthetics”, which causes the “zeal for aesthetics”. The opinions of the participants in the discussion are adopted to explain the key words and propositions they have put forward, giving the book a strong logic in its way of discussion. Only the most important participants are included in the book, namely Zhu Guangqian, Zong Baihua, Li Zehou, and Cai Yi, but the essence of the discussion is introduced almost comprehensively. The “contemporary” in the book title refers to a limited period

of time when the “zeal for aesthetics” arises and the Soviet aesthetics is approved. For example, the “philosophy of beauty” mentioned in the book is based on the “absolute objectivity”, “absolute authority”, “integration of subjectivity and objectivity”, and “objective society”, which are completely in accordance with the four major viewpoints in the discussion. Thus, this thesis mainly refers to the materials related to the discussion and the logic of its relevant argumentation. Although The Value Evolution of Modern Chinese Literary Theories has a theme limited to literature as its title indicates, this thesis agrees with its explanation of the thoughts of the first-generation Chinese aestheticians, especially that of Wang Guowei’s ideas. The book summarizes Wang’s aesthetic views as the “integration of truth and beauty” and “intentionality of kindness”. It conducts a close analysis on the two terms and summarizes Wang’s opinion of the relationship between truth, goodness and beauty as follows.

| (Table 1) Wang Guowei’s opinion of the relationship between truth, goodness and beauty | 14) |
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| Characters of the Chinese | Comparison with other peoples | Remedy | Soothing effect | Nature of the effect |
| 1 Knowledge (Truth) | Insufficient | Political integrity and university education | None | Too boring |
| 2 Morality (Goodness) | Nearly the same | None | Too serious |
| 3 Emotion (Beauty) | The most insufficient (It is because the Chinese lack hope and consolation that they indulge themselves in opium and gambling.) | Religion (for the lower class) and art (for the upper class) | Serving as encouragements and consolations to the Chinese people | realistic and idealistic consolation (especially in the form of literature) |

The book describes Wang Guowei’s “Literary Theory of Aesthetic Perspective” as the “Chinese-style ‘art for art’s sake’”. It appreciates the extremely high academic value of Wang’s aesthetic thoughts, and testifies to the possibility of the advent of

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14) Qingbing Tong, Ting Quo et al., The Evolution of the Theoretical Values of Modern Chinese Literature (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), 33.
Chinese aesthetics in terms of its contribution to modern academic disciplines. The thesis also refers to *The Criticism of Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* to understand the current situation in the field of contemporary aesthetics. This book focuses on the third and fourth generations of Chinese aestheticians who are active in this field only after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Generally, the studies on contemporary Chinese aesthetics centralize on the theories of the first and second generations of Chinese aestheticians, giving little space for that of the third and fourth generations. Given that, the thesis mainly refers to the book for the aesthetic thoughts of the following aestheticians and thinkers active after 1949: Li Zehou, You Xilin, Deng Xiaomang, Zhu Liyuan, Wang Defeng, Zhang Fa, Chen Wangheng, Zhang Shiying, Fan Zhichang, Yang Chunshi, Wang Qiankun and Ye Xiushan.

In addition to the viewpoints of the aestheticians mentioned above, this thesis pays special attention to the book named *Famous Contemporary Chinese Aestheticians*, which consists of "a basic introduction to the famous contemporary Chinese aestheticians, their aesthetic works, and their answers to some aesthetic questions"15). The book also "covers the famous aestheticians of Chinese Mainland and their studies"16), showing the status quo of contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

2) The Research Status and Literature Review of Category-Oriented Studies

The category-oriented study approach is the most common method of aesthetic study in China, and is adopted by a large number of textbooks, introductory and theoretical books. The thesis refers to two books about the category-oriented studies on "ontology"17) and "aestheticism": *Chinese Aesthetic Ontology in the 20th Century*, and *A Study of the 20th-century Chinese Aestheticism*18). The first book reviews and

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16) Ibid.
generalizes the discussions on ontology which are divided into two parts according to the development stages, one from 1911 to 1949 and the other from 1949 to 1999. It records the changes of the nature of ontological thoughts. Both of the two books are systematically organized and provide this thesis with study materials about the source and changing process of categories and concepts.19)

3) The Research Status and Literature Review of Chinese-Western comparison-oriented Studies

