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# Celebrating Multilingual Discourse

## A New Frontier in Philosophical Exchange

*Xiao Zhang*

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Renmin University of China\*\*

*Andrea Baldini*

Nanjing University\*\*\*

We are delighted to announce the third and last issue of the second volume of the *East Asian Journal of Philosophy*. As we bring this volume to a close, we are excited to introduce a ground-breaking format that reflects our commitment to fostering global philosophical discourse: the multilingual book symposium. In an era marked by growing interconnectivity and cultural diversity, this innovative approach not only enriches our understanding of philosophical works but also reinforces the journal's role as a platform for cross-cultural dialogue.

The role of language has consistently exerted a substantial influence on the development and structure of philosophical discourse. However, linguistic obstacles may occasionally impede the accessibility and dissemination of profound concepts. In light of this recognition, our efforts have been directed at surpassing these constraints through the implementation of a symposium that encompasses a diverse range of languages. Through this approach, our intention is to not only recognize the vastness of language variation but also promote a more extensive interchange of philosophical perspectives.

The focus of our multilingual book symposium is centered on the most recent monograph authored by Mary Wiseman, titled *A Grand Materialism in the New Art*

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*from China*. Through the publication of this groundbreaking work, Wiseman further advances our understanding of global aesthetics, thereby broadening our intellectual horizons. Given the focus of this book on Chinese art, we have extended invitations to two Chinese academics, Dianna SU and Wengxuan SHI, to partake in the symposium. The authors' perceptive comments are presented in both Chinese and English, allowing readers who may not possess fluency in the latter language to engage in the discourse. We were fortunate to receive responses from Wiseman on the comments.

The symposium serves as evidence of the journal's dedication to promoting diversity. Over the course of its two-year tenure, *EJJP* has encompassed a range of contributions in English, Mandarin, Japanese, and Korean, which are languages that aptly depict the multifaceted East Asian region. This particular approach not only facilitates the exchange of cultural perspectives but also expands the intellectual boundaries of our readership.

As we draw this volume to a close, we extend an invitation to our readers to explore the multilingual symposium, embrace the multitude of perspectives, and reflect upon the interrelatedness of human cognition. *EJJP* maintains a steadfast dedication to challenging traditional forms of communication, and we anxiously anticipate the dialogues that will arise as a result of this groundbreaking methodology in the future.

Thank you for joining us on this intellectual journey. We look forward to welcoming you in the upcoming third volume, where we will continue to explore new frontiers in philosophical exploration.



## **I. SYMPOSIUM**

## Book Review

### ***A Grand Materialism in the New Art From China* by Mary Wiseman**

Wenxuan Shi

Independent Researcher\*

The new book, *A Grand Materialism in the New Art from China*, by Mary Bittner Wiseman is a thought-provoking read. By focusing on materialism, this book looks at contemporary Chinese art within its changing social background and examines its relationship with contemporary and global art. Briefly, this book considers two independent movements that happened in the art world of China: first, the shift of the focus from language as “what determines how we articulate ideas and see the world” to what underlies and hides within language; second, the move towards globalization (xv). The two movements overlap because of their shared concern with material and Wiseman examines them through the lenses of Peter Osborne’s conception of the contemporary and Arthur Danto’s definition of art. However, this book is not solely about art; it is, rather, a multidisciplinary work based on art, especially on contemporary art in China. In this sense, art is not only the theme of the book but also the site or commencement of discussion from which Wiseman talks about philosophy, cultural traditions, and their relationship with art. Within these discussions are differences of how Eastern and Western practitioners and thinkers conceive of the world, life, and human existence; how they regard art and aesthetics; and what they value. Based on wide but in-depth discussions, Wiseman finally returns to her emphasis on art itself, reflecting on what art is in contemporary society.

This book is divided into three parts: crisis, working through art, and thinking through art. In the first part, crisis, Wiseman introduces the historical background of the changing point in Chinese art and then addresses the change itself. According to Wiseman, with the opening to the West, China also opened itself up to Western capitalism. This prompted a shift in the way that Chinese artists viewed the world. This change in attitude and perspective, Wiseman argues, expressed

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itself in artworks. Specifically, avant-garde artists speak to the new China by seeking the belief that is missing in the changing social background. At this stage, when language has failed to consistently capture the changing world, material versions of their expression begin to appear in some of the best new artworks.

In the second part, working through art, Wiseman shows how Chinese artists utilize art to work through these issues. Chinese artists faced three problems: first, how does capitalism affect their identity as a Chinese person; second, what is the source of the meaning of their language when its original meaning has been lost or shifted through changing social context; and third, what is their art and art theory in the new era. By assessing the artworks of several prominent independent artists, such as Xu Bing, Cai Guoqiang, and Song Dong, Wiseman argues artists in China seek answers through reflecting and thinking about themselves and their meaning by appealing to and expressing themselves through materials. In this sense, materials are their site and approach, as well as a means of questioning.

In part three, thinking through art, after having explored contemporary Chinese art in the previous two parts, Wiseman leaves the emphasis of Chinese art and reflects on art generally. Here, she focuses on three themes: the global, the contemporary, and the concept of art. Firstly, Wiseman considers several contemporary Chinese artworks and briefly outlines what is meant by the global, especially global art. She thinks “global does not mean the absence of features of identifying its place and origin”, but “a focus that values difference” (87). She also thinks of global art as the art that is engaged and appreciated by people around the world rather than as art without signs of its place and region of origin. Secondly, Wiseman refers to Peter Osborne’s *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* and appeals to the exhibitions of two Chinese artists to examine Osborne’s account of contemporary art. Osborne interprets contemporary art as a kind of modernism and concludes that modernism is far from being over – even if many critics think it is. Instead, he believes modernism continues to structure the entire field of contemporary art to the extent of remaining a historically critical practice. The two exhibitions, *According to What and Bound Unbound*, of two Chinese artists, Ai Weiwei and Lin Tianmiao, are consistent with Osborne’s interpretation of the contemporary art. Finally, Wiseman reflects on art itself by referring to Arthur C. Danto’s definition of art and looking at its application to some works of the new art from China. Wiseman insists that the history of art had not come to an end in China with its opening up to the West, and Danto’s definition is appropriately applied to this new Chinese art.

There are two considerable merits to be found in this book. Firstly, it opens a wide discussion when talking about Chinese contemporary art, involving philosophy (epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics), cultural traditions, and topics from

many other disciplines. This wide discussion helps readers reflect on art beyond art itself and look at the relationship between art and other disciplines from a broad perspective. Through this, readers can understand how art and other disciplines mutually influence each other and affect human life. When reading many details in the final part, readers might find that thoughts branching from the former two parts are still relevant to the thoughts at hand, helping them think independently about the question of what art is. As Wiseman suggests, art is not only about people's attitudes toward beauty and their comprehension and expression of it, but it also reflects how people think of themselves, comprehend the world, and understand their lives. In this sense, what art shows is not limited to beauty, for it embraces the entire human world, its life and existence. Therefore, this book opens up a wide space and copious resources for readers to think through these issues themselves.

Secondly, Wiseman accurately captures the features and spirit of Chinese art and clearly presents it to her readers, thus making this book a helpful as well as precise analysis of Chinese art. She notices valuable differences in the role of beauty between Chinese and Western art, indicating a difference in worldview between the two cultures. According to Wiseman,

It was to the spirit, not the eye, that the work of art made its strongest appeal. The art is notable for its beauty, but beauty is not what was sought, which was the harmony of the work with the pulse of the universe, that is, the satisfaction of Hsieh Ho's first principle.

(61)

Beauty is important in art, but it is a secondary pursuit in Chinese art. The harmony of the work with the pulse of the universe, or in other words, the harmony of the spirits of the subject and object of artwork is the first aim when Chinese artists create art. Again:

The making, not the made, has traditionally been valued in the art of China... Process, not product, and energy, not form, underlie and constitute the real... there is art when an artist captures the spirit and vitality of some object or activity through the use of the brush.

(63, 65)

Art is an expression of "the spirit and vitality of some object or activity," in other words, this spirit and vitality is what artists want to show through their works. To

capture them accurately, an artist “gives herself to the vital moment so that she transfers its resonance in her to the medium in which she is working” (65). This is how Chinese artists achieve a harmony between themselves and the object of the artwork, and how artists produce the artwork in accord with the pulse of the universe. At the same time, this is also what underlies the language. By capturing the core features of Chinese art, Wiseman lucidly explains Chinese art to readers.

This book, with its focus on a specific topic and overarching contextual discussions, is one many will find impressive and interesting. The first group of readers it will appeal to is scholars of aesthetics and artists who want to know Chinese contemporary art, especially in terms of materialism. The second group is of scholars who are interested in cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary research, especially between Chinese and Western traditions and between art and philosophy. Wiseman’s comparison of Chinese and Western views and her analysis and appreciation of Chinese artworks can satisfy these needs. The third group is of philosophers who are interested in the effect of philosophy on other disciplines. This book illustrates the influence of philosophy on art; thus, it can be regarded as a thorough case study for tracing philosophy’s influence on other disciplines. Briefly, considering the specific topic of art and the abundant content which covers a wide span of time and discipline, this book will be of interest to a wide variety of readers.

## 书评：玛丽·怀斯曼《中国新艺术中的大唯物主义》

石雯萱

独立学者 \*

玛丽·比特纳·怀斯曼 (Mary Bittner Wiseman) 的新书《中国新艺术中的大唯物主义》(*Grand Materialism in the New Art from China*) 发人深省。本书以唯物主义为着眼点, 在变化的社会背景中审视了中国当代艺术及其与当代和全球艺术的关系。简要说, 本书考察了发生在中国艺术界的两个独立的运动: 一是从“决定我们如何表达思想和看待世界”的语言到语言背后的隐藏和构建的转移; 二是走向全球化 (xv)。这两个运动在物质层面有所重叠, 怀斯曼通过彼得·奥斯本 (Peter Osborne) 当代的概念和阿瑟·丹托 (Arthur Danto) 艺术的定义审视了它。然而, 本书不仅是关于艺术, 而更是基于艺术, 特别是中国当代艺术的多学科著作。从这个意义上来说, 艺术不仅是本书的主题, 更是讨论的场所或起点, 由此怀斯曼谈论了哲学、文化传统及其与艺术的关系。在这些讨论中, 东西方的实践家和思想家在以下几个方面存在着差异: 一是如何认识世界、生命和人的存在; 二是如何看待艺术和审美; 三是所珍视的东西不同。基于广泛而深入的讨论, 怀斯曼最终回到她对艺术本身的强调, 反思了当代社会的艺术是什么。

本书被分为三个部分: 危机, 通过艺术工作, 和通过艺术思考。在第一部分“危机”中, 怀斯曼首先介绍了中国艺术转折点产生的历史背景, 而后论述了中国艺术发生的变化。怀斯曼认为, 随着向西方开放, 中国也向西方资本主义敞开, 这促使中国艺术家看待世界的方式发生了转变。怀斯曼认为, 这种态度和视角的变化表现在了艺术作品中。具体来说, 先锋艺术家们通过在变化的社会背景中寻找失落的信仰与新中国对话。在此阶段, 当语言已无法一贯地捕捉变化的世界时, 艺术家们表达的物质版本开始出现在一些最好的新艺术作品中。

在第二部分“通过艺术工作”中, 怀斯曼展示了中国艺术家如何通过艺术来解决这些问题。中国艺术家面临三个问题: 首先, 资本主义如何影响了他们作为中国人的身份认同; 其次, 当语言的原意在变化的社会背景中消失或发生变化时, 他们语言意义的来源是什么; 最后, 在新时代他们的艺术和艺术理论是什么。通过评估徐冰、蔡国强、宋冬等几位杰出独立艺术家的作品, 怀斯曼认为中国的艺术家通过诉诸物质来反思和思考自身及其意义, 以寻求答案和表达自己。从这个意义上说, 物质是他们追寻的场所、方法和手段。

在第三部分“通过艺术思考”中, 怀斯曼从前两部分对中国当代艺术的探讨中抽身而出, 走向了对艺术的普遍反思。在此, 她关注了三个主题: 全球、当代和艺术概念。首先,

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怀斯曼考察了几件中国当代艺术品，并简要概述了全球及全球艺术。她认为“是全球的并不代表标志着其起源和地域的特点的缺失，而是注重差异”（87）。她还将全球艺术视为被全世界的人们参与和欣赏的艺术，而非没有起源和地域特色的艺术。其次，怀斯曼参考了彼得·奥斯本的《无处可去：当代艺术哲学》（*Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*）并诉诸两位中国艺术家的展览来检验奥斯本对当代艺术的解释。奥斯本将当代艺术解释为一种现代主义，并总结说现代主义远不像许多批评家所认为的那样已经结束。相反，他相信它在保留历史实践批判的程度上构建了当代艺术的全部领域。而两位中国艺术家艾未未和林天苗的展览《根据什么》（*According to What*）和《束缚与解脱》（*Bound Unbound*）与奥斯本对当代艺术的诠释是一致的。最后，怀斯曼通过参考阿瑟·丹托对艺术的定义及其在一些中国新艺术作品上的应用反思了艺术本身。怀斯曼认为在中国，艺术史并没有随着中国向西方的敞开而终结，而丹托的定义运用在中国新艺术上是恰当的。

本书有两大亮点。首先，它开启了对中国当代艺术的广泛讨论，涉及了哲学（认识论、伦理学、形而上学）、文化传统以及诸多其他学科的话题。这样的讨论有助于读者超越艺术本身来反思艺术，并从更广阔的视野来看待艺术与其他学科的关系。由此，读者可以了解艺术和其他学科是如何相互影响并影响人类生活的。在阅读最后一部分内容时，读者可能会发现阅读前两部分所带来的思考仍萦绕脑海，并帮助他们独立地反思“什么是艺术”这个问题。正如怀斯曼所指，艺术不仅关乎人们对美的态度和对美的理解与表达，它还反映了人们如何认识自己，如何理解世界，以及如何理解生命。从这个意义上说，艺术所展示的不仅限于美，而包含了整个人类世界一人的生命与存在。因此，本书为读者独立思考这些问题提供了广阔空间和丰富资源。

