

中英审美现代性的差异

首届“中英马克思主义美学双边论坛”论文集

主编 王杰、易存国

【英】罗伯特·斯宾塞 (Robert Spence)



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(讲席教授) 大会发言



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与会部分代表合影
(罗伯特·斯宾塞、迈克·桑德斯、肯尼斯·苏林、大卫·奥尔德森、王杰、梁允翔、索宇环、易存国)



大会专题讨论之一

中英审美现代性的差异

——《首届中英马克思主义美学双边论坛文集》序

王 杰

2008年初春，受国家留学基金委的资助，我以“高级研究学者”和曼彻斯特大学艺术、历史与文化学院名誉研究员的身份到曼彻斯特大学从事访问研究，合作研究者是著名的马克思主义文学理论家特里·伊格尔顿教授。刚到曼彻斯特大学时，因伊格尔顿在美国耶鲁大学讲学，英文系系主任 Laura Doan 教授介绍我认识了该系优秀的青年马克思主义文学批评家迈克·桑德斯（Mike Sanders）博士，安排他帮助我解决研究工作中的有关问题。在和迈克的交往中，我们讨论了马克思主义文学批评和美学的许多问题。伊格尔顿回来后，我们讨论最多的是马克思主义的命运，以及马克思主义美学的有关问题。伊格尔顿和我有一个共识：马克思主义美学的学科建设远远没有完成，还有许多工作要做。

对于马克思主义而言，曼彻斯特是一个重要的城市。在市中心的 Chetham's 图书馆里，至今保存着马克思当年在这里看书和研究的座位。正是在这里，年轻的马克思和恩格斯讨论了《共产党宣言》的写作思路和构想。恩格斯当年经营的工厂现在是著名的“人民历史博物馆”，也在曼城市中心。自 20 世纪 80 年代以来，曼彻斯特大学的马克思主义文学批评和文化理论研究在世界范围内具有重要的声望和影响。我从英国回国后不久，迈克来信告诉我，在 2008 年的学科排名中，曼彻斯特大学英美文学与文化系排名全英第二。除了伊格尔顿等著名学者外，曼大英文系还有大卫·奥尔德森（David Alderson）、迈克·桑德斯（Mike Sanders）、罗伯特·斯宾塞（Robert Spencer）等一批优秀的青年马克思

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主义研究学者。与曼彻斯特相比，上海也是一个重要的工人阶级城市和中国马克思主义诞生和发展的重镇。《共产党宣言》的第一个中译本就出自上海。鲁迅、瞿秋白以及著名的“左联”就是中国早期现代化过程中十分重要的文化阵营，在中国的现代化发展中起过十分重要的作用。在全球化的社会和文化背景下，以上海和曼彻斯特两个城市为支点，以双边论坛的形式开展马克思主义美学的交流与对话，无疑是一件很有意义的事情。

经过一段时间的筹备，在克服了许多困难和阻力之后，以“中英审美现代性的差异”为主题的首届中英马克思主义美学双边论坛于2011年4月23-25日在上海交通大学人文学院隆重举行，为了再现当时的语境，我把在开幕式上的致辞复制如下。

尊敬的各位嘉宾、女士们、先生们：

大家早上好！

两个星期前，上海交通大学刚刚庆祝了115周年校庆，这所中国最早的现代大学见证了中国社会的现代化过程，包括它的痛苦、困顿和辉煌。今天，我们在这里隆重召开“首届中英马克思主义美学双边论坛”，来自英国曼彻斯特大学，美国杜克大学、加州大学洛杉矶分校、麻省理工学院，俄国圣彼得堡大学，澳大利亚昆士兰科技大学，以及全国各高校和研究机构的学者，共聚交通大学思源湖畔，研讨和反思中英审美现代性的共同性和差异，交流各国马克思主义学者和研究者对当代社会复杂性的认识，这无疑是一件很有意义的工作。在此，我谨代表上海交通大学人文学院对各位学者的光临表示热烈的欢迎！