The biggest challenge in this study lies in the ambiguity of “aesthetics”, the study object. Aesthetics is a discipline with distinct modern characteristics. Therefore, for those who are not familiar with the modern concepts, it can be an extremely unfamiliar discipline in terms of its field, object, and method of research. Of course, this is not a special case for aesthetics. Philosophy (which aesthetics belongs to) and the relevant disciplines such as natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences all achieve their development within the modern academic system set up on the basis of the rational beliefs about humanity under the influence of the Enlightenment. The greatest problem is that aesthetics is at the lowest level in the system. Another problem lies in its ecological features: aesthetics develops from and with philosophy, and then becomes an individual science. Since the beginning of human civilization, history has witnessed the existence and growth of philosophy as a body of knowledge. That is before the manipulation of philosophy by the so-called academic institutions, or universities. In addition to knowledge, philosophy also includes the world outlook, cultural practice and thinking patterns which are formed over a long period of time. Therefore, the imposition of one ideological system on another without the consideration of the above root causes will not bring about any integration or profound thoughts. As a result, the study on the comparison between Chinese and Western aesthetics is of great significance as a preparation stage for their integration.

Nowadays, there are plenty of “Chinese-Western comparison-oriented” study

results. This research, however, does not aim at the comparison between the Chinese and western aesthetics, nor does it adopt the method of comparative philosophy. Nevertheless, it intends to figure out “how can the integration of two different cultures and ideologies be realized”, so it refers much to the “Chinese-Western comparison-oriented” study results for methods and concepts. The book *Comparative Aesthetic Principles* points out the possibility and legitimacy of the optimistic development for not only some issues on Chinese and Western aesthetics, but also the study of ideological and cultural comparison as a whole. The focus of the book is not on the comparison between “Chinese and Western aesthetics”, but on the "comparative aesthetics" of China and the West. Hence, it starts with the scientific research method of “comparison”, and then testifies to the "possibility of comparative aesthetics", the “necessity of comparative aesthetics” and the “development trend”. Next, the book talks about the approaches to comparative studies. For example, it illustrates “the practicality of the parallel research on comparative aesthetics”, “the practicality of the influence research on comparative aesthetics” and “the practicality of the dislocation research on comparative aesthetics”\(^{20}\). Many previous “Chinese-Western comparison-oriented” studies consist of rather shallow comparisons with a purpose, leading to the misunderstandings of the cultures and ideologies on both sides. Thus, without the investigation of their sources and meanings, the study can easily become a failure. Since the book mentioned above covers the various situations that may arise during the comparative researches, this thesis refers much to it for demonstration method.

In addition to the discussions on the forms and methods of studies, the thesis also refers to quite a few “Chinese-Western comparison-oriented” studies. The questions raised in *Philosophical Aesthetics and Ancient Chinese Studies* are basically in line with the those in this study. Academically, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, and Chinese thoughts are based on ancient Chinese studies. Therefore, these two are in contradiction with each other in some way. In this sense, the book shares academic questions with this study which mainly refer to the part in the book that is in accord with the study subject, namely “The Modern and Contemporary Trends and the Modernization of Chinese Culture: the Methodological Significance of the

Shift From ‘Cherishing the Old Knowledge and Acquiring the New’ to ‘Reviewing the Sources and Creating Innovations’”21). The Paradigm and Transformation of Chinese and Western Aesthetics concentrates on a thematic study on the comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetics, with its three major themes being “(Western) Aesthetics and Chinese Aesthetics”, “Aesthetic History and Western Aesthetics”, and “Aesthetic Culture and Literary Aesthetics”. In part 5.1.1 or “The Reexamination of the Legitimacy of ‘Aesthetics’ as the Name for the Discipline”, the thesis answers the question of the correspondence between Western and Chinese aesthetics, agreeing with the view of “(Western) Aesthetics and Chinese Aesthetics” and that aesthetic history is not the same with aesthetics itself. The thesis also pays special attention to “Disciplinary orientation and Modern Structure of Aesthetics” and “Creative Transformation of Chinese Aesthetic Spirit and Traditional Aesthetics”, since they systematically explore the establishment and development of the overall aesthetic structure22). This research focuses on the orientation of Aesthetics in educational institutions, especially in universities and colleges. Objective materials from book A Comparative Study on Aesthetics Curriculum in Chinese and American Universities—a Case Study based on 12 Universities are used for its reference. This book is very useful with “the Descriptions of Aesthetics Courses” in both Chinese and American colleges, “the Comparison of Aesthetic as a Curriculum”, and “the Comparison of Aesthetics Textbooks”23). Zhang Fa not only attended to the comparison of Chinese and Western Aesthetics, but also paid attention to “comparison of aesthetics in China, Western countries and India”, and “international issues of Chinese aesthetics” and so on, carrying out his comparative studies from various perspectives.

In Chinese and Western Aesthetics and Cultural Spirit24), Zhang Fa comparatively studied “the fundamental spirit of Chinese and Western Culture”, “Chinese and Western aesthetic as a whole”, and found out some features that are particular in

23) Qianhua Yang, A Comparative Study on Aesthetics Curriculum in Chinese and American College—a Case Study Based on 12 Universities (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009), 3-34, 35-59, 60-118.
24) Fa Zhang, Chinese and Western Aesthetics and Cultural Spirit (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2010).
a single aesthetic system. In the meantime, he expounded different understandings of certain Chinese and Western aesthetic concepts such as “harmony”, “tragedy”, and “sublimeness”. Though these concepts were introduced to China, correspondence can be found in Chinese thoughts and literary theories. Based on a detailed analysis of literature, Zhang believes that China and the West have a common understanding of the said concepts that makes a comparative study on Chinese and Western aesthetics possible: “Harmony” is an “aesthetic condensation of ideals”, “tragedy”, an “aesthetic condensation of dilemma” and “sublimeness”, an “aesthetic condensation that transcends intent”. In addition, Zhang Fa also carried out comparative researches on several core issues, trying to answer some key questions such as how to understand “the supreme state of Chinese and Western aesthetic objects”, “the theory of Chinese and Western aesthetics creation”, and “the theory of Chinese and Western aesthetics inspiration”. He also conducted a comprehensive and general comparative study on Chinese and Western aesthetics, including “the body of Chinese and Western aesthetics” and “the specific ways of Chinese and Western aesthetics”. This research pays more attention to an overall comparative analysis of these mentioned questions. In addition, Zhang Fa also broadened his horizon, trying to make “a comparison of Chinese and South Korean aesthetics”, “to see why the West firstly achieved modernity by comparing Chinese, Western, and Indian thoughts”, and “Comparative Aesthetics: China and the rest”, etc., all of which are extensive and multiple-level comparative studies. Owing to his accumulated researches and experiences on principles and theories of aesthetics over years, his “Systematic Comparison of the Works of Chinese and Western Aesthetics Principles and Theories” adopted an especially reliable method of expounding theories and his A Comparative Study on the Chinese and Western Aesthetics Principles Systems in the 20th Century is a monograph on that topic among other previously written masterpieces like Aspects of Aesthetic, An Introduction to the Aesthetics (2nd edition), and An Outline to the Aesthetics etc.. Zhang Fa has not only made fruitful achievements in the field of aesthetic

theoretical systems and overall study on these systems, but also studied the process of Western aesthetics development. He has paid attention to the development process of Western aesthetics in the 20th century, and compiled *A History of Western Aesthetics in the 20th Century*\(^{29}\). Therefore, his book *A Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Aesthetics Principles Systems in the 20th Century* is a comprehensive work of his researches, which mainly includes three parts: “the Western aesthetic principles system in the 20th century”, “the Chinese aesthetic principles system in the 20th century”, and “the comparison of the Chinese and Western aesthetic principles system”. The major references used in this research can be found in *A Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Aesthetics Theoretical Systems in the 20th Century* and *Chinese and Western Aesthetics and Cultural Spirit*.

In addition to the references mentioned above, this research also refers to “Enlightenment and cultural identity tension in context of post-colonialism” a chapter in *Exploration of the Modern Chinese Aesthetics*\(^{30}\). This research also pays attention to the influences of “enlightenment” and “anti-enlightenment”, “colonialism” and “anti-colonialism” on the development of aesthetics in China, which relates to “aesthetic education”. These are further discussed in “2.7 Post-colonial aesthetics – from the ‘West’ to the ‘East’ and to ‘East Asia’” and in “5.1.2.2.2 from the ‘anti-imperialist and anti-feudalism’ trend of thought to the ‘Socialist’ Aesthetics”.

4) The Research Status and Literature Review of Structure-Oriented Studies

There are few researches on the “structure-oriented” studies of Aesthetics, which should be logical and systematic. The object of this research is aesthetics as a branch of modern and contemporary research subject. Establishing a “modern and contemporary sub-discipline” requires a logic theory introduction. Therefore, this research refers to the following books: *Attempts and Problems in Aesthetic Construction* and *A Study on Systematic History in Chinese Aesthetics*. Particular attention is paid to

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the analysis of Wang Guowei’s aesthetics by Yan Guozhong in the chapter “Wang Guowei: Aesthetic Construction with the idea of ‘realm’ as the Core” of his book Attempts and Problems in Aesthetic Construction. With a focus on Wang Guowei’s concept of “realm”, Yan went through Wang Guowei’s aesthetic thoughts and from the issue of “aesthetic” derived a discussion about “realm”. “Realm” here means an “idea” and “internal stipulation”, the core of Chinese aesthetics, which derived from Chinese philosophy, and thus represents the spirit of the Chinese nation. The second generation of aestheticians like Zong Baihua and Zhu Guangqian systematically discussed this issue. Zong Baihua put the concept of “Yijing” (an artistic concept) into literature and art, and Zhu Guangqian analyzed his theory. The concept of “Yijing” can strengthen the internal logical structure of aesthetics. Zhang Fa’s A Study on Systematic History in Chinese Aesthetics emphasized historical records and literature which enabled him to find some elements that correspond to the modern subject based on which he conducted a structural analysis. This research method is appreciated in this research because if a method of modern philosophy combined with the analysis of the literature were adopted, it would be easy to lose the “beauty” contained. The basis for developing the theory here lies in the literature itself in which the hidden structure is found. Generally speaking, through the analysis of literature, the ideological system of the literature becomes available, which is in line with the requirements of aesthetics research and shows the possibility of the establishment of Chinese aesthetics.

5) The Research Status and Literature Review of History-Oriented Studies

In the second half of this research, the chapter “6.1 Aesthetics in China” focuses on the process of establishment and development of Aesthetics in China after the great efforts of the first, second, and third generations of aesthetic scholars from

31) Guozhong Yan, Attempts and Problems in Aesthetic Construction (7 Volumes) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015), 3-43. However, the main point of this book belongs to Soviet aesthetics, which focuses on the “the essence of aesthetics”. Yan Guozhong’s other monographs, Out of the Classics: A Review of Contemporary Chinese Aesthetic Debates, specifically studies the debate process of logical development of the “esthetic rush” debate.

19897 to 1978. The research method adopted here is a historical-oriented one. In general works of Aesthetic studies, there are certain contents related to history-oriented studies, but as for monographs, they are not that sufficient. This research draws on research findings of Zhang Qiqun and Wang Desheng. In particular, this research follows Zhang Qiqun’s train of thoughts and reviews the process of Chinese aesthetics development in the past 100 years. This research has gained inspiration from his book’s criticism of shortcomings of some aesthetics theories. Wang Desheng’s *Chinese Aesthetics in the 20th Century* also mainly discusses the history of the development of Chinese aesthetics in the past 100 years. However, this book lacks a logical relevance between the former and latter scholars and aesthetic thoughts. Though it is so, this does not lessen its value as the reference for it involves a large number of aesthetic discussions in the past 100 years. To make a summary of it is still rewarding.

In addition to the important documents mentioned above, this research also refers to some articles on “The establishment and development of aesthetics in China”. In terms of the history of Chinese aesthetics development in the 20th century, special attention is paid to the research findings of Zhang Qiqun and Wang Desheng; in terms of the Western philosophy and comparative philosophy of the East and West, Zhang Rulun’s articles are highly valued; and in terms of East Asian aesthetics and the comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetics, great importance is attached to Zhang Fa’s research findings.

The research findings of the issue of “Aesthetics in China or East Asia” are quite close to the topic of this research. In particular, the basic viewpoints in *Contemporary Studies of Chinese Aesthetics* by Liu Yuedi and Li Xiuji are basically consistent with that of this research. In the first chapter of this book, the issue of “establishing aesthetics as a subject in China” is raised. The origin of the word “beauty” and

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“aesthetics”, the orientation and educational foundation of aesthetics, and the structure of beauty-aesthetic-and art are mentioned. These three are also mentioned in this research. Problems of aesthetic research conducted in China in the 20th century are topics of both their studies and this research, but when it comes to how to cut into these problems, this research is different from theirs. First, in the chapter “5.1 Re-examination of ‘aesthetics’ as the name of a subject” of this study, the origin of the name of “aesthetics” is talked about too, but the focus has been shifted to the reflection of correctness of “the knowledge of learning aesthetics”. Second, chapter 3.1 is about the orientation of aesthetics, finding aesthetics positions not only from the educational foundation, but also from the system of educational institutions and the knowledge structure based on that. Finally, in chapter “3.2.1.4”, this research also raises the issue of “beauty-aesthetics-art”, but does not approach the issue from the perspective of research institutions, just paying attention to the origin of their aesthetic thoughts and scrutinizing the position of these three in Kant’s aesthetics and the changes in their relations during the history of aesthetic development. The word “contemporary” in Contemporary Studies of Chinese Aesthetics refers to the period after the founding of the People’s Republic of China which serves as a start of the “extensive discussion on aesthetics”. In this research, it is believed that as early as in the end of Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) and early Republic of China (about 1910s), there were discussions on aesthetics as a modern sub-discipline. At that time, the aestheticicians had a clear understanding of traditional thoughts and knowledge structures, and they also understood foreign languages, which has been played a decisive role in the process of 20th-century aesthetics development in the past 100 years in China. However, in Contemporary Studies of Chinese Aesthetics, aesthetic research trends since 1978 were divided into four categories: aesthetic principles and theories, the Western aesthetics history, Chinese aesthetics history, and aesthetic ontology, a similar classification to this research, seen in chapter 6. However, this research focuses more on the analysis of the new category of “aesthetic principles”. The reason why this research pays more attention to the “aesthetic principles” lies in two aspects: Firstly, the research of “aesthetics principles” conducted in China is a comprehensive and integrated research. Analyzing “theories in aesthetics principle” based on the theoretical structure of Western aesthetics, Chinese aesthetics, and
Soviet aesthetics requires the researcher’s ability of comprehensive and systematic thinking so as to ensure innovation. Secondly, the influence of Marx’s aesthetics is the most powerful among all academic elements that constitute the “aesthetics principles”, which has become a unique method to study Chinese aesthetics and plays a concrete role in society and education.

In addition to Contemporary Studies of Chinese Aesthetics, Hu Jian’s “Discipline Presentation: Localization of Western Aesthetics” in Modernity and Chinese Aesthetics35) and questions mentioned in the Han Demin’s “Multiple Attempts to Transform ‘Aesthetics’ to ‘Chinese Aesthetics’” in Aesthetic Construction and Modern Interpretation of Chinese Cultural Spirit36) are quite close to the core idea of this research, but the methodology adopted and basic viewpoints of judging certain issues are quite different.

3. Conclusion: The Development Direction and Future of Aesthetic Research in East Asia

This paper aims to present the direction in which aesthetic research in East Asian countries should move forward through the analysis of Chinese aesthetic research trends that have developed discussions about aesthetics into a grand de-bate called aesthetic popularity (美學熱). Here, “East Asia” refers to countries that belong to the cultural region that utilized Chinese characters, most prominent China, South Korea, and Japan.

Aesthetics was established in the course of the modernization process of academics and fundamentally stemmed from western philosophy. "Aesthetics" was received relatively early during the modernization process in East Asian countries, but due to its conflicting characteristics of "ambiguity" and "inclusiveness" that created obstacles to its development it could not obtain its status as an academic discipline. However, since the modernization period, China has accepted aesthetic theory through

various routes from Europe, Japan and Russia, which allows a multi-level research basis of aesthetics. In addition, if we scrutinize the influences of aesthetics, we can easily notice that it has become a type of movement beyond the realm of academics since it was accepted as part of the spirit of enlightenment. In the end, aesthetics could form a trend of thought with social influence; thereafter, through the conflict between the functionalism of Soviet aesthetics and the essentialism of aesthetics, it could be developed into a national scale aesthetic discussion.

Today, in almost all universities in China, aesthetic is being taught as a basic curriculum. China as well as has the largest number of aesthetic education institutions, aesthetic research centers, and scholars in the world, has grown into a major country for aesthetic research. In this regard as a successful case, this paper examined the tendency of aesthetic research in modern China and divides it into the following five categories for analysis: first, the research status and literature review of aesthetician-oriented studies; second, the research status and literature review of category-oriented studies; third, the research status and literature review of Chinese-western comparison-oriented studies; fourth, the research status and literature review of structure-oriented studies; and fifth, the research status and literature review of history-oriented studies.

The research tendencies of aesthetics in China discussed above provided a direction for the academic development of aesthetic research in East Asia, and from this we can confirm its significant value. At the same time, the issue of aesthetic re-interpretation of traditional contents, the issue of division and convergence between aesthetics, literature, and philosophy of art, and the method of how to break away from the dichotomy between east-west aesthetics will comprise the task for which scholars in East Asia should try to find solutions together in the future.

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