其次，怀斯曼准确抓住了中国艺术的特点和精神，并将其清晰地阐释给了读者。这使本书对中国艺术的分析精准到位。怀斯曼注意到了美的角色在中西方艺术中的重要差异，这表明了两种文化世界观的差异。据怀斯曼所述，“最受艺术作品吸引的不是人的眼睛，而是精神。艺术以美著称，但其所追求的不是美，而是作品与宇宙脉搏的和谐，即谢赫第一原则的满足”（61）。美在艺术中是重要的，但却是中国艺术的次要追求。作品与宇宙脉搏的和谐，或者说艺术品主客体精神的和谐才是中国人创作艺术的首要目标。同样的，怀斯曼认为“中国艺术历来重视艺术创造的过程，而非艺术品本身。过程而非产品，能量而非形式，构成了真实...当艺术家通过画笔捕捉到某种客体或活动的精神与生命力时，艺术就诞生了”（63,65）。

艺术是“某种客体或活动的精神与生命力”的表达，或者说，这种精神和生命力才是艺术家想要通过其作品表达的。为了准确把握它们，艺术家“在关键时刻全神贯注，以便于将自身的共鸣转移到她工作的媒介上”（65）。这就是中国艺术家如何实现自己与艺术对象之间的和谐，如何根据宇宙的脉搏创作其作品。同时，这也是语言的基础。通过捕捉中国艺术的核心特征，怀斯曼向读者清晰地阐释了中国艺术。

本书以其具体的关注点和全面的背景讨论，令许多读者印象深刻和感兴趣。它首先会吸引的读者是想要了解唯物主义视角下中国当代艺术的美学家和艺术家。其次，它会吸引热衷于中西方传统、艺术与哲学的跨文化、跨学科研究的学者。他们可以受怀斯曼对中西方观点的比较及其对中国艺术品的分析和鉴赏的启发。再次，它还会吸引乐于发现哲学对

其他学科有何影响的哲学家。本书阐述了哲学对艺术的影响，因此可以被看作是追溯哲学对其他学科影响的详尽案例研究。简要说，由于艺术这个具体主题和涵盖丰富的跨时间跨学科内容，本书将会引起读者的广泛兴趣。



# Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Art through Mary Bittner Wiseman's Book *A Grand Materialism in New Art from China*

Dianna Su

Beijing Normal University\*

While observing contemporary artworks in an art museum, we might consider two distinct groups of questions. The first group relates to the mind, memory, and material: What will we recall after visiting the art museum? Might it be the forms, the concepts, the context, the connections between the images created by the conceptual space, or the artworks' physical natures made by the materials used by the artists? The second group of questions relates to issues arising from the differences brought about by the local and the global. Mary Bittner Wiseman's new book, *A Grand Materialism in the New Art from China* (2020), is a masterpiece about contemporary Chinese art that responds to both sets of questions. The book discusses the theme of materialism in new Chinese art, especially how to present its theme by using different materials to make artworks.

The use of "Grand Materialism" in the title is puzzling and fascinating. Could we explain it as *grand wei wu zhu yi*, or a tradition of thought in which all things that exist are made up of matter? As Kathleen Higgins, a philosophy professor at the University of Texas, Austin, points out in her review of Wiseman's book, *wei wu zhu yi* in terms of both ideology or consumer capitalism is not the "materialism" Wiseman had in mind when talking about China's new art. In Higgins's view, Wiseman is pointing more to the actual materials used by contemporary Chinese artists. Hence, we should translate Wiseman's idea of "materialism" as *da wu zhi zhu yi*, or grand discussion on material. For instance, we might consider the Chinese contemporary artist Xu Bing and his discussion of how the concept of artwork usually starts with a feeling for the materials, which is a reasonable relationship that many artists utilize in their works. Xu Bing's specific decision to use tobacco as his primary medium provokes questions about how and why he chooses to use

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this material. This is one kind of meaning of “materialism,” which inspires our interest in the idea of *da wu zhi zhu yi*. We might also consider the words of art historians Wu Hung and Orianna Cacchione, who curated the 2020 exhibition *Allure of Matter: Material Art from China*, a show that focused on the choice of twenty-six Chinese artists to make their artworks from everyday materials. According to the curators, in China, starting in the 1980s, the material used in an artwork was, itself, a significant tool of expression, one that took precedence over a particular style or the image portrayed. This is the concept of “materialism” presented in Wiseman’s book.

Overall, there are three key parts of Wiseman’s book: “Crisis,” “Working through Art,” and “Thinking through Art.” These three themes are relevant to Chinese contemporary art, dating back to the exhibitions *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998) and *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* (2017). Although Wiseman chooses “New Art from China” for her title instead of “Chinese contemporary art,” she still regards recent Chinese art as part of the broader, global contemporary art-world scene. In Wiseman’s discussion of contemporary Chinese art, we read about the complicity of different definition of materials as a key component of the art, along with themes that include the physical materials used by the artists ; Energy or *Qi* in traditional Chinese painting; the history of materials; the Chinese language; and the sexual body, most especially, the female body.

In Wiseman’s view, we can regard the avant-garde art scene in China as a series of subversive beliefs, including the subversive assumption that, early in this new century in China, there is a gap between art and nature—an artistic concept found in Western artists, as well. We can also find this opinion in the 2011 book *Subversive Strategies in Chinese Contemporary Art*, coauthored by Wiseman and Professor Liu Yuedi, specifically in the section of the book titled “Crisis.” This book section cites an *Art in America* review, which states that social realism occupied an important role in the modern art section of the Guggenheim Museum’s 1998 exhibition *China: 5000 Years*. While there is nothing left in the current exhibition for social realism, and also those young Chinese avant-garde artists are often testing the limits of tolerance and are not conformist. This type of review is not rare in the West, and Wiseman criticizes it. In her eyes, it is not fair to consider the work of Chinese avant-garde artists as something only meant to test the limits of tolerance in China, as it deprives us of considering the other functions of avant-garde and its nature, such as being a kind of critical thinking on social systems that can aim for its improvement.

Next, we can discuss the second group of questions highlighted at the outset of this review, which concerns the different concepts and understandings brought by the local and the global. As a part of the global community, when we see artworks

from another culture or geographical zone, we rely on our own local experience of art and our own cultural concepts to attempt to understand the non-local art. Yet, we must ask whether this approach helps to enrich our aesthetic and art philosophy concepts. In such circumstances, for a non-existent concept in one kind of art, might we find a related reference substance in another critical discourse of art? Alternately, do we need to find the answer by crossing into more traditional art and the cultural conception of “the Other?”

Wiseman values understanding Chinese contemporary art through traditional painting theory while also searching for its counterpart in the West via Hsieh Ho’s “Six Principles” (e.g., “Spirit Resonance,” “Life Movement,” etc.) and Shi Tao’s “one-stroke method.” She focuses on comparing the expression of traditional and contemporary art in China instead of looking at the differences between the East and the West. In other words, Wiseman is looking at Hsieh Ho’s “Six Principles” in modern and contemporary Western painting, from impressionism to abstract expressionism, to rethink the relationship between Western art and Chinese art. However, she also distinguishes differences between the Chinese context and Western art practices. For example, Hsieh Ho’s “Bone Matter Structural Use of the Brush” means building structure through each brushstroke, while, for example, impressionism is genius in terms of color and light; impressionists used the brushstroke, dots and daubs of paint, and other techniques to present modern life and to invite us to see the light and shapes. In terms of Hsieh Ho’s “Conform with Objects to Obtain Likeness,” Wiseman emphasizes a key difference between abstract expressionism and traditional Chinese painting, namely, that, with abstract expressionism, the subconscious mind was considered a major part of the context and form of the art, but the abstract expressionists could not rid themselves of their thoughts or emotions, unlike what traditional Chinese artists did. In the sense of notions about the “self,” the two really share nothing in common. In the West, the conscious mind is often at the center of each person’s world, with the individual being a rational and self-interested atom. While in China, “the center” is something artists try to capture that resonates with them, like Shan Shui—or, nature and its culture—instead of the landscape. While reading Wiseman’s thoughts about Hsieh Ho’s “Six Principles,” I was reminded of Wu Guanzhong’s description in 1981 when he viewed abstract expressionist paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston at the National Art Museum of China. In his opinion, Chinese viewers could see the beauty of the Dunhuang frescoes and the carvings of ancient tombs in Jackson Pollock’s artworks, as well as notice strong parallels between Franz Kline’s paintings and the written Chinese character “*Shou*,” meaning long life. Wu Guanzhong’s reaction looks similar to finding Hsieh Ho’s “Six Principles” in Western painting. It is a little strange at first to draw a connection between

Kline's work and the *shou* character, but this connection helps Chinese viewers understand Western abstract painting a little better while also allowing them to reflect more deeply on their own art and culture.

Wiseman provides a lot of examples of artists that most Chinese people are familiar with, names like Xu Bing, Song Dong, Wang Guangyi, Cai Guoqiang, Huang Yongpin, and Lin Tianmiao. At the same time, Wiseman discusses the expression of Chinese art, especially the connection between ancient painting and new art in China, in order to introduce a Chinese artist that people may not be as familiar with, Jizi, a new face on the contemporary art scene. Wiseman believes that the paintings of Jizi, a self-taught artist, relate to the idea of "grand materialism," since he depicts the world in ink as the universe and the origin of the materials, instead of, for instance, the leisure life of China literati or a stylized landscape. Wiseman conducted serious research on Shi Tao's art theory, and in her view, unlike God created the world with the word—"Let there be light"—rather than through action, Shi Tao created the world through his action of painting. While Shi Tao's paintings come from the stroke of his pen, they include the idea of language and other things. Wiseman posits that this is not unlike Jacques Derrida's point of view—that writing precedes words. Whether it is Shi Tao or Ji Zi, the artists' work has its own life, and it is not possible to distinguish the artist from his art. It is just like breathing naturally, which is to say that "grand materialism" in Chinese art points to the silent, moving material world made by mountains and rivers, replacing the physical world made by the invisible scientific world of constantly moving molecules. This idea reminds me of Liu Haisu's discussion in the 1920s on the similarities between Shi Tao and Paul Cézanne and other postimpressionists, especially in terms of their "expression." Liu Haisu stated that the then-called "new art" and the new ideas of modern European had existed in France for a long time but were simply buried. Thus, he believed that it was necessary not only to study the new changes in European literature and art but also to strive to unearth the inherent treasures of Chinese art, as well. It is unknown whether Wiseman ever read Liu Haisu's writing, but there appears to be similar wisdom in her discussion of the "expression" of traditional Chinese art and Western modern and contemporary art.

We can also read the influence of Arthur Danto in Wiseman's discourse. Danto centers his discussion of art on the meaning of artwork, which is like Wiseman's discussion about the material—the story surrounding a particular thing and the appearance of a work, which can convey information. We are left with philosophical questions: What kind of information can be conveyed? How close is the look of a work of art to the thing it is trying to express, the story it tells, and the final character it contributes to?

From the perspective of a Western observer, Wiseman, in her book, uses ma-

terials to discuss the spirit of Chinese art, narrating the information she comprehends and thinks about as one story. As she writes, contemporaneity is embodied in the ink works of contemporary Chinese artist Ji Zi—that is, “he found a breach in the available trio of traditional Chinese art, modern western art, and market-driven art, as have other artists who have gone their own way” (35).

Compared with some Western observers, Wiseman does not pay much attention to the political aspects or the marketability of Chinese new art. Instead, from a philosophical perspective, the author focuses her attention on the transformation of language and material, and she looks for the discursive conflict behind it while, at the same time, paying attention to globalization and Chinese-ness—the storytelling of Chinese contemporary art from the perspective of materials. In sum, Wiseman adds many interesting and meaningful considerations to the profound art philosophy discourse while also telling her international readers about China and the country’s recent art history.