人文学院在上海交通大学的发展战略中有着举足轻重的地位，在学校的通识教育、创新人才培养和人文基础学科建设中，发挥着重要的支撑作用。目前，人文学院包括四系两中心，即中文系、历史系、哲学系、科学技术史与科学哲学系，以及国家大学生素质教育基地、艺术教育中心，涉及科学技术史、中国语言文学、历史学、哲学、音乐学五个一级学科。近年来，根据学校的战略部署，人文学院提出了建设“新人文”学科和跨学科建设的发展理念。以学科建设为中心，加快培育发展优势学科和交叉学科，大力引进高端人才，积极组建高水平科研团队，扩大国际合作与交流，努力提高承担国家重大科研项目的能力，学术研究蒸蒸日上，学术影响日渐扩大。

去年5月，世博会开幕不久，曼彻斯特大学“艺术、历史与文化学院”

的大卫·奥尔德森博士访问上海交通大学，在讲学期间，我们商谈合作举办“中英马克思主义美学论坛”。令人高兴的是，不到一年时间，这个当时还很朦胧的设想就变成了现实，曼彻斯特大学和上海交通大学因为马克思主义美学这个学术的纽带再次联系起来。我们计划把双边论坛办成一个国际性的马克思主义美学和文化研究方面的专业性论坛，每年或者每两年举办一次，在上海交通大学和曼彻斯特大学轮流举办。通过这样一个学术交流的平台，我们希望两国以及各国马克思主义美学和文化研究领域的学者可以交流研究信息，交换研究成果，探讨开展合作研究的可能性，共同把马克思主义美学、马克思主义文学批评和文化理论研究推向深入。

在中国，美学和现代化进程紧密相连。在上海交通大学的早期历史上，有一位重要的美学思想家叫蔡元培，他也是上海交通大学早期著名“特班”的创办者。在当时的条件下，上海交通大学的前身南洋公学培养了邹韬奋、李叔同、黄炎培、傅雷、张元济等一批在中国早期现代化进程中发挥了重要作用的著名学者和文化名人。早在20世纪30年代，蔡元培就提出了影响深远的“以美育代宗教”的设想，期望用审美经验的超验性和审美自由的启蒙作用来解决中国社会现代化过程中所产生的种种问题。在后来的历史发展过程中，美学和文学艺术的有关问题始终在中国社会现代化过程中占据一个十分重要的地位。与英国社会的现代化过程相比较，中国的审美现代性所包含的问题更为复杂，因为中国的现代化发展一直是处在全球化的语境之下，以西方文化为他者，具有一种较英国社会不同的复杂的矛盾结构。我想，中英审美现代性的差异既是一个学术问题，也是一个现实问题，值得我们认真地探讨，从不同角度去研究和分析，通过讨论和争议产生某种共识或某种新的观点。

2009年秋季，《马克思主义美学研究》编辑部迁至上海交通大学人文学院。2011年初，我们又组建了“上海交通大学人文学院美学与文化理论研究所”，马克思主义美学和文化理论的研究已经列入人文学院的“十二五”建设规划和中长期发展规划中，我们希望经过一段时间的持续努力，把上海交通大学人文学院建设成中国研究马克思主义美学和文化理论的一个重镇。我希望各位学者和朋友积极支持这一事业。今天，中英马克思主义美学论坛的隆重开幕就是一个良好的开端。

最后，祝会议圆满成功，祝各位专家学者在沪期间生活愉快！

谢谢！

时间过得很快，一晃一年又过去了。第二届双边论坛将于今年4月12-14日在曼彻斯特大学如期举行。这一届的主题是“马克思主义与人道主义”，将着重研讨马克思的《1844年经济学哲学手稿》中的美学思想以及马克思主义与人道主义的复杂关系。著名马克思主义理论家Janet Wolff和Kevin Anderson教授将分别发表题为“社会学的第三方立场：正视文化理论转向的影响”和“卡尔·马克思和当下的存在：超越抵抗以及走向人的解放”的报告。中方将有16名学者出席会议并发表自己的研究成果。

早春二月，大地苏醒。在易存国教授和罗伯特·斯宾塞博士的共同努力下，首届中英马克思主义美学双边论坛的会议论文集得以编辑出版，其中凝聚了上海交通大学人文学院“美学与文化理论研究所”各位同仁的艰苦努力，包含着许多担当和奉献，我真诚地感谢大家！

是为序。

2012年3月16日于

上海交通大学人文学院美学与文化理论研究所

（主编简介：王杰，上海交通大学人文学院院长，特聘教授，博士生导师。）

Preface

Aesthetics, Modernity and Cultural Theory in China and Britain

Robert Spencer

The essays in this volume are all products of discussions held at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in April 2011. The forum, an exciting joint venture by Shanghai Jiao Tong and the University of Manchester, brought together scholars from 'around the world to discuss Marxist theory and in particular Marxist approaches to aesthetics and the study of modernity. The event, the idea of Professor Wang Jie and Dr David Alderson, was an extremely stimulating and eclectic occasion. Speaking as an English academic working mostly from a broadly Marxist perspective, I would not hesitate to say that the event was both eye – opening and fortifying. It gave a sense of the variety of concerns and the diversity of perspectives among Chinese colleagues and it served to confirm the sheer richness and rigour of the Marxist tradition.

The event consisted, firstly, of individual papers of varying lengths on the broad subject of aesthetics and modernity. Many of the essays in this volume began life as presentations on this first day of the forum. On the second day there were extended and very detailed discussions of readings that had been circulated in advance by the Chinese and the British participants. The conversations about Mao's talk on aesthetic commitment and orientation at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, on Jiang Rong's extraordinary novel *Wolf Totem* and on Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (his classic study of English literary representations of the process of urbanisation and

‘modernisation’), did not conclude with agreement on all the matters discussed. Yet they were all the more instructive as a result. The atmosphere was agreeably democratic as different interpretations and points of view were expressed by the participants and by the many graduate students in attendance. No consensus was reached but every discussion enabled preconceptions to be put to the test. The debates ended with increased understanding on all sides of the comparable but at the same time very divergent experiences of ‘modernisation’ in the Chinese and British contexts.

Indeed, the term ‘modernity’ cropped up more and more frequently in our conversations. We focussed too on the diverse ways in which literature and culture more broadly both respond to and in turn seek to affect and even influence the enormously complex and contested processes of industrial and capitalist modernisation. The contributors to this volume have approached these problems from several different angles. Firstly, Justin O’ Connor, Wang Jie, Zhu Liyuan, Ma Haili, Sam Liang and Yangjie have chosen to explore the question of the distinctiveness of Chinese art and therefore Chinese aesthetic theory. Other contributors take as their focus the nature of contemporary capitalist culture. In this category are David Alderson, Gao Jianping, and Jin Huimin, Alexander Petrov, Kenneth Surin, LiJinshu, Wang Qinfeng and Zhang Bi. The Marxist aesthetic tradition’s versatility and its global dimensions are the subjects of the essays by Xia Zhongyi, Yu Zhaoping, Robert Spencer, Xia Jinqian, Duan Jifang and Zhou Weishan. A further category, on the question of early and ‘precapitalist’ culture and on research in aesthetic anthropology, contains work by Mike Sanders, and Ye Shuxian, Xu Xinjian, Tang Qicui. The centrality of the category of the aesthetic is insisted upon in all these articles. Perhaps this aspect of our conversations at the forum and of the further reflection and discussion that will undoubtedly be prompted by this volume will prove to be most salutary. I speak as somebody who is convinced that the analysis of literature and art is a central purpose of our work because aesthetic experience, as well as scholarly and critical reflection on the aesthetic, provide us with certain rewards and forms of knowledge. All the articles gathered in this collection stress the specific challenges and rewards of the aesthetic.

Yet we also need to acknowledge, as the scholars gathered here do, the force of the kind of objection raised by the great German Marxist and philosopher of aesthetics Herbert Marcuse when he insisted that aesthetic concerns have no intrinsic justification. ‘In a situation where the miserable reality can be changed only through radical

political praxis', Marcuse reminds us, 'the concern with aesthetics demands justification' (1979: 1). As I read him, Marcuse is contending that attention to culture is justifiable only when aesthetic experience serves to amplify and even helps, in some necessarily circuitous manner, to rectify an exploitative social order. When culture instils the capacity to reflect on that order in addition to encouraging the aptitudes required to undertake a moral and political transformation it gains a more cogent justification. Hence the uncompromising belief of another distinguished (if idiosyncratic and invariably heterodox) Marxist like Theodor Adorno that an exaggerated or blinkered fixation with questions of culture and cultural value is potentially a distraction from the world of suffering and exploitation from which culture seeks to detach itself and from which it sometimes diverts our attention. Adorno's aesthetics, as Robert Hullot-Kentor has put it, 'are a continuous reflection on the idea of the possible reversal of domination into liberation' (2006: 42). Adorno stresses the political importance of aesthetic experience. For Adorno the aesthetic is valuable precisely because it permits a reflection on the distinctively uneven and contradictory process of capitalist modernity.

Indeed, Adorno restates a recognisably Marxist position, first and most eloquently set forth in *The Communist Manifesto*, that capitalist modernity is both the best and the worst thing that has ever happened to humanity. Alongside the enormous liberation of productive forces, the vast and unprecedented accumulation of material goods and technological know how, as well as the 'melting into air' of redundant traditions and superstitions under the innovative and unsettling processes of capitalist competition, modernity results *at the same time* (and through the very same processes) in a far less attractive reality of alienation, deracination, periodic crisis, grotesque inequalities in wealth and the unsustainable despoliation of the natural world. Raymond Williams is a thinker whose work my English colleagues and I were pleased to be able to introduce to some of our new friends in Shanghai and whose classic study, *The Country and the City*, we were even more delighted to see had already been quite widely read and pondered in China. (By the way, we are especially pleased that a new Chinese translation of *The Country and the City* is underway). Williams's work captures the intrinsically contradictory character of capitalist 'modernisation'.

Capitalism... has always been an ambiguous process: increasing real wealth but distributing it unevenly; enabling larger populations to grow and survive, but within them seeing men only as producers and consumers, with no substantial claim on society

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except in these abstract capacities. There was thus a continuing contrast between the extraordinary improvement of the land and the social consequences of just this process, in the dispossessed and the vagrants, and the old, the sick, the disabled, the nursing mothers, the children who, unable to work in these terms, were seen as merely negative, an unwanted burden. To see the paradox of successful production and these human consequences would be to penetrate the inner character of capitalism itself (1973: 82).

Likewise in colonial India, as Mike Davis reminds us, ‘ “Modernization” and commercialization were accompanied by pauperization’ (Davis 2001: 312). The history of British rule in India can be encapsulated by the bald fact that between 1757, the year in which the British under Robert Clive established their first foothold in the territory, and 1947, the year of independence and partition, there was no increase in India’s per capita income. For most of that period income actually declined. Cash-crop booms were accompanied by declining agrarian productivity and food security. British progress, Davis shows, meant Indian ruin. The point, which is also Adorno’s and Williams’s, is that modernity is a profoundly uneven and ambiguous process; it gives with one hand and takes with the other, bestowing wealth on some and poverty on others, generating the conditions for but, crucially, not yet the reality of a just and meaningful existence for all.

Modernity is a seemingly neutral but in fact profoundly value-loaded term. To be modern, in the colloquial understanding, is to be progressive. But such a simplistic notion of modernity downplays modernity’s contradictions and limitations. Hence the claim made in *The Heart Beats on the Left*, the memoir of Oskar Lafontaine who was briefly German finance minister under Gerhard Schroeder, that the prevalent notion of modernity actively avoids and even discourages vital questions about what it means to be modern and how we might contrast the contradictory processes of capitalist modernization with alternative understandings of progress and development:

The words ‘modernization’ and ‘modernity’ have been degraded to fashionable concepts under which you can think anything at all. If you try to figure out what the people called ‘modernizers’ today understand under the term ‘modernity’, you find that it is little else than economic and social adaptation to the supposed constraints of the global market. The concept of modernity is reduced to purely economic and technical categories [reduction of legal protection against lay-offs, reduction of the

social safety net, reduction of taxes for the wealthy, etc.]. Modernity has simply become a word for the conformity to such economic constraints. The question of how we want to live together and what kind of society we want has become a completely unmodern question and is no longer posed at all (quoted in Jameson 2002: 9).

Williams's work is closely concerned with the ideas I have been discussing here. Like Lafontaine, he argues that crude definitions of modernity forestall the democratic process of debating and deciding on a society's deepest aspirations. They substitute an abstract enthusiasm for accumulating capital for the essential conscious and collective discussion of *how* we wish to live and *which* meanings and purposes our society wishes to prioritise.

Modernization is, indeed, the 'theology' of a new capitalism. It opens up a perspective of change, but at the same time it mystifies the process, and sets limits to it. Attitudes, habits, techniques, practices must change; the system of economic and social power, however, remains unchanged. Modernization fatally short-circuits the formation of social goals. Any discussion of long-term purposes is made to seem utopian [...] Modernization is the ideology of the never-ending present. The whole past belongs to 'traditional' society, and modernization is a technical means for breaking with the past without creating a future (Williams 1968: 45).

For Adorno too, modernity is an ideology. Far from world history tracing an uncomplicated movement from backwardness to modernity, its movement is as jagged as the edge of a saw. Modernity means both progress and regression, development and under-development. No positive meaning can be inferred from history, Adorno argues, which is repetitive not progressive. The Nazi death camps, for example, as well as the multiple crimes of colonial power cannot be assimilated to a narrative of historical progress in the way that the philosopher Hegel tried to do with, say, the destruction of the Greek city states. Seeing Napoleon on the eve of the Battle of Jena, Hegel declared that he had seen the world spirit on horseback; the Emperor, he thought, was the very personification of history's progressive momentum. Adorno's riposte to this way of thinking is stark: 'I have seen the world spirit', not on horseback, but on wings and without a head, and that refutes, at the same stroke, Hegel's philosophy of history' (1974: 155). The terminus of history is not reason or liberty but the deadly weapons of World War II. Adorno therefore dares us to countenance the belief that history does move continuously and in the same direction, but that it is not travelling along the road

of more freedom and more knowledge but towards ever greater violence: 'the path of the world spirit is the unity of terror rolling over mankind' (1996: 341). The point, for Adorno, is to scrutinise modernity, to recognise its contradictoriness and its limitations and to effect a radical break with that whole process. Moreover, that break has not yet occurred. It is the salient value of the aesthetic, of the kinds of thinking and the kinds of experience made possible by works of art, that it is able to engender or encourage such scrutiny.

'I see economic development', the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács once said, 'as creating only the conditions for the victory of socialism' (1974: 127). Modernisation, in other words, produces unprecedented material wealth but does not distribute that wealth evenly; nor does it have much to tell us about how material wellbeing can be combined with sustainable forms of production or with a contented and meaningful life. This volume, by contrast, is concerned with the business of evaluating modernity, of examining modernity's contradictions, and of using the categories, challenges and experiences of the aesthetic to explore alternative ways of thinking and even alternative ways of living. These essays, in short, show that there is more than one way to be modern. As I have been saying, capitalist modernity often doesn't bring development at all but rather, in David Harvey's phrase, 'accumulation by dispossession' (2005: 137 - 182); it ushers in destitution and inequality at the same time as it countenances and acclaims progress. It is a very pleasurable thing for me to be able to introduce this book by observing that a democratic dialogue about what it means to be modern was enacted so vigorously in Shanghai last April and is continued so promisingly in these pages.

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