

1. The topic of this international congress of aesthetics is “Diversities in Aesthetics.” How do you understand this topic? What influences do you think that this conference will take about to Chinese aesthetics and aesthetics all over the world?

**There are many forms of diversity here: diversity of the arts, diversity of aesthetic practices and experiences beyond the realm of art; diversity of methods of analysis; diversity of cultures and philosophical traditions, some of which are distinguished on national or geographical grounds. Because of all this diversity that is represented in the ICA congress, I would not try to predict any particular influence that the conference will have on Chinese aesthetics or on aesthetics outside China. In any case, at least in the United States and Europe, conferences have far less influence on the direction of research than do important books and articles.**

2. I remember that you use the word of “bridge” on the round table in 2002, which was held here in Peking University. And in that meeting, you expressed your desire to build a bridge between Pragmatism and Chinese philosophy. My question is, on what foundation and aspects is the dialogue between Chinese aesthetics and western aesthetics possible and effective? And how can we carry on this dialogue?

**Yes, I used the metaphor of bridge to describe my philosophical approach and function when I had my first interview in China in 2002 on the occasion of the publication of the Chinese translation of my two books *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Practicing Philosophy*, a group interview with a panel of Chinese scholars. The idea of bridge was already applied to my philosophy by French philosophers and critics because of the way my philosophy makes bridges between art and life, between high art and popular art, and between different traditions of philosophy. I expressed my hope that we could make a bridge between American pragmatist philosophy and Chinese philosophy, and I think that there are enough commonalities between them to build a strong bridge. (I cannot speak about Western philosophy in general because it is too diverse and much of it does not seem as compatible as pragmatism with Chinese philosophy and culture). To be more concrete, let me identify four ways that my version of pragmatist philosophy connects with Chinese thought: first, there is an emphasis on the importance of practice rather than a focus on abstract metaphysics which connects with the emphasis on practice in both Confucianism and Chinese Marxism; second, there is an emphasis on change or flux which relates to the basic Chinese idea of reality as a world of change; third, there is the recognition of the value of popular art, which can be connected both with classical Chinese thought (e.g. Mencius) and with more recent communist respect for the popular. Fourth, my work on somaesthetics affirms the union of body and mind but also insists on the need to cultivate the body-mind or soma. This is in accord with Chinese philosophy’s recognition that body and mind are not two separate things but integrated dimensions of the person and that we should cultivate this somatic self or person. Indeed one key term for self-cultivation in Chinese uses *shen* and thus implies quite clearly cultivation of the body.**

**I am extremely pleased with the excellent reception that pragmatist aesthetics has received in China since the publication of my books in 2002, and, of course, this reception has been greatly helped by the subsequent publication of John Dewey’s classic of pragmatist aesthetics in the translation of Gao Jianping. Recently, I learned of an important literary theorist in Beijing (Prof. Mao from CASS) who wrote a book called *Three Faces of Pragmatism: On J.Dewey, R. Rorty, and R. Shusterman’s Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Cultural Politics*. I think that pragmatism – an open-minded philosophy of practice and change and democratic pluralism – is**

one good direction for developing a Chinese-American philosophical dialogue, including one in aesthetics. The wonderful reception of somaesthetics in China also suggests a promising direction for dialogue, as the philosophers Zhang Zailin and Li Junxue wrote just last month in the *Guangming Daily* (2010-7-22). I hope to return to China more frequently to work with Chinese scholars on developing collaborative research projects in somaesthetics and pragmatist aesthetics. Learning together by working together and seeing each other regularly face-to-face is, I think, the best way to carry the dialogue forward, especially in somaesthetic teaching where bodily presence is very important.

3. At the beginning of last century, Dewey stayed in China for two years. And in the biography written by his daughter Jane, we can see such words as “China is the country Dewey most concerned with” and Dewey’s stay in China “plays great role in activating his academic zest”. Indeed, there is a natural intimacy between pragmatist aesthetics and Chinese traditional thought. I know that you are leaning Chinese these days. And you are interested in Chinese culture. I appreciate your endeavor. So can you tell me what interest you in Chinese culture?

Unfortunately, I don’t have enough time to learn Chinese in a very systematic way. I merely get some lessons from Chinese doctoral students and visiting professors who come to study with me. But I really enjoy this learning, and it helps me understand better some of the classical Chinese philosophical texts that I read in translation or in bilingual texts. I still know very little about Chinese culture apart from the philosophical classics. I do appreciate some of the poetry of the Song and Tang period, but my understanding in Chinese literature is still very meager. As for contemporary Chinese culture, I have written on two young contemporary artists, Peng Si and Wang Fei, whose work I find very interesting.

4. In the past half century, aesthetics in Europe and in America underwent a process that Analytic aesthetics dominated at first, and then went out of analytic aesthetics. And your own story is a mirror of this process. We know, you are once an outstanding scholar in the field of analytic aesthetics. But you turned your steps to Pragmatism and find inspirations from Dewey and Emerson. So my question is what role did pragmatism played in the progress walking out of analytic aesthetic?

Yes, I was trained in analytic philosophy at Oxford and was very successful in analytic aesthetics. That method and style of writing has never left me. My philosophical style of writing and argument is closer to analytic philosophical style than it is to Emerson or Dewey. I belong to what is sometimes called analytic pragmatism that includes philosophers who were successful in analytic philosophy and argue in that style but do so with insights also from pragmatist philosophers: such analytic pragmatists working in aesthetics include Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman, Joseph Margolis, and myself. Outside of aesthetics one could mention Hilary Putnam and Robert Brandom as analytic pragmatists. Of course, many philosophers in analytic philosophy are purists, so they think if you embrace pragmatist insights in your thinking you can no longer be analytic, but I don’t think there is a dichotomy between the two approaches. Wittgenstein and Quine are paradigmatic analytic philosophers who adopted clear pragmatist principles in their philosophy. Still, it is true that the most interesting work done now in aesthetics goes beyond the narrow analytic paradigm. Arthur Danto with his Hegelian perspective is an example of how the best analytic aestheticians go beyond purely analytic sources.

5. In late 20<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared a trend in America and China, that is, the aestheticization of ordinary life. What do you think about this movement?

I have long been associated with this trend (I wouldn’t call it an organized movement), because my book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* argues for integrating art more into life, including the practice of ethics as an art of living. I think this trend is positive, if we understand this sort of aestheticization as an intensifying of aesthetic qualities

**and thus as an improvement of everyday life, and also if we incorporate the ethical dimension in our notion of what constitutes beautiful behavior or aesthetic forms of action.**

6. You once defined art as “dramatization”, although you preferred not to define art. What do you intend to express by giving out such a definition. Do you think it has any connections with Dewey’s “*an experience*” and “aesthetic aesthetics”?

**In defining art as dramatization, I did not intend to offer a traditional definition of necessary and sufficient conditions or a definition that perfectly matched the extension of the concept of art. Those definitions have shown themselves to be either inaccurate or too general to be instructive. I critically analyze these definitions in my book *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, where I call them “wrapper definitions” because they simply try to perfectly cover the objects included under the concept or art. In defining art as dramatization I am offering a different kind of definition: one that does not try to cover all and only objects that are considered art but that instead tries to highlight or emphasize something about art, some new perspective on it, that helps us understand it better. The concept of dramatization does that through the two different meanings of to dramatize – first to intensify and enliven an experience but second to put some action in the formal frame of a stage (which also serves to intensify it). Not only the art of drama involves this integrated use of intensification through formal framing, but so do other forms of art. Moreover, this definition helps resolve the tension in aesthetic theory between theories that define art in terms of heightened experience or beauty and theories that instead define it in terms of the background institutional framing of the artworld and the sociohistorical contexts of art practice. Dewey’s theory and theories that focus on art’s intrinsic meaning and beauty focus on the first aspect in the notion of dramatization. Theories that define art in terms of the artworld, art institutions, and historical context focus on the second. Dramatization combines both. But it is not exclusive to art. Ritual also dramatizes in both senses, which is why it has great aesthetic power.**

7. Your research in soma-aesthetics and popular culture calls for the development and creation by self and the promotion of one’s experience. My question is, how can the development of the private self impel the reformation and advancement of the whole society?

**I think that your Confucian tradition already gives the main answer to this question in the *Da Xue*. Before you reform and govern the kingdom, you must reform and govern your family, and before you properly govern and reform your family, you must achieve good self-government, self-reform, and self-development. Since the self is always social, then self-improvement should always include improving one’s understanding of others and one’s relations with others. Moreover, your acts of self-improvement -- if they are done in the proper spirit of recognizing the self’s dependence on society and its need to contribute to society – can inspire others to improve themselves and harmonize their behavior. This is the idea that the exemplary person teaches by example and rules by the attractive harmony of his behavior. Of course there is no guarantee of success in reforming the world, but that is no reason to give up, and there is always the consolation that one is at least contributing to improving that part of the world that one’s self occupies and engages with.**

8. Finally, could you please introduce to Chinese readers the current development of aesthetics in America and its direction in the future?

**I cannot speak for America in general, and I would not want people to have the impression that America presents a unified field or direction in aesthetics. There is American aesthetics that is influenced by the analytic tradition, by the pragmatist tradition, and by French and German philosophical traditions. Besides aesthetics generated from philosophical research, there are aesthetic theories based more on visual art and literary theory.**

I am not a prophet and cannot predict future trends, but I can say what I think would be good for the future. First, that the resources from the different philosophical traditions would be integrated or brought into dialogue or into synthesis in the work of individual philosophers who know the different traditions. I have been trying to do this and so have some other philosophers who work in a variety of traditions. I would also like to see more integration of theory and practice in aesthetics. I have tried to do this by giving practical workshops in somaesthetics. Perhaps one day my Chinese will be good enough to do this in China, as I have done it in France and America.