# 从“大物质主义”看中国当代艺术

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当我们在美术馆观看当代艺术作品的时候，可能会思考两个问题：第一个问题是有关心灵或记忆和物质性。给我们的参观经验留下记忆痕迹的是它的形式？观念？还是语境？亦或是艺术家所使用的物质材料所建立的观念空间和物质属性的形象联系呢？玛丽·比特纳·怀斯曼的新著《中国新艺术的大物质主义》，正是一本美国哲学家讨论中国当代艺术的力作，回答了我们所提出的第一个问题，这本书探讨了中国新艺术中的物质性主题，特别是如何用材料来呈现其主题。

在本书中，标题中的“Grand Materialism”是一个让人困惑又着迷的字眼。我们可以解释为“（大）唯物主义”吗？正如美国德克萨斯大学哲学教授 Kathleen Higgins 为此写的水评，她认为在中国，意识形态的“唯物主义”概念，或者消费主义资本时代的“唯物主义”都不是玛丽心目中的“materialism”。在 Kathleen 看来，玛丽使用的这个术语指向，指向了中国当代艺术家使用的物质材料，关注的是自然的物理材料。因此，似乎我们更应该解释为“大物质主义”或者“宏大的物质主义”。正如本书开篇引用了一段艺术家徐冰的话，大意是艺术作品的理念通常始于艺术家对材料的感受，这是艺术家和其作品最理性的关系，而艺术家徐冰想用烟草作为首要的创造媒介，在这个决定之后，才显现了如何和为什么使用这些材料的问题。这段话激发我们对于“物质主义”的兴趣，也解释了这个词的一种含义。关于材料或物质性，也是巫鸿和奥利安娜关注的问题，他们策划了《物之魅力：当代中国材质艺术》，展现了 26 位中国艺术家用日常材料创作的艺术作品，按照策展人的观点，材质艺术不是风格，也非图像，而是艺术家表达的重要工具，出现于 20 世纪 80 年代，这与玛丽的著作有着异曲同工之妙。

玛丽的这本书分为“危机”、“艺术创作”和“艺术思考”三个大篇章，所描述的中国新艺术时段，是从 1998 年高名潞策划的《蜕变突破：华人新艺术》到 2017 年纽约古根海姆美术馆策划的《世界剧场：1989 年以来的艺术与中国》展览。她的标题所采用的是“中国新艺术”，没有使用更流行的“中国当代艺术”，但又将中国新艺术视作当代的、全球化的象征。我们根据她的论述及其所涉及的中国当代艺术作品，可以发现物质作为艺术作品的主体，包含了文字的物质层面，也包含了中国传统绘画所说的“气”，还有物质的历史，以及玛丽特别关注的中国当代艺术的性别身体，特别是女性的身体。玛丽认为艺术家用艺术来解决其策略所引发的问题，例如资本市场、公共社会空间对中国艺术家对自我身份

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的认知的影响，这让我们不禁联想到了玛丽谈“中国当代艺术的颠覆策略”。在玛丽看来，我们可以将中国前卫艺术视作一些信仰的系列颠覆，包括对西方的艺术观念认为艺术与自然法之间存在鸿沟，对于新世纪处于转折点的中国是恰当的假设的颠覆。这样的观点见于 2011 年她与刘悦笛主编出版了《当代中国艺术颠覆策略》，而她所发表的文章正是本书开篇“危机”。文章引用论述了《美国艺术》里的一段评论，这篇评论认为社会主义现实主义在 1998 年古根海姆美术馆划的《中国艺术 5000 年》在现代艺术中占有重要位置，但是现在的展览中荡然无存，而青年中国前卫艺术家是不墨守成规，挑战忍耐度。这样的观点在西方评论者那里并不少见，玛丽对其观点进行了批判，她认为前卫艺术的特点是不守成规，但是如果说中国前卫艺术家在 21 世纪之交只是挑战忍耐度，这是对艺术的一种不公，也剥夺了艺术的潜在功能和本质。

我们所思考的第二个问题，是有关本土与全球化带来的差异。当作为全球化的观众群体观看另一个文化和地区的当代艺术作品的时候，我们依靠我们对于本土的艺术经验和文化观念来理解作品，这些非本土的特定概念，是否有助于丰富我们的美学和艺术哲学概念呢？在这样的情况下，在一种艺术中不存在的特征或概念，我们无法离开其背景以进入另一种艺术的批评话语，我们是否能在另一个批评话语中找到对应的参照物呢？或者是跨越到他的传统艺术与文化思想中去寻找答案呢？

玛丽非常重视从传统的中国画论中寻找中国当代艺术的表现性特质，从谢赫六法“气韵生动”“骨法用笔”和石涛的绘画理论“一画”来寻找其西方的对应物，她特别关注的是从中国传统艺术和中国当代艺术中来比较表现性，而非只是单一关注中西方的艺术差异。换句话说，玛丽似乎在寻找西方现当代油画里的“谢赫六法”，从印象派一直到后印象，从超现实主义再到抽象表现主义，但是又区分了“谢赫六法”在中国语境和西方艺术实践的差异性和偏斜处。例如，“骨法用笔”，是用笔触建构结构，而印象派绘画的绘画技法关注笔触，用笔触、涂抹和点表现现代生活，让我们看到颜色和形状；而关于“应物象形”，玛丽强调了抽象表现主义与中国传统艺术的不同，她认为无意识决定了抽象表现主义绘画的内容和形式，但是不像中国传统艺术家那样在绘画中摆脱有意识的思想和情感，同时摆脱自己。原因是中西方世界观中的自我概念不同，在西方的观念里，有思想的头脑是世界的中心，个体是理性的、自私的原子，而中国传统艺术家所表达的“中心”即艺术家正在描绘的主题，并引发其共鸣的东西，例如山水。读完玛丽所谈的西方“谢赫六法”，我不禁想到吴冠中先生 1981 年在中国美术馆看到波士顿博物馆所藏的抽象表现主义画作时打的比喻，从杰克逊·波洛克的作品中看到敦煌壁画和古墓穴砖刻之美，或从弗兰兹·克兰的作品追求读到书写“寿”字的异曲同工之妙，这类似于我们在西方艺术中寻找“谢赫六法”一般，起初有些惊讶，但也是帮助我们更好地了解西方的当代抽象绘画，也重新审视我们自己的艺术和文化。

玛丽还认为中国当代视觉艺术相比文学更为西方观众熟悉，因为推动中国当代艺术界的能量在创造视觉艺术作品的过程中得以呈现。这也印证了中国当代艺术作为国家文化软实力的对外形象建构的重要因素的可能性和必要性，帮助我们更好地推广中国传统艺术的当代表达，从新的角度思考我们的传统文化，也有助于西方的普通观众了解中国的当代社会，正如我在斯坦福访学期间所认识的岛田美和副教授，她是研究抗日战争历史的日本学者，表示她所教授的日本学生非常想了解中国的当代艺术和艺术家，借此更好地了解中

国当代社会。而另一位教授英语的斯坦福退休老师也表示中国当代艺术的欧美推广非常有意义，他指出了日本当代艺术在美国的影响力，也希望能够有更多的中国艺术家作品被介绍到美国。

玛丽在这本书中列举了许多我们熟悉的中国当代艺术家的案例，比如徐冰、宋冬、王广义、蔡国强、黄永砗、林天苗，但是对当代艺术圈而言没有那么熟悉的姬子，玛丽不遗余力地从中国艺术的表现性来探讨，并且是从中国传统艺术到新艺术讨论“表现”。关于“大物质主义”对这个词最贴切的解释，也是玛丽基于当代中国水墨画家姬子的作品解读，认为这位自学成才的中国艺术家作品，在广度和深度上都是一种“大物质主义”。姬子用水墨所表现的世界不是文人墨客的闲情逸致或者书斋生活，也不是程式化的山水，而是表现宇宙洪荒，是物质的起源之处，也是存在之物本身。玛丽在此考察了石涛的《画语录》，在她看来，正如上帝创造世界一样，是言语（“上帝说有光”），而非行动，产生了世界，而石涛不同，语言在内的一切事物的存在，是归功于“一画”的动作。玛丽认为这类似于德里达的观点，写作先于言语，而无论是石涛，还是姬子，心与手腕的动作是一致的，作品拥有自己的生命，我们无法从艺术中分辨出艺术家来，就像呼吸一样自然，也就是说“大物质主义”在中国艺术中，无论是古代山水画，还是当代水墨画，都指向了山川河流所指向的沉默与流动的物质世界，取代了西方的不可见的分子不断移动组织的物质世界。这让我想到了刘海粟 20 世纪 20 年代讨论石涛和塞尚等后印象派艺术家的相似之处，特别强调了“表现”，并言现代欧洲人所谓的新艺术、新思潮在吾国湮埋已久。所以刘海粟认为既要研究欧洲文艺的新变迁，也要努力发掘中国艺术固有的宝藏。玛丽是否读过刘海粟的文章我们不得而知，但是关于中国传统艺术和西方现当代艺术的“表现”问题探讨，可谓是英雄所见略同。

玛丽在哥伦比亚大学的老师阿瑟·丹托在《当代中国艺术颠覆策略》中发表了《艺术过去的形态：东方与西方》一文，讨论如何理解中国艺术的文字。玛丽在纽约的大学里讲授哲学和美学，除了丹托，英国美学家理查德·沃尔海姆也是她的老师。我们可以从玛丽的论述中读到丹托的影子，比如丹托的艺术定义是有关艺术品的意义，而玛丽讨论的也是有关物质，有关围绕特定事物的故事，一件作品的外观，可以传达信息吗？可以传达怎样的信息？而作品的外观与它所表达的态度、讲述的故事、最终的角色有多接近？

我想，玛丽也是从一位西方观察者的角度，用物质材料在讲述中国艺术的精神，也把她所领悟和思考的信息讲述为中国艺术故事，编写为了这部《中国新艺术的大物质主义》一书。她所看到的中国新艺术，就像她所关注的中国当代艺术家姬子的水墨作品所体现的当代性，即“发现了中国传统艺术，西方现代艺术，市场驱动艺术三重奏的突破口，这是‘当代’的精髓。”与一些西方观察者相比而言，玛丽没有更多关注中国新艺术的政治性和市场性，而是从哲学角度，关注语言和物质的转化，并寻找背后的话语冲突，同时关注全球化与中国性，从物质材料的角度去看中国当代艺术的故事性，而为深奥的艺术哲学论述增添了许多有趣的、有意义的故事，也讲述给世界的观众和读者。



# Material, Global, and Storied

Mary Bittner Wiseman

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I am honored to have had *A Grand Materialism in the New Art from China* been given such thoughtful and probing reviews by Dianna Su and Wenxuan Shi. Since it was written in light of art that has been seen in the last decades in the United State and England, it has been invaluable for me to see how the book is received by Chinese critics and to see what should be looked at more closely. In this short piece I can only begin to explore three issues. The first is that of the materials that make up the works of art. They are at the same time the subject of the work, either because of what they are in themselves or what they refer to. The artist chose them because of what resonates in them. This resounding can be glossed either through the first principle of art of Hsieth Ho or through what the Welsh poet Gerard Manly Hopkins says in *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* (1855) that each mortal thing does.

The second issue is that of the relation between the local and the global in the new Chinese art. While all of the works have been made by Chinese artists, their Chinese-ness goes beyond this in various ways, among which are, for example, the concrete particularity of the contents of Song Dong's mother's home during the Cultural Revolution and being a member of a particular kind as are the Ming Dynasty chairs used by Ai Weiwei. Some works have a connection to the artist's life. Ai Weiwei has been a refugee in Berlin since 2015 when China returned his passport after four years. The rubber used in the 197 foot raft carrying 300 refugees, *The Law of the Journey* (2017), was manufactured in the Chinese factory that manufactures the rubber used for the boats refugees use to cross the Mediterranean. Xu Bing was in New York when the Twin Towers were destroyed on 9/11. He collected some dust that was there and used it to make *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect* (2004), which is a line from a Zen poem. These expressions of Chinese-ness raise the question of how and why these works, replete as they are with references to China and things Chinese, can have the vital global presence they do have.

The third issue is that of language, which has two roles in the new art. One is

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the attention paid to its material side, the marks and sounds used in writing and speaking, respectively. Wittgenstein argued persuasively that there can be no private language, and language must be seen in writing or heard to be public. The second role language has in the new art is to articulate the significance of the materials. The description is a story whose end is the appearance of the material in the work. There is a *prima facie* conflict between the necessity of language to say why the art's material is what it is and the claim that material has come to the fore in the new art precisely because it lies below the level of language. The clash between the two is more apparent than real, but no matter the challenge, *The Allure of Matter*—the title of a 2020 exhibition in the United States curated by Wu Hung—in its independence of identity-conferring language persists for contemporary Chinese artists. Materials and material things are what they are, a common denominator.

## 1 Materials

Sometimes they are utterly particular like the bronze shards from Tibetan statues of Buddha shattered during the Cultural Revolution and used by Zhang Huan to make statues of parts of Buddha's body, a train damaged in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the names of children killed in the earthquake, a series of photographs of menstrual blood on Chen Lingyang's body in her *Twelve Flower Months* (1999-2000). In other works, the materials are any items from a particular class, like ash from a Buddhist temple in Shanghai. In still other works, the material is of a kind that refers to something in the artist's past, as the white cotton thread Lin Tianmiao uses in her photographs and sculptures refers to the thread salvaged from worn clothing that she had to rewind into balls when she was a child, or the art made from tobacco and its related products by Xu Bing that refers to his father's death from lung cancer. His father's medical records are included in exhibitions of the art. The white cotton thread, and the tobacco bring the artists' pasts into the present.

There are many examples of the use of random members of a particular kind in works of art that do not refer to the past of China or its artists. Two examples are the live insects and small creatures that prey on them in Huang Yong Ping's *Theater of the World* (1993) and Wang Guangyi's *Things in Themselves* (2000), which are 8000 bags of unhusked rice stacked up from floor to ceiling against the walls of a room. They are both about food. The one animal, the insects, the other, plant, the rice that feeds the Chinese people. On display in the *Theater of the World* is the never-ending activity of eating and being eaten, and *Things in Themselves* without

which, Kant avers, there would be no world, are sacks of food, without which there would be no life. Omnipresent and necessary for the existence and survival of the individual, the species, and a social world are, respectively, food, women's bodies, and speech and writing. And each of these figures in the new art from China.

These materials are not of interest for their materiality, but for their histories as well as for their roles in the on-going of the natural and social worlds and for what about them led artists to make them subjects of art. It is the spirit of life or vital movement that resonates, in them in the words of the 6th century critic Hsieth Ho. In the words of the Welsh poet Gerard Manley Hopkin, it is that each mortal thing "finds tongue to fling out broad its name." In saying what it is, each thing says that it is. The existence of the materials and material objects in the new art is of greater moment than are their names in the sense of definite descriptions that uniquely identify them. The definite description of the train in Zhang Huan's *Hope Tunnel* (2000) is "a train destroyed in the Sichuan earthquake that Zhang had his team bring from Sichuan to his studio in Shanghai where it was made ready to exhibit." In presenting the train to the world as a work of art, Zhang Huan "flings out broad its name." The name referred to is, however, not a descriptions, but an index. Each thing says "I am this." The distinction between a description and an index will be seen to be important later on.

The sheer presence of the damaged train is a stark witness to the history of the earthquake. For an artist to choose a material out of which to make art, she has to be open to it, to its presence, which for Hopkins is its existence, while for Hsieth Ho it is its *qi*, the energy that pulses through all there is. Einstein quantified the relation between an object's mass and energy, but we do not need physics to shore up our intuitive grasp of the connection between the existence and energy of the items that comprise, the material world. On Hopkin's account, things cry out their names and our job is but to listen. On Hsieth Ho's, the artist who would capture the presence of his subject must quiet his mind, freeing it from associations he might have with the subject, thereby opening himself to the present-ness of the subject. It is to let the subject take over. So too can the viewer be taken over by what is exhibited. The choice of media and appropriate subjects for art was limited for the classical Chinese artist as it is not for the contemporary artist, who is as apt to make a sculpture or installation or performance art as a painting.

A significant difference between the two is that the contemporary artist is using the art to say or do something, while her classical Chinese counterpart used it to celebrate the **presense** and the beauty of the rivers and mountains that structure China's world. History has moved so fast for the contemporary Chinese artist that reflection on rivers and mountains, water and stone, gives way to the need to deal with the introduction of Western capitalism into Mao's socialism, where the virtue

of competition is at odds with that of cooperation. The equivalent of the classical artist's opening himself to nature is the contemporary's opening himself to what lies below the disparate languages of capitalism and socialism, namely, matter and material things. The artist's job is to look through the changes that capitalism has wrought in a communist world to see the real and the raw, untouched as they are by the -isms. This, however, is not all they do. They direct their attention to what others, thanks to the business of their lives, do not do, language's marks and its sounds, its material side. This will be discussed later, but, first, a brief look at what it means to be global. Perhaps it is little more than to be known and appreciated all over the world. Perhaps this is tied to the electronic revolution and social media that have made the world smaller and have come to characterize the contemporary. The British philosopher Peter Osborne argues in his aptly titled book, *Anywhere or Not at All* (2013) that the contemporary and the global are co-extensive.

## 2 Global

The least that an object's being local can mean is that was made in a certain locale. This does not mean, however that a dress designed by an American for an American market and made in China is Chinese or is local to China. Neither is it global. It is an instance of the globalization of manufacture. The journalist Thomas Friedman pointed out that a Lexus, like a dress, can come from anywhere whereas a lemon tree, unless raised in a hot house, cannot. Something beyond its being made in China is needed for something to be identified as Chinese. The material used, like silk or gunpowder, could place a work in China, as would a work's material coming from an event in China's history. These relations mark it as Chinese, but it can still be global, albeit not in the narrow sense that it bears no trace of its origin. A wider sense of global is being able to be understood and appreciated across the globe, as the Chinese art of the last four decades has been.

This is because the art is material and storied. It is trivially true that all visual art is material. Marks are made on a surface with something, and some material is shaped into a sculpture. Things are needed for installation art and people for performance art. It is through their materials that the new Chinese artworks express an attitude towards their subject, which are what the work is about. The material either is or is essentially connected to what this is. The material of *Things in Themselves* is food, necessary for the existence of life and what cannot get much further below the networks of language. The work says that food is a thing in and of itself. No more need be said. Zhang Huan's larger than life statues of Buddha's

body are about the impossibility of destroying Buddhism. They refer not just to the violence of the Cultural Revolution but also to the Buddhism that could not be practiced under Mao. Zhang's statues are more powerful than those shattered in Tibet, showing Buddha to persist and have power in the least part of his body the intentions of the Cultural Revolution notwithstanding.

The art made by Ai Weiwei using Ming Dynasty chairs and Zhang's statues are works of material history, which is itself storied. Material, independent of language as it is, is like a common denominator in arithmetic. All people live in a material world and are in a position to appreciate art whose subject is material or material things. The artworks whose subjects are their materials have an aesthetic dimension that brings visual pleasures. These, together with the viewer's recognition of the materials, are still not enough for her fully to engage with the work. More is needed, and the more is language in which is told the stories that are part of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Chinese art.

Each of the materials in the art comes with its story, often displayed on a plaque on the wall of the art's exhibition. These stories have a global appeal because people throughout the world relish stories that have a beginning, middle, and end, each step related to the next either as cause or reason. Children's stories, myths, and folk tales are used to educate and inform, often by invoking emotion. It is easier to take stories to heart than it is to take arguments or abstractions. Cai Guo Qiang's *The Ninth Wave* (2014), named after an 1850 Russian painting of survivors of a shipwreck barely holding onto a mast for survival, showing human helplessness in the face of nature's forces. Cai has 99 fabricated tigers, pandas, camels, and apes clinging wearily to a worn ship sailing past the bund on the Huangpu River in Shanghai. High levels of smog in the area had led to 16,000 dead pigs being found floating down the Huangpu. Whereas the 1850 Russian painting depicted the effect of nature's forces, Cai's installation depicts those of human negligence and indifference.

Identification with the suffering of the animals on the boat can lead viewers to infer that this level of pollution is unacceptable. This work refers to the recent history of Shanghai and, through the story it tells, makes a plea for care of the environment. It is particular; it is about the 16,000 dead pigs found in the Huangpu River and can be understood by anyone, as can virtually all of the storied works made in post-Mao China. Neither they nor the emotions they elicit are limited to Chinese viewers.

### 3 Storied

We are left with the claims that the materials used in the new work are outside the networks of language and yet it is only by virtue of their stories can they function in the works whose subjects they are. The worry is that if something is outside language, it cannot be identified and so cannot figure in a story. This is not the case, however. The fact of the existence of the material world and all that it affords is not dependent on language. The presence, the present-ness, of any individual declares itself, in Gerard Manley Hopkins' words, in finding "tongue to fling out broad its name;/ Each thing does one thing and the same:/ Deals out that being indoors each one dwells:/ Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells ...". Little there is that does not belong to a kind, but Hopkins has it that the name of each thing is "myself." In its there-ness it does what each thing of its kind does, as "kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame." It is individuals that are and do what every member of its kind is and does and thereby "Deals out that being indoors each one dwells." No language is needed here. Yet it is needed to show why this dust, these bags of rice, this menstrual blood, a boat carrying 99 fabricated animals are the subjects of works of art.

There is a precedent for words being part of an art object. It is the poems that share the silk or paper surface of ink paintings in classical Chinese art. The stories that accompany the new art can fairly be considered part of the work. The second role of language in the new art, to highlight the material side of language, is nicely presaged in the calligraphy of the poems that appear in many classical paintings. Such works exemplify the three arts of calligraphy, painting, and poetry. Calligraphy is the first art of China, and ink painting grew out of it. The material dimensions of language, script and speech, can capture the rhythm and music of the world, as calligraphy does better than most other of the world's scripts. Xu Bing, whose mother was a librarian, spent a lot of time as a child among books he could not read, and in 1987 he began to make a book that could not be read, *Book from the Sky* (1987-1992). He hand-carved 4000 wooden blocks and said the activity was like meditating. Pages were printed and bound into books as they would have been printed and bound in the Song Dynasty. Connected pages hang from the ceiling, pages festoon the walls, and lie on the floor behind a row of bound books. Every stroke is *bona fide*, but they do not combine to make legitimate characters that convey meaning.

The movements of hand and wrist in carving or writing characters and in turning the strokes into paintings exemplify the *qi* that courses through everything and the "being indoors each thing dwells." So does the activity of making art whose subjects are material objects exemplify the *qi* and the being of each object whose

resonance the artist transfers to the work, saying only “I am this.” Then, with visual clues and artists’ statements, the viewer comes to grasp the artists’ intention, which is the story she is using the material to tell. The charge the new artists in China have given themselves is to invite the viewer to appreciate the material out of which the world has made itself and to criticize or make a plea. The materialism of the work of Chinese artists in the last four decades grounds us in the material world without which, so far as we can know, there would be nothing.

## **II. ARTICLES**

# Analytic Aesthetics in Mainland China

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**ABSTRACT** | Since its emergence in the 1950s, analytic aesthetics has become the mainstream approach to aesthetics in the English-speaking world, and it has subsequently spread throughout most of the world, including mainland China. Although it was introduced into the Chinese academic world at an early time, around the late 1950s, and has been disseminated and researched in China over the past three decades, analytic aesthetics remains underdeveloped in China. Chinese academics tend to have little familiarity with, and exposure to, analytic approaches to aesthetics. Unsurprisingly, given this situation, Chinese contributions to analytic aesthetics have had a marginal impact on the international academic discussion. This paper aims at providing a picture of the development of analytic aesthetics in China. In section 1, I clarify the scope of the paper. Section 2 briefly introduces aesthetics in China so as to outline the context for our discussion about analytic aesthetics. In section 3, I first offer a brief historical narrative of the dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China, and then explore how analytic aesthetics has been researched and taught in China.

**KEYWORDS** | Aesthetics; Analytic Aesthetics; Chinese Aestheticians

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## 1 Introduction

Some qualifications regard the paper's scope are in order.

First, since the academic environment in mainland China is notably different from that in other parts of China, analytic aesthetics is also treated and practiced differently.<sup>1</sup> For example, in mainland China, analytic aesthetics is a marginal area in the aesthetics research, but it is more popular in Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in this paper, I narrow the scope of discussion, which only covers analytic aesthetics in mainland China, and treat it as a distinctive academic phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

Second, although it is beyond the purpose of this paper to answer the question "What is analytic aesthetics?", it is necessary and helpful to provide a profile of it, especially to the readers who are unfamiliar with it.<sup>4</sup> Analytic aesthetics is an approach to philosophical aesthetics which is characterized by its use of linguistic or conceptual analysis, and its preference for linguistic precision, clarity, and succinctness. Historically speaking, analytic aesthetics emerged from the philosophical movement of linguistic analysis in the 1950s, and has developed over the past 70 years into the dominant academic approach to aesthetics in the English-speaking world. Early analytic aesthetics, which culminated in the 1960s, is more destructive, in the sense that it is characterized by the application of a *reductive* method of analysis to clarify concepts which may have been used ambiguously in previous theories of art and art criticisms.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, later analytic aesthetics, such as the works of Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Wollheim, is more constructive, in the sense that they are characterized by the application of a *reconstructive* method of analysis so as to positively contribute to our understanding of concepts and phenomena in aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use 'aesthetics' to refer to both aesthetics and philosophy of art.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Paisley Livingston used to work at Lingnan University for over ten years, from 2003 to 2015; In the younger generation, Andrea Sauchelli and Rafael De Clercq are working at the same institution.

<sup>3</sup> In the rest of this paper, by 'China', I mean mainland China.

<sup>4</sup> It is easy for an analytic aesthetician to identify whether a paper or book in aesthetics belongs to the analytic tradition, but it is hard to define analytic aesthetics in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, because there are no elements (such as claims, methods, and purposes, etc.) that are shared by all and only works of analytic aesthetics (Shang and Peng 2007). Thus, a promising alternative way to characterize analytic aesthetics, as suggested by Shusterman (1994), is to summarize the salient features and themes of analytic aesthetics and provide a social-historical narrative of how analytic aesthetics is developed. For an overview of the salient characteristics of analytic aesthetics, see Shusterman (1989, 1–19). For a Chinese counterpart, see Shang and Peng (2007).

<sup>5</sup> To have an impression of early analytic aesthetics, see Elton (1952). For a discussion of the characteristics of early analytic aesthetics, see Silvers (1987).

<sup>6</sup> For the distinction between reductive and reconstructive methods of analysis, see Shusterman (1989, 4–5). For an overview of several major topics that analytic aestheticians contribute to, see Levin-

Third, this paper intends to introduce the development and state of analytic aesthetics in China for the first time,<sup>7</sup> and it mainly focuses on two aspects: research and teaching. Since there is very little teaching of analytic aesthetics in China, more attention will be paid to research. When it comes to research related to analytic aesthetics, this paper discusses both research *in* analytic aesthetics, as well as, and indeed mainly, research *about* analytic aesthetics. I shall thus discuss notable translations, introductions, and interpretations of works in analytic aesthetics. The discussion of such contributions is necessary in order to help the reader understand which views, authors, and trends in analytic aesthetics have had a broad impact in China, and which ones have been sidelined or ignored.

With these clarifications in mind, in the following section I will attempt to locate analytic aesthetics in its Chinese academic and institutional background.

## 2 Aesthetics in China

Historically speaking, since the founding of People's Republic of China, the development of aesthetics can be roughly divided into three periods: before the reform and opening-up 改革开放,<sup>8</sup> from the reform and opening-up to the end of the 20th century, and from the beginning of the 21st century to now. Ideological factors played an important role in the first period, the aim of which was to build a Marxist aesthetics in China. The most important event of this period is the "Great Aesthetics Discussion" from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, in which various aestheticians (e.g., Cai Yi, Gao Ertai, Zhu Guangqian, Li Zehou) defended different accounts of the nature of beauty.<sup>9</sup> After the reform and opening-up, aesthetics became a heated discussion topic in China. This resulted in an atmosphere of aesthetics research and teaching that is referred to as the "Aesthetics Craze", lasting until the mid-80s.<sup>10</sup> The mainstream approach to aesthetics in this period was the Aesthetics of Practice (*Shijian Meixue* 实践美学), established by Li Zehou, which argued that beauty is the product of human praxis and the nature of beauty lies in the dialectical unity of objectivity and sociality.<sup>11</sup> Besides, there were two major trends

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son (2003, 7–20).

<sup>7</sup> To my knowledge, this has not been attempted before in English, though a relevant precedent in Chinese is Wu and Liang (2018).

<sup>8</sup> Reform and opening-up is a program of economic reforms in China, initiated in 1978. It has had great and long-lasting impacts on almost every area of contemporary China, including the Humanities.

<sup>9</sup> For an introduction to the "Great Aesthetics Discussion", see Gao (2018, 157–158); Man (2012, 164–166)

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the "Aesthetics Craze", see Gao (2018, ch. 10).

<sup>11</sup> For an introduction to the aesthetics trends in this period, see Yuedi Liu (2018).

in the aesthetics of this period: the revival of traditional Chinese aesthetics,<sup>12</sup> and the introduction of western aesthetics, including the works of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Freud, Lacan, Arnheim, Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, Sartre, Langer, Jauss, Derrida, Barthes, Dufrenne, Merleau-Ponty, and others. The third period witnessed a more pluralistic development of aesthetics, during which many more theories were introduced and researched in the Chinese aesthetics world, most notably pragmatist aesthetics (particularly the works of Richard Shusterman), postmodernist aesthetics (with a focus on the works of Lyotard, Deleuze and Baudrillard), analytic aesthetics (particularly the works of Danto), and contemporary continental aesthetics (particularly the works of György Lukács, Jacques Rancière, and Giorgio Agamben). A cluster of topics received more attention in this period. These are body aesthetics/somaesthetics, the definition of art, eco-aesthetics (*Shengtai Meixue* 生态美学), and aesthetics of living (*Shenghuo Meixue* 生活美学), etc. In this academic context, analytic aesthetics was introduced at the beginning of the first period, but only received sustained attention in the 21st century. Although aesthetics has always been an important area of research in the Chinese humanities, analytic aesthetics occupies only a marginal place in the picture.

I will now introduce the institutional dimension of aesthetics in China. When discussing aesthetics in China, I think that an important distinction should be made between aesthetics as a *disciplinary area*, and aesthetics as an *area of research*. At least three disciplinary areas in the Chinese discipline system of higher education are closely related to aesthetics: aesthetics (discipline code: 010106), theory of literature and art (discipline code: 050101), and art theory (discipline code: 1301).<sup>13</sup> What's more, these three disciplines are normally set up in three different types of institutions in Chinese universities: aesthetics is set up in the Department/School of Philosophy, theory of literature and art in the Department/School of Literature, and art theory in the Department/School of arts. Thus, differently from the English-speaking world, where most people who work in aesthetics do so in philosophy departments, aestheticians in China work in at

<sup>12</sup> For example, reconstructing contemporary Chinese aesthetics via concepts from traditional Chinese aesthetics, such as *Ganxing* 感兴, *Yixiang* 意象 and *Yijing* 意境. See L. Ye (1985).

<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, there is a three-fold structure in the discipline system of higher education in China: category 学科门类–discipline 一级学科–subdiscipline 二级学科. In this case, **aesthetics** (discipline code: 010106) is a sub-discipline of the discipline **philosophy** (discipline code: 0101) under the category **Philosophy** (discipline code: 01). There are two versions of official discipline list published by the Ministry of Education, which are helpful in understanding the current discipline system of higher education in China. For the 1997 version, which adopts the three-fold structure, see: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe\\_833/200512/t20051223\\_88437.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe_833/200512/t20051223_88437.html). For the 2011 version, which adopts a two-fold structure (category-discipline) without listing subdisciplines, see: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe\\_833/201103/t20110308\\_116439.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe_833/201103/t20110308_116439.html).

least three different types of institutions. In terms of analytic aesthetics, another interesting comparison is that most aestheticians in philosophy departments in the English-speaking world only work in the analytic tradition; in China, however, very few people who work in a philosophy department are analytic aestheticians, and most scholars who do research about analytic aesthetics work in other types of institutions. For example, both Matteo Ravasio and Andrea Baldini,<sup>14</sup> the only two foreign aestheticians in China with an analytic background, work in a School of Arts (Ravasio at Peking University, and Baldini at Nanjing University). Li Meng, the first Chinese scholar who wrote a book to introduce philosophy of film in the analytic tradition, works at Southwest University's School of Literature. Wang Xuejia, the first Chinese scholar who wrote an introduction to analytic philosophy of music, works at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music. A similar situation can be found in other areas, such as publication venues, professional associations and research funding. For example, in terms of publication, there are several specialized aesthetics journals in China (*Research on Marxist Aesthetics*, *International Aesthetics*, *Chinese Aesthetics*, etc.), but important articles in aesthetics can also be found not only in some general philosophy journals and general journals in the humanities and social sciences (*Philosophical Research*, *Philosophical trends*, *Nanjing Journal of Social Sciences*, etc.), but also in specialized journals of art theory and literary theory (*Literature & Art Studies*, *Arts Criticism*, *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, etc.)<sup>15</sup> Papers in analytic aesthetics are more likely to be published in general philosophy journals, general journals in the humanities and social sciences, and specialized journals of art theory and theory of literary and art, than in specialized aesthetics journals. From this, one can understand that aesthetics research in China exists in a complex and fragmented institutional environment, which includes at least three different disciplinary areas, each with its own separate institutions, publication venues, research networks, and funding opportunities. As I will illustrate later, this institutional framework is also helpful in sketching a general picture of analytic aesthetics in China.

<sup>14</sup> For some representative works, see Ravasio (2019, 2020, 2022), and Baldini (2016, 2018, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> In China, most scholars who work in the humanities prefer to publish their works in the journals listed in Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) or A Guide to the Core Journal of China (AGCGC), because publications in CSSCI or AGCGC journals are always assigned more weights in the academic evaluation system. Since most specialized aesthetics journals are not listed in CSSCI or AGCGC, scholars may prefer to publish their works in general philosophy journals, general journals of humanities and social sciences, and specialized journals of art and literature, which are listed in CSSCI or AGCGC.

### 3 Analytic Aesthetics in China

In this section, I will first provide a historical narrative of the dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China, and then focus on how analytic aesthetics is researched and taught in the Chinese academic world.

#### 3.1 A Historical Narrative

The dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China can be roughly divided into two stages: from the late 1950s to the middle of the 1960s, and from the late 1980s to the present day.

In the first stage, analytic aesthetics was critically introduced in China in the late 1950s as one of the approaches to aesthetics found in the Anglo-American capitalist world. Some papers in analytic aesthetics were translated and published in specialized journals that aimed at introducing philosophical issues from the international academic world (Wu and Liang 2018). For example, the Chinese translation of William E. Kennick's paper "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?", one of the most important papers in early analytic aesthetics, was published in the 5th issue of the *Digest of Contemporary Foreign Philosophy and Social Sciences* in 1959. Jerome Stolnitz's paper "Notes on Analytic Philosophy and Aesthetics" (originally a paper read at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1962) was translated and published in the 7th issue of the *Digest of Contemporary Foreign Philosophy and Social Sciences* in 1964. From the brief introductory words written by the translators of these papers, we can see a clear and strong critical attitude towards not only the ideas defended in the paper Kennick (1958), but also towards analytic aesthetics in general (Kong 1964). Analytic aesthetics was regarded as absurd and empty, because it merely focuses on the analysis of the linguistic structures of some aesthetic concepts, such as "art" and "beauty", without touching the essence of aesthetic phenomena and activities.<sup>16</sup> A similar attitude can also be found in the first research paper that systematically introduced early analytic aesthetics into the Chinese academic world (Z. Li 1980, 472–

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<sup>16</sup> This attitude can be seen clearly from the following excerpt: "Contemporary capitalist aesthetics has declined entirely. In order to get rid of this decadent situation, capitalist aestheticians manufactured some bizarre and weird 'theories' of aesthetics. The so called 'analytic aesthetics' is one of them. This kind of 'aesthetics' denies that the law of art can be known in principle. It claims that the task of aesthetics is not to explore the substantial content referred to by concepts such as 'art', 'aesthetic object' and 'beauty', but merely to conduct 'diagnosis' and 'analysis' to the linguistic structures of these concepts. In this way, it eliminates the objective content of aesthetics, and thus regards the aesthetic criterion and aesthetic judgement as purely subjective, which is obviously reactionary and absurd" (Stolnitz 1963).

487).<sup>17</sup> In this paper, Li distinguished two distinct analytic approaches to aesthetics: a linguistic approach (early analytic aesthetics), and a semiotic approach (Susanne Langer). He introduced the basic ideas of early analytic aesthetics, including works of Wittgenstein, Alfred Jules Ayer, Morris Weitz, and papers from *Aesthetics and Language* (Elton 1952), and treated the analytic approach as an eliminativist one, which replaces real aesthetic questions with complicated but trivial linguistic ones. Since the middle of 1960s, analytic aesthetics, together with other aesthetics trends from the Anglo-American capitalist world, was silenced and almost disappeared from the Chinese academic world due to the Cultural Revolution.

In the second stage, starting in the late 80s, analytic aesthetics (particularly later works in the field) was re-introduced into the Chinese academic world as a new and inspiring approach to aesthetics, with more and more works being published (including translations, research papers and monographs). In 1987, Gene Block's book *Philosophy of Art* was translated into Chinese by Teng Shouyao. This book was the first Chinese translation of an aesthetics book from the analytic tradition, and it was regarded as something new to the academic circle in China at that time, as illustrated by the title of its Chinese translation: *New Insights in Aesthetics* (*Meixue Xin Jie* 美学新解). As Teng pointed out, this book was new in terms of both content and method, that is, it adopted a new method to discuss some topics about aesthetics and art which were unfamiliar to the Chinese academic world then. In contrast to the first stage, where the method of linguistic analysis was subject to a blanket criticism, the value of the analytic methodology was recognized in this book, mainly because of its contribution to the clarification of ambiguous concepts and expressions, and its related capacity to improve our understanding of aesthetics and art. In the same year, John Fisher, then the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, was invited to give a lecture at Shandong University, which introduced aesthetics trends in contemporary America (Wang 1987). This is one of the earliest interactions between analytic aestheticians and the Chinese academic world. Since the 1990s, analytic aesthetics has received more and more attention in China, with over sixty book translations, and the publication of over thirty monographs, and hundreds of articles. In this period, more analytic aestheticians have been introduced into the Chinese academic world, including Goodman, Wollheim, Danto, Monroe Bearsley, George Dickie, Kendall Walton, Roger Scruton, Jerrold Levinson, Peter Kivy, Noël Carroll, Stanley Cavell, David Bordwell, Allen Carlson, Stephen Davies, and others, and more topics in analytic aesthetics have been researched, including the definition of art, aesthetic experience, the ontology of art, expression, pictorial

<sup>17</sup> This paper was written in 1964, but published in 1979. See Z. Li (1980, 457).

representation, environmental aesthetics, everyday aesthetics, etc.

Although these developments are notable, analytic aesthetics remains highly underdeveloped in China. This phenomenon can be clearly illustrated by considering the amount of people who carry out research in this field, as well as the number of funded projects in the area. Since 1994, the National Social Science Fund of China (the most important research fund in humanities and social sciences in the country) has sponsored around 300 projects in aesthetics. However, fewer than 20 such projects are closely related to analytic aesthetics.<sup>18</sup> It is hard to exactly quantify how many people in China do research related to aesthetics, but a rough estimate can be given by looking at the number of members in the Chinese Academy of Aesthetics, which is the only nation-level association of general aesthetics. Currently, there is a total of 99 committee members and 583 regular members in the Chinese Academy of Aesthetics.<sup>19</sup> However, only around thirty among them do some research related to analytic aesthetics.<sup>20</sup>

An interesting question follows: why is analytic aesthetics underdeveloped in China? It is not surprising that analytic aesthetics was underdeveloped before the reform and opening-up. On the one hand, analytic aesthetics was regarded as a research methodology from the Anglo-American capitalist world, and thus treated as trivial or even reactionary from an ideological perspective (Dai 2012); on the other hand, early analytic aesthetics embraces anti-essentialism and focuses exclusively on art (Shusterman 1989), whereas the central concern of aesthetics at that time in China was to explore the essence of beauty, particularly the beauty of nature and society. Thus, analytic aesthetics was in tension with the aim of building a Marxist aesthetics system (Dai 2012). After the reform and opening-up, aesthetics became extremely popular around the late 1980s, and a great deal of western aesthetics theories were introduced into China. The present lack of development in Chinese analytic aesthetics can be explained in terms of a competition with other western aesthetics approaches, and especially in light

<sup>18</sup> This number is calculated by searching the project data in the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC) online search system, see: <http://fz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/seach>. The total number of projects about aesthetics can be larger, because there are also some projects which are about aesthetics under the categories of Chinese Literature, Foreign Literature, and Art. In this paper, when discuss funded projects, I only consider projects sponsored by the NSSFC.

<sup>19</sup> For the list of committee members, see: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/YggaAMn-fa7k1jst5zvjUw>. For the list of regular members in total, see: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/UsR1NOEwq-4Tb3FOYQLy1w> and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/obOEj9NSgFStO86TXRBqmQ>.

<sup>20</sup> As a rough criterion for a focus on analytic aesthetics, I looked at those scholars who published at least one research book in analytic aesthetics, or work on at least one project sponsored by NSSFC, or have at least two papers about analytic aesthetics in top journals (journals listed in A&HCI or CSCI or AGCGC).

of the long-lasting dominance of Germany classical aesthetics (Liu 2009, 26; Dai 2012; Gao 2018, 170). Besides these historical factors, analytic aesthetics often requires a background in other subfields of analytic philosophy, such as philosophy of language, metaphysics, and logic, and Chinese aestheticians sometimes lack familiarity with these areas.

Given all of the above, it is still too early to write a detailed and systematic historical narrative of how analytic aesthetics developed in China, and this is because of a sheer lack of subject matter. If someone in the future were to narrate the historical development of analytic aesthetics in China, this section would at best be a prehistory to that history.

### 3.2 Analytic Aesthetics Research in China

In this subsection, I will discuss how analytic aesthetics is researched in China by answering three different but closely interrelated questions: What types of research are there? Who is doing the research? What subject matters are being researched?

As indicated in the Introduction, the majority of analytic aesthetics in China are research *about* analytic aesthetics. Among them, a basic type of research is translation. Currently, the most translated works are classical books in analytic aesthetics including Goodman's *Language of Arts* (1976[2013]), Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1979[1990]), Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects* (1976[1980/1990/2011]), Danto's *The Transfiguration of Commonplace* (1981[2012]), Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990[2013]), Carroll's *Beyond Aesthetics* (2001[2006]), Davies' *Definitions of Art* (1991[2014]), etc. Besides, two important anthologies of analytic aesthetics have been translated into Chinese: Kivy's *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (2004[2008/2018]), and Carroll's *Theories of Art Today* (2000[2010]). As for the quality of translations, works translated by scholars who are familiar with analytic aesthetics are generally of good quality; however, other translations are less satisfactory, possibly because of the translator's lack of familiarity with the field.

There are also monographs, journal papers and doctoral theses discussing theories in analytic aesthetics. Although some critical reflections can typically be found in them, in general, they are more introductory and interpretative, in the sense that their primary purpose is to explain the theories as correctly, clearly, and comprehensively as possible. In terms of subject matter, very few publications are aimed at introducing analytic aesthetics in general. Among them, Peng Feng (from School of Arts at Peking University, formerly Department of Philosophy at the same institution) wrote a book entitled *Return—Eleven Questions in*

*Contemporary Aesthetics*, which was published in 2009. Peng's book is the first introductory book to aesthetics covering a large amount of material on different topics from the analytic tradition. Another important contribution was made by Liu Yuedi, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Liu's *The History of Analytic Aesthetics*, published in 2009, is the first book which introduces the historical development of analytic aesthetics into the Chinese academic world. In this book, Liu introduces the aesthetics theories of a cluster of analytic philosophers including Wittgenstein, Beardsley, Wollheim, Goodman, Danto, and Dickie etc., as well as several important topics in analytic aesthetics, such as definition of art, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic concepts. Besides, Zhang Hui, from Qufu Normal University (formerly China Three Gorges University), published a series of papers to introduce analytic aesthetics under two funded projects.<sup>21</sup>

Most research focuses on theories of particular philosophers, or discusses some particular topics in analytic aesthetics. Several philosophers have received more attention in the Chinese academic world. Exemplary figures are Danto (B. Zhang 2012; Jian Zhou 2018; Jing Zhou 2019; Jia Wang 2020), Langer (Wu 2002; Z. Wang 2012; Bao 2013), Goodman (An 2013), Dickie (Manting (殷曼婷) Yin 2010; Huang 2021), Wollheim (Zhao 2016), Beardsley (Deng 2015), and Carlson (Xue 2018). Besides, though not as popular as the above philosophers, the theories of Frank Sibley, Walton, Cavell, Levinson, Scruton, Kivy, Carroll, George Currie, Malcolm Budd, Davies, Arnold Ber-leant, Dominic Lopes, etc. have been introduced into the Chinese academic world through some book chapters, journal articles, and doctoral theses.

Three topics in analytic aesthetics has been extremely popular in China, namely, the definition of art, the end of art, and environmental aesthetics. The definition of art is discussed in dozens of journal papers, and widely introduced in textbooks of aesthetics or art theory published in last twenty years, partly because it is one of the most basic questions in the philosophy of art. A recent and systematic research on this topic is the funded project "A Research on the History of 'Art' Definition in Contemporary Western Aesthetics" (project code: 20FZWA007), which is being conducted by Huang Yingquan, from Capital Normal University. Since the 2010s, Danto's theory of the end of art has received heated discussion in China, not only because of the topic's intrinsic interest, but also because it resonates with Hegel's idea of the end of art, which was already widely discussed in the Chinese academic world. Among countless publications on this subject, a particularly interesting point is contributed by Peng, who explores the theoretical influence of

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<sup>21</sup> The two projects are "History of Contemporary American Aesthetics" (project code: 16AZX024) and "A Research on The History of Contemporary British Aesthetics" (project code: 11CZX074).

Zen Buddhism on Danto's theory, and argues that what is ended is just a particular type of historical narrative centered on artworks, whereas the historical narrative of art in the so-called "post-historical era" may be centered on artists (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2019, Feng (彭锋) Peng 2021a). Environmental aesthetics has been met with considerable interest in China, not only because the aesthetics of nature is a major topic in both traditional and contemporary Chinese aesthetics, but also because it fits well with the construction of ecological civilization in China.<sup>22</sup> Although they are familiar with theories of analytic environmental aesthetics, such as the work of Carlson, Glenn Parsons and Yrjö Sepänmaa, Chinese scholars who work on environmental aesthetics, or eco-aesthetics, prefer to engage this topic from different theoretical resources, including traditional Chinese philosophy, phenomenology, Marxism, German classical philosophy, critical theory, etc. (Zeng 2010; Chen 2015; Feng(彭锋) Peng 2005; Cheng 2010).

Other topics have been introduced or researched from an analytic point of view: aesthetic experience (Deng 2015), interpretation (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009), pictorial representation (especially the perceptual account) (Manting (殷曼婷) Yin 2015, 2018, 2019), the ontology of artworks (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2011; M. ( Yin 2020), the paradox of fiction (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009), art and ethics (Han 2021), the philosophy of music (Song 2011; X. ( Wang 2017; W. Wang 2019), and the philosophy of film (M. Li 2008).

There are only a few people who carry out research *in* analytic aesthetics in China. Two representative aestheticians who mainly work in the analytic tradition are Ravasio and Baldini. Currently, they are also the only two foreign philosophers who do research in analytic aesthetics in the university-level institutions in China. Ravasio mainly works on the philosophy of music, especially musical expressiveness. Baldini's research is primarily in the philosophy of public art, with a focus on street art. Most of their works are published in high-ranked international journals of aesthetics or philosophy. There is also one Chinese scholar, Peng Feng, who does some original research in analytic aesthetics. Peng proposes a solution to the "paradox of fiction" that appeals to Polanyi's theory of body-mind relation, particularly the distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009). The same theoretical framework is applied by Peng to distinguish different types of seeing and different types of pictures in his studies on traditional Chinese *xieyi* 写意 painting, which can be regarded as a development of Wollheim's theory of twofoldness (Feng(彭锋) Peng 2021b).

As illustrated in this subsection, an important feature of current analytic aes-

<sup>22</sup> The construction of ecological civilization 生态文明建设 is a national policy proposed in the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, which aims at protecting the environment and pursuing sustainable development.

thetics research in China is that it is highly selective in terms of subject matter. Almost all research is focused on classical works and philosophers from previous generations. In comparison, the younger generation of philosophers who work in analytic aesthetics, such as Derek Matravers, Catherine Abell, Bence Nanay, and others, are almost unknown in the Chinese academic world. In addition, not all of the important figures from previous generations are equally well-known. For example, nine of Danto's books have been translated into Chinese, and a total of four books and around 100 journal papers discuss Danto's theories. However, there are only a few journal papers and book chapters introducing the theories of widely known and discussed philosophers, such as Frank Sibley, Malcolm Budd, or Joseph Margolis.

### 3.3 Analytic Aesthetics Teaching in China

Aesthetics is widely taught in China. Courses in aesthetics are not only found in School/Department of Philosophy, but also in other institutions such as School/Department of Art, Literature, Communication, etc. Courses that are nominally in "aesthetics" are typically centered on philosophical aesthetics, though at times include substantial content from other disciplinary areas, such as cultural studies, art history, and cognitive science.

Within philosophical aesthetics, analytic aesthetics receives very little attention in teaching. On the one hand, in the courses which are more introductory to aesthetics in general (such as Introduction to Aesthetics, History of Aesthetics etc.), analytic aesthetics is always introduced rather briefly, and without more detailed discussion;<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, in the courses which are more specialized to some particular topics (such as Aesthetics of Music, Aesthetics of Film), materials from the analytic tradition are also rarely covered.

Up to now, very few scholars in China have ever taught courses which are mainly focused on analytic aesthetics – perhaps no more than ten. In terms of general aesthetics courses, Peng Feng has taught an undergraduate course "Principles of Aesthetics" in the Department of Philosophy and School of Arts at Peking University. This course is a general introduction to aesthetics which discusses

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<sup>23</sup> This can also be verified indirectly by considering how analytic aesthetics is introduced in the important textbooks of aesthetics or history of aesthetics published in the recent two decades. In most of the textbooks, when introducing analytic aesthetics, what is covered is always at most a combination of no more than four topics as follows: the method of linguistic analysis, Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance, Weitz's view on why "art" cannot be defined, Danto's artworld theory and theory of the end of art, Dickie's institutional definition of art, Goodman's semiotic theory of art, and Wollheim's account of seeing-in. See, for example, D. (Wang (2001), X. Zhou (2004), L. (Ye (2009), Y. Wang (2011), Niu (2014), F. Zhang (2015), Zhu (2018).

materials from the analytic tradition on a cluster of topics, such as aesthetics experience, interpretation, definition of art, fiction of paradox, expression of emotion, appreciation of nature, aesthetic category, etc. At the same institution, Matteo Ravasio teaches the PhD course “Introduction to Analytic Philosophy of Art”, which covers representative authors in the early analytic tradition (particularly Goodman and Wollheim). Ravasio also teaches a PhD course on western musical aesthetics that makes extensive use of Andrew Kania’s *Philosophy of Western Music: A Contemporary Introduction* (2021), an introduction to the philosophy of music focused on the analytic approach. Ouyang Xiao (Department of Philosophy, Peking University, formerly Wuhan University), also teaches a general introduction to analytic aesthetics. In terms of courses specialized on some topics, Cheng Xi-angzhan used to teach the graduate-level course “Specialized English for Graduate Students” at the Centre for Literary Theory and Aesthetics of Shandong University. Although designed as an English language course, the course subject was in fact analytic environmental aesthetics, as can be seen by the course textbook: *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (2007), an anthology of papers edited by Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott on environmental aesthetics. At the undergraduate level, Yin Manting taught a seminar course “Pictorial Representation from the Perspective of Cognitive Psychology” at Nanjing University’s Department of Philosophy in 2021. This course introduces some theories of perception, as well as perceptual account of pictorial representation, discussing authors such as Gombrich, Goodman, Wollheim and Lopes.<sup>24</sup>

There are at least two reasons for the lack of teaching about analytic aesthetics in China. On the one hand, people typically teach analytic aesthetics when they are also doing research in the area. Lack of researchers thus normally translates in a lack of teaching. On the other hand, scholars who do carry out research about analytic aesthetics may not have the opportunity to teach analytic aesthetics because of institutional constraints. For example, Shi Xiongbo from Lanzhou University (formerly Shenzhen University) published a paper which employs Wollheim’s concept of retrieval to explain the particular mode of appreciation of Chinese calligraphy (Shi 2020). Peng Shuixiang from Southwest University wrote her PhD thesis about the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and she also applied for a project (project code: 15FZX037) and published a book on analytic aesthetics in the United States based on her PhD research (S. Peng 2018). However, both Shi and Peng are working at the School of Foreign Language at their respective universities, where courses of aesthetics are not offered. Therefore, they would not have the opportunity to teach analytic aesthetics unless invited by other institutions. A

<sup>24</sup> See: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KLVXj05Q\\_aZm4VeECVT7cg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KLVXj05Q_aZm4VeECVT7cg).

similar situation may occur to other scholars who would otherwise want to teach analytic aesthetics, as they are supposed to design course content in accordance with the general plan formulated by their institution. If the general plan does not include analytic aesthetics, they may not have the opportunity to teach it. In conclusion, the teaching of analytic aesthetics is possibly even more underdeveloped in China than research in the same field.

The above discussion should have made it clear that analytic aesthetics is still highly underdeveloped in China, in terms of both teaching and research. Does this mean that we should do something about it? I argue that we have at least two good reasons to promote analytic aesthetics in the Chinese academic world. First, developing analytic aesthetics is helpful in providing new methods to carry out aesthetics research in the country, placing an emphasis on conceptual analysis and clarity. Second, since analytic aesthetics is the mainstream approach to aesthetics in the international academic world, it would be easier for aesthetics from various cultural traditions to be acknowledged by the international community if it is researched and presented in relation to topics and frameworks in analytic aesthetics. Thus, developing analytic aesthetics in China can be helpful in introducing Chinese aesthetics to the international academic world. For example, it would be easier for foreign aestheticians to understand the concept of *xièyì* 写意 in Chinese aesthetics, when it is characterized in relation to the theory of twofoldness, which is more familiar to aestheticians in the international academic world.<sup>25</sup> This does not of course imply that Chinese aesthetics can be reduced to analytic aesthetics, or that the analytic approach is preferable, but simply that a plurality of research methodologies can be beneficial to the Chinese academic environment. This is not unlike what happens in continental Europe, where the analytic approach is now widespread, and coexists alongside several other more traditional approaches, often resulting in interesting theoretical syntheses.

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<sup>25</sup> This idea and this example are due to Feng Peng.

my questions about the research and teaching of analytic aesthetics in Mainland China.

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# Mathematical and Metaphysical Explanations

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper explores the connection between metaphysics and mathematics. The paper has two goals. The modest goal is to compare metaphysical and mathematical explanations, emphasizing their similarities. The ambitious goal is to single out a special subset of mathematical explanations, i.e. Lange's distinctive mathematical explanations, and argue that they are actually grounding explanations.

**KEYWORDS** | Mathematical Explanations; Metaphysical Explanations; Grounding

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## 1 Introduction

It seems to be plausible that mathematical explanations (MA-explanations) in the empirical world are based on relations between two orders of facts: mathematical facts and empirical facts. The matter of which relations are best placed to do the explanatory work is, however, subject to controversy. Several accounts have been proposed to this end, but the dispute is still ongoing among philosophers (for instance, Baker (2012), Pincock (2014), and Baron (2016)). Regardless of which account turns out to be the best, mathematics' explanatory power can be hardly denied.

Conversely, the debate over the status of metaphysical explanations (ME-explanations) has been reappraised. Some philosophers argue that if any metaphysical notion can be explanatory, then *grounding* appears to be a promising candidate (e.g., Fine (2012), deRosset (2013), Dasgupta (2014), and Trogdon (2018)). The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the connection between MA-explanations and ME-explanations.

In section 2, I introduce the notion of grounding and provide two reasons for seeking a connection between metaphysical and mathematical explanations. In section 3, I spell out the role of grounding in metaphysical explanations by examining the formal properties of grounding and explanations. In section 4, I distinguish two ways in which mathematical explanations can be acausal, and claim that grounding claims and some mathematical explanations are acausal in the same sense. In section 5, I extend Lange's notion of 'explanations by constraint' to grounding, and introduce the concept of distinctive metaphysical explanations. In section 6, I argue that distinctive mathematical explanations provide us with information about a portion of grounding network. I examine a case study from VSEPR theory to illustrate my view.

## 2 On Metaphysical Grounding and Mathematical Explanations

Grounding plays an essential role in metaphysics by encoding metaphysical priority or, in other words, what is fundamental. Metaphysical grounding is a philosophical concept that is expressed by instances of words such as 'because of,' 'depend on,' 'in virtue of,' etc. Grounding is so pervasive in the philosophical discourse that it can be found in many philosophical core sentences.

Consider a sentence such as 'non-empty sets depend on their members', or 'true propositions depend on truth-makers'. Those sentences can be understood

as pointing to a metaphysical notion of dependence.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it has recently become customary to analyze those expressions in terms of grounding. But the properties of such a notion are notoriously open to dispute, so grounding is being subjected to numerous controversies over its nature.

To avoid some contentious issues, I will maintain that grounding is plural, by which I mean that there are various notions subsumed under the word ‘grounding’. Incidentally, the fact that many different properties have been attributed to grounding may favor a pluralistic approach.<sup>2</sup> For the sake of argument, I will hold that ‘grounding’ is said in many ways; what all grounding relations, or predicates, have in common is that they aim to characterize non-causal fundamentality among facts or entities. Then I will single out the properties that makes grounding explanatory.

I consider two reasons for seeking a connection between grounding and MA-explanations. On the one hand, I want to represent the relation *in virtue of* which mathematical facts explain physical facts. Call this the ‘dependency requirement.’ By way of an example, the fact that we can never walk over each of Königsberg’s bridges just once and end up where we started is explained in virtue of the fact that Königsberg’s bridges do not form a Eulerian path.<sup>3</sup> That is a physical fact that is explained by a mathematical fact. On the other hand, I am interested in what sort of explanatory relation holds between the physical, contingent world and the mathematical, necessary realm. Call this the ‘modal explanatory requirement.’ I hold the view that a satisfactory narrative of the relationship between grounding and MA-explanations must take into account both requirements.

Let me clarify further the terminology I will use in this paper. In a MA-explanation of a physical, contingent phenomenon, the *explanans* is a mathematical fact, while the *explanandum* is a physical fact. For example, the fact that I was not able to untie a trefoil knot is explained by a topological fact, i.e. it is impossible to untie a trefoil knot in three dimensions without cutting it.

In a ME-explanation the *explanans* and the *explanandum* are connected by linking grounding facts with grounded facts. Consider a public event such as a conference. What makes it a conference rather than, say, a football match (Dasgupta 2014, 3)? An answer may explain that a conference is such *in virtue of* its

<sup>1</sup> Not every usage of these words expresses metaphysical grounding. For instance, some usages point to causal relations such as ‘the door slammed because of the wind.’ In the pages that follow I will only focus on the grounding usage.

<sup>2</sup> See McDaniel (2017) for a pluralistic concept of grounding.

<sup>3</sup> A Eulerian path is a trail in a graph which visits every edge exactly once. The Euler path theorem states that it is impossible to construct such a Eulerian path for any connected graph with more than two vertices of odd degree.

attendees acting in certain ways rather than others. Roughly, an event is a conference if its participants behave in a particular manner, such as giving talks, listening to the speaker and so on. The explanation in question does not highlight what causes the event to occur; rather, it highlights what must be the case for an event to occur: what grounds what.<sup>4</sup>

I will discuss three central points: grounding is an explanatory notion; MA-explanations and ME-explanations are both acausal; there are cases where MA-explanations and ME-explanations are both explanations by constraints.

### 3 Grounding Is Explanatory

Some philosophers (e.g. J. Wilson (2014)) argue that grounding is not truly explanatory. This should not come as particularly surprising, as there are some who doubt that grounding is even intelligible (e.g. Hofweber (2009) and Daly (2012)).

I take that any explanation must address why-questions. Grounding explanations are no different in such respect: they address why-questions by making salient facts that are fundamental. Standing on a beach on a sunny day, I ask myself why the sand is hotter than the sea. An explanatory answer that makes salient what is fundamental can go something like this: the sand is hotter *by virtue of* having lower specific heat than that of water. Here is an example of a philosophical why-question that aims to highlight a fundamental fact: why does {Socrates} exist? And here is an answer: the fact that {Socrates} exists depends on the fact that Socrates exists. In other words, the existence of Socrates' singleton depends on the existence of Socrates the philosopher.

To see an analogy between grounding and explanations, I point out grounding has formal properties that philosophers typically associate with explanations (Raven 2015). Grounding and explanations form strict partial orders on facts.<sup>5</sup> Explanations have the following properties:

- Explanations are irreflexive ( $x$  does not explain itself).
- Explanations are transitive (if  $x$  explains  $y$ , and  $y$  explains  $z$ , then  $x$  explains  $z$ ).

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<sup>4</sup> A caveat is in order here. I am not committing myself to the view that grounding is indispensable for ME-explanations; that is, I am not saying that grounding relations are the only ones that guarantee ME-explanations. See Kovacs (2017) for an argument against the indispensability of grounding in ME-explanations.

<sup>5</sup> A strict partial order is a binary relation  $R$ , such that  $R$  is irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive.

- Explanations do not work backwards (if  $x$  explains  $y$ , then  $y$  does not explain  $x$ ).

Likewise, philosophers generally agree that grounding relations are strict partial order.

- Grounding is irreflexive ( $x$  does not ground itself).
- Grounding is transitive (if  $x$  grounds  $y$ , and  $y$  grounds  $z$ , then  $x$  grounds  $z$ )
- Grounding is asymmetric (if  $x$  grounds  $y$ , then  $y$  does not ground  $x$ ).

Grounding theorists have also raised several counter-examples to each of those proprieties, but I will stick to the common view that grounding is a strict partial order on facts.<sup>6</sup>

Even if we concede that grounding and explanations are both strict partial orders, this is not sufficient for grounding to be considered explanatory. Indeed there are strict partial orders relations that are not explanatory. Consider the relation ' $x$  is taller than  $y$ .' That is a strict partial order, but it is hardly explanatory on its own, without further properties or a relevant context of utterance.

I put forward two additional formal properties that explanations have: hyperintensionality and non-monotonicity.<sup>7</sup> Grounding is hyperintensional in the sense that, given two intensionally equivalent propositions,  $p$  and  $q$ , if  $p$  grounds  $q$ , then  $q$  cannot swap place with  $p$  *salva veritate*, i.e. without change in truth-value.<sup>8</sup> In the same vein, explanations are hyperintensional in the sense that two intensionally equivalent explanations for the same phenomenon cannot be substituted *salva veritate*.<sup>9</sup> Hyperintensionality is worth mentioning because it allows us to distinguish grounding from supposedly non-explanatory notions such as supervenience (see Horgan (1993)).

The failure of monotonicity also highlights the similarity between grounding and explanation. Deductively valid implications are monotonic in that if  $P \rightarrow C$  is valid, so too is the implication from  $P \wedge Q$  to  $C$  (for any  $Q$ ). Explanations and

<sup>6</sup> Some of the most interesting counterexamples are collected in Trogon (2013).

<sup>7</sup> See Raven (2013) and Dasgupta (2014).

<sup>8</sup> The fact that Socrates exists and the fact that {Socrates} exists are intensionally equivalent because any possible world in which the first obtains is a world in which the second obtains and vice versa. The fact that Socrates exists grounds the fact that {Socrates} exists. However, it is not the case that the fact that {Socrates} exists grounds the fact that Socrates exists.

<sup>9</sup> Give two explanations that are logically equivalent it is possible that a person may believe the one but not the other.

grounding are non-monotonic (Rosen 2010, 116) in the sense that if  $p$  explains (or grounds)  $q$ , it does not follow that  $p \wedge r$  explains (or grounds)  $q$  (for any  $r$ ).

The debate on what counts as an explanation is quite extensive. But given that grounding shares core formal properties with explanations, it makes sense to see how far that analogy can take us. Let us then explore what explanatory role grounding can perform.

#### 4 Mathematical and Metaphysical Explanations Are Both Acausal

In this chapter there are a couple of theses I want to examine. Not only will I claim that metaphysical and MA-explanations are acausal, but I will also argue that they are acausal in the same sense. I first elaborate on MA-explanations and then evaluate in what sense MA-explanations are acausal.

Let us consider two ways in which MA-explanations can be acausal. On the one hand, according to the ontic view (e.g. Baker (2012) and Colyvan (2012)), MA-explanations appeal to facts involving abstract objects. That view stems from the debate on indispensability argument in the philosophy of mathematics. The argument goes like this: MA-explanations are acausal because they involve quantification over abstract objects that are indispensable to the explanatory power of scientific theories. On the other hand, according to the modal view, the *explanandum* is shown to hold necessarily regardless of contingent facts (Lange 2013). In the modal view, mathematics does not gain its explanatory strength from quantification over abstract entities, but it exploits facts that are modally stronger than ordinary causal laws.

The modal view is perhaps less known in the literature, so let me bring up an example (488). Why does a mother fail to distribute 23 strawberries evenly among her children? According to the modal view, an explanation of that fact involves two classes of facts: contingent facts and necessary facts. In our example, the contingent facts involve the mother's disposition, the number of strawberries, the number of children and so on. The necessary fact is a mathematical one, i.e. 23 cannot be divided evenly by 3. Even if the mother wanted to distribute the strawberries among her children, the mother could not do so without cutting the berries. The explanation works by showing that a necessary mathematical fact explains a contingent fact. 'Necessity' is key word in this context.

To me, a fascinating problem is whether we can connect Lange's modal view on mathematical explanations with grounding. Philosophers think that grounding can help us achieve two goals at least. First, grounding aims to set apart facts that are fundamental from facts that are merely derivative. Second, grounding aims

to get a grip on what *acausal* priority is. Consider the following Clark and Liggins (2012)'s example. Why a cup is brittle? The brittleness of the cup results from the specific way its constituent atoms are arranged. In other words, the atoms' configuration explains why the cup is brittle. The explanation is acausal because the arrangement of atoms does not, strictly speaking, cause the brittleness of the cup. In grounding jargon, the cup's brittleness is grounded in how its constituent atoms are arranged.

Clark and Liggins seem to admit that metaphysical explanations can exist in terms of grounding. Unfortunately, for my purpose, their example does not fit well with Lange's modal view. One could object that the atomic structure *causally* explains the brittleness of the cup by recognizing a physical factor, i.e. the lack of crystal structure, which is responsible for brittleness.

The problem is that the modal view leverages a broad notion of causality, in which an explanation is causal if it provides information about the world's causal network. This means that an explanation could still be causal even though it does not, strictly speaking, mention any causes. Lange (2016, xvii) himself points out that grounding explanations seem to describe features of the world's causal network. If Lange's claim is true, then I do not see an easy way to bridge the gap between the modal view and grounding.

## 5 Two Explanations by Constraints

Here is a plan to go beyond Lange. First, explain the concept of explanation by 'constraints'; second, show that ME-explanations are special kinds of explanation by constraints; third, detach grounding from causation by leveraging the concept of explanation by constraint.<sup>10</sup> That will pave the way for some ME-explanations to be acausal.

Mathematics can provide explanations by constraints in the sense that they can put modal constraints that are stronger than any physical law. For examples, Königsberg's bridges have never been crossed in a certain way because they *cannot* be crossed in that manner; I *cannot* untie the trefoil knot on my table because a trefoil knot is a nontrivial knot; the mother *cannot* distribute the strawberries among her children because 23 cannot be divided evenly by 3.

Those explanations seem to be distinctively mathematical, in the sense that the connection between the *explanans* and the *explanandum* holds not by any

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<sup>10</sup> Some authors have recently advanced a strong connection between grounding and causation. See Schaffer (2016), A. Wilson (2018), and Trogdon (2018).

contingent law of nature but by mathematical facts. Mathematical facts are also necessary because they are true in every possible world.

Consider the following objection. Mathematics is not a unitary corpus, but there are many different mathematical theories. Some of them are also inconsistent with one another. This, however, introduces an element of contingency, which might be problematic for the present proposal.<sup>11</sup>

The objection seems to stem from a pluralistic view of mathematics. Does mathematical pluralism imply that mathematical facts are contingent? Let me clarify that a full-blown discussion on mathematical pluralism goes beyond the scope of this paper. In fact, there may be varieties of mathematical pluralism that are incompatible with my view. It is important to clarify that mathematical pluralism is not problematic as long as it does not hold that the relationship between the *explanans* and the *explanandum* is contingent by its nature. My view allows that there are cases in which the relationship between mathematical facts and physical facts is contingent. For example, there could be a physical fact that is explained by two mathematical theories that are incompatible with one another. However, those explanations would not be explanations by constraints in the sense that I am interested in. In my lingo, an explanation by constraint must hold in virtue of a necessary mathematical relation. If it does not, the explanation could still be mathematical but not by constraint.

Distinctive mathematical explanations (DMA-explanations) diverge from explanations where mathematics is merely used to describe physical laws. To see what I mean, compare the aforementioned DMA-explanations with the following use of mathematics in Dalton's law. Why can climbers die of hypoxia climbing Mount Everest? An explanation involves Dalton's law of partial pressures, which states that the total pressure of a mixture of gas,  $P_T$ , is the sum of all of the partial pressures of the individual gases,  $p_1 + p_2 + \dots + p_n$ , in the mixture. Persistent people who keep climbing Mount Everest experience the total pressure to decrease, causing the partial pressure of oxygen to decrease below 0.1 atm. Pressures of oxygen below 0.1 atm are not safe for humans, causing hypoxia.

Dalton's law explains hypoxia in climbers by leveraging a mathematical equation that represents the pressures of gas molecules as real numbers. However, the explanatory power of Dalton's law does not rely on necessary mathematical facts. The law explains by virtue of contingent aspects of the physical world, namely the fact that the total pressure in a mixture is constant.

DMA-explanations work differently by putting modal constraints on the physical world. My hypothesis is that DMA-explanations are not the only explanations

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<sup>11</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for pointing out this objection.

by constraints. There are some ME-explanations that do not derive their power from contingent facts either; they do not hold by virtue of physical laws but by necessary grounding facts.

I distinguish between two classes of ME-explanations: distinctive metaphysical explanations (DME-explanations) and surreptitious metaphysical explanations. DME-explanations are *necessary* determination relations, whereas mere metaphysical explanations are *contingent* determination relations.

Surreptitious metaphysical explanations are quite similar to causal explanations in that they work as surrogates of causation. In Dalton's law the total pressure of a gas mixture is grounded in each partial pressure. As a result, each partial pressure is fundamental, whereas the total pressure is merely derivative. Since the explanation in question works by appealing to contingent aspects of the world, i.e. a law of nature, it is a surreptitious metaphysical explanation. In my view, 'Clark & Liggins' example mentioned earlier is also surreptitious, because it gains its explanatory power from a contingent aspect of the world, i.e. the lack of crystal structure.

The distinction between surreptitious and DME-explanations may cast light on why some philosophers attribute the property of necessity to grounding, whereas others ascribe to it the property of contingency.<sup>12</sup> In this paper, I will not elaborate further on surreptitious metaphysical explanations because they are not explanations by constraints.

DME-explanations have strong modal force. In any DME-explanation, the *explanans* necessarily entails the *explanandum*. Although there is more to grounding than modality (Fine 2012), there is a strong connection between grounding and necessitation. Given a plurality of facts,  $F$ ,  $F$  is a DME-explanation of a plurality of facts,  $P$ , iff  $P$  is fully grounded in  $F$ , and  $P$  is modally entailed by  $F$ .<sup>13</sup> In plain words, DME-explanations convey metaphysical necessity.

I argue that DME-explanations are explanations by constraints. They do not work by describing the world's causal network, but they derive their power from necessary (grounding) facts. The fact that Socrates exists is a DME-explanation of the fact that {Socrates} exists. This is because the existence of Socrates fully grounds the existence of {Socrates}, and the existence of {Socrates} is modally entailed by the existence of Socrates because every world where Socrates exists is a world where {Socrates} exists too.

Consider the following objection. The existence of Socrates is a contingent.

<sup>12</sup> Necessitarianism is the default view about grounding. See Rosen (2010), deRosset (2010), Audi (2012), Trogon (2013), and Dasgupta (2014). For contingentism see Leuenberger (n.d.) and Skiles (2015).

<sup>13</sup> It is common to distinguish full and partial grounding. For example,  $A$  and  $B$  together fully ground  $A \wedge B$ , while each only partially grounds it.

Thus, the power of a DME-explanation, such as the one that explains the existence of {Socrates}, seems to rely on a contingent fact. If that is true, how can a DME-explanation be an explanation by constraint? After all, it does not seem to carry any modal necessity.

My reply to that objection goes as follows. Suppose someone had killed Socrates' father before Socrates was born, so that Socrates would never have existed. If that had occurred, Socrates' existence would not have explained the existence of its singleton. However, the success of a DME-explanation does not presuppose that Socrates and its singleton exist in every world. but that every world where Socrates exists is a world where {Socrates} exists too. To put it another way, the necessary grounding fact is the connection between Socrates and its singleton, not the existence of Socrates.<sup>14</sup>

## 6 Distinctive Mathematical Explanations and Grounding Network

I argued that DMA-explanations and DME-explanations are explanations by constraints. I now want to establish a stronger connection between the two. In a nutshell, here is my hypothesis: if a mathematical fact distinctively explains an empirical fact, then the former fully grounds the latter. DMA-explanations are a subset of DME-explanation or, in other words, DMA-explanations are DME-explanations in which the *explanandum* is mathematical in character. If that is true, then DMA-explanations can provide us with information about a portion of the (acausal) grounding network.

In a DMA-explanation, mathematical truths modally entail a plurality of physical phenomena, in the sense that DMA-explanations uniquely derive their power from necessary mathematical truths. I define a mathematical necessity as a mathematical truth that is metaphysically necessary. The goal is to show that some mathematical truths ground physical phenomena. A DMA-explanation contains a necessary mathematical truth, which entails the *explanandum* in every possible world.

As a consequence, we should regard mathematical facts as metaphysically fundamental or, in other words, as necessary grounding facts. A DMA-explanation contains a specific necessary grounding fact, i.e. a mathematical truth, which entails the *explanandum* in every possible world. Basically, DMA-explanations mirror ME-explanations that exploit mathematical truths as necessary grounding facts.

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<sup>14</sup> I do not believe that this move can be applied to Clark and Liggins (2012)'s example. It does not seem that every world where a cup is brittle is a world where its atoms are arranged in a certain way. There could be worlds in which brittleness is caused by other atoms' arrangements.

It may be easier to see what I mean by way of an example. Consider again the bridges of Königsberg. No one can cross the bridges of Königsberg by passing each bridge exactly once and then going back to the starting point. This is explained by a mathematical fact: Königsberg's bridges form a non-Eulerian graph. The explanatory power does not depend upon any causal phenomenon; rather, it appeals to a mathematical fact: necessarily, such-and-such an arrangement is non-Eulerian.

The connection between the *explanans* and the *explanandum* holds necessarily given the fixed arrangement of bridges: every possible world in which a sequence of bridges does not form a Eulerian path is a world where no one can cross Königsberg's bridges. Also, mathematical facts are (metaphysically) necessarily true in every possible world, and that metaphysical necessities are grounding facts. The *explanans* is a grounding fact that explains by its necessary modal force given by a mathematical result. Because the connection between the grounding fact and the grounded fact is necessary, the *explanans* fully grounds the *explanandum*.

The case of Königsberg's bridges shows that a DMA-explanation mirrors a corresponding DME-explanation. But let me show you another example that has not been studied in the literature so far.

The shape of a molecule depends on the minimum repulsion energy of the electron groups. The bond angles within a molecule can be determined experimentally, but it is possible to make predictions *ab initio* based on pure mathematical considerations. VSEPR theory allows us to predict the shape of molecules given the assumption that the electron groups want to get as far apart as possible.<sup>15</sup> That is a consequence of the Pauli principle combined with electrostatic repulsion. The Pauli exclusion principle states that no more than two electrons may fill the same orbital, and that if two electrons are present they must have opposite spins. Moreover, the electron groups are attracted to the nucleus, but they also repel one another through coulombic forces.

Consider now one molecule of CH<sub>4</sub> (methane) with four hydrogen atoms around the central carbon atom. In the absence of distortions, the four hydrogen atoms achieve the maximum separation possible by assuming the regular tetrahedral shape, where the hydrogen atoms are the vertexes of the tetrahedron. That is a mathematical necessary constraint, because it is the only way for the hydrogen atoms to be equidistant from one another and the carbon atom in a three-dimensional space.<sup>16</sup>

The explanation of the molecular arrangement of CH<sub>4</sub> gets its power from a

<sup>15</sup> I will follow Gillespie et al. (2001, 79–85) in the discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>16</sup> See Glaister (1993) for a concise discussion of the tetrahedral shape of methane.

mathematical necessary fact: the central angle between *any* two vertexes of a regular tetrahedron is  $\arccos(-\frac{1}{3}) \approx 109.47^\circ$ . Note that the explanation appeals to contingent facts no more than the case of Königsberg's bridges presupposes a fixed arrangement of bridges. Thus, it is a DMA-explanation. Because the explanation works by exploiting a necessary mathematical truths, we can say that the molecular arrangement of CH<sub>4</sub> is fully grounded in the regular tetrahedron having certain mathematical properties. The DMA-explanation mirrors a corresponding DME-explanation.

## 7 Conclusion

My argument shows that DMA-explanations are of great value for metaphysics. To sum up, I argued that there is a strong connection between DMA-explanations and DME-explanations. They both appeal to facts that are modally stronger than ordinary causal facts. In any DMA-explanation, the connection between the *explanandum* and the *explanans* holds by virtue of a necessary mathematical fact underlying the explanation. This fact also figures in a corresponding DME-explanation, in that it fully grounds a plurality of physical phenomena. My claim is that we can track what facts are fully grounded in mathematical truths by identifying DMA-explanations.

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### **III. REVIEWS**

## **Review – *Equality Renewed: Justice, Flourishing and the Egalitarian Ideal***

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As one of the dominant theories in political philosophy, utilitarianism claims that a policy should aim at maximization of total social welfare. However, it turned sharply to equality with the publication of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. Now, the major contemporary theories of justice all share these egalitarian ideas, valuing the equality of everyone. Rawls criticized utilitarianism for ignoring the problem of inequality in the distribution of welfare and proposed the difference principle to ensure justice for the worse-off. But a society formed on the liberty principle and the difference principle, and which is built on the bases of the original position and the veil of ignorance, excludes those who are mentally disadvantaged. Sen switched the point of emphasis here by focusing on "equality of what". He critiqued three types of equality: utilitarian equality, total utility equality, and Rawlsian equality in the Tanner lecture, and proposed his model of "basic capability equality" to "shift attention from goods to what goods do to human beings" (Sen 1980, 218–219), and attended to how capability achieves valuable functionings. Meanwhile, Cohen critiqued Sen's explanation of capability for giving too much weight to freedom, which is "concerned with what one CAN do and 'with what one can DO'" (qtd. Nussbaum and Sen 1993, 26). Cohen argued, in egalitarian politics there is no "genuine choice" as such that needs to exert the value of capability for egalitarianism, insofar as equality has nothing to do with capability. Cohen argued that egalitarianism is about building a society, in which "no serious inequality obtains when everyone has everything she needs, even if she did not have to lift a finger to get it" (28), and that is what "equality of access to advantage" is aiming at.

Drawing on this debate on egalitarianism, Christine Synowich proposes her new approach to equality in *Equality Renewed: Justice, Flourishing and the Egalitarian Ideal*.

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-tarian Ideal by combining the theories of Sen and Cohen. She argues that equality should be understood in terms of enabling everyone to have a good life. Where Sen's "equality of capability" focuses on what a person can do and Cohen's "equality of access to advantage" concentrates on what the community provides, Sypnowich's "equality of flourishing" draws on both these views. She believes that everyone has an equal right to enjoy a flourishing life. What kind of life can be counted as a flourishing life? Sypnowich answers that three criteria should be satisfied: one should have a life that includes the ability to choose how to live; involves objectively worthwhile pursuits; and grants personal contentment (Sypnowich 2017, 140–141). She establishes thresholds for flourishing, starting with a basic flourishing level that everyone should attain. If a person's condition does not reach this basic level of flourishing, the community should provide sufficient resources to help him or her achieve it, and thus it is reasonable to distribute resources more to the disadvantaged, to some extent. After that, equality will give way to excellence, and that's why Sypnowich also calls her account "egalitarian perfectionism" (132). In a word, equality has priority until everyone can achieve a basic level of flourishing, and after that, equality may be compromised by instances of excellence. Is the basic level of flourishing constant? Sypnowich says no, arguing that the basic level of flourishing is flexible. It is positively correlated with the wellbeing of the majority of people within a state, and the goal of her account of human flourishing is to maximize flourishing as well as to equalize it by way of a staggered threshold approach. This approach "seeks an ambitious level of equal flourishing by means of improving flourishing, as much as is possible, at a base level and then raising it in stages, to ensure that the flourishing of the worst off is constantly improved" (146).

This book covers almost all topics within political philosophy, including race, gender, neutrality, multiculturalism, autonomy, global justice, and cosmopolitanism. Sypnowich demonstrates the advantages of her flourishing approach in addressing these themes.

*Equality Renewed* is made up of three parts: challenges to equality, liberal revisionism, and equality and living well. Part I and part II correspond to the two major challenges to egalitarianism: the problem of difference and the neutralism of liberal political thought, respectively. In Part III, Sypnowich mainly elucidates her new approach to equality and extends it into the realm of global justice. In Part I, Sypnowich maintains that "adherents to the idea of difference may abhor such a world, but they deploy typologies and distinctions based on culture, race, gender, or language that suggest essentialism about difference" (36). She argues that although "our invocations of difference always risk essentialism" (26), "the politics of difference" should not be reduced to essentialism. Cultural recognition, color con-

sciousness, deconstruction of race, and sexual difference make us pay attention to people who appear different, but the main point is to tell us that race and gender do not have inherent and unchangeable attributes for our unique identities; they are nonessential. We are free to choose these identities, either changing them or giving them up, because races and genders are only differences, not permanent and immutable identities. Thus, the relationship between difference and commonality is compatible; they can coexist. However, it is worth noting that Sypnowich does not underestimate the importance of highlighting differences, neither with regard to race nor gender. The point she wants to emphasize is that if we really understand differences, we will not stereotype them always as being harbingers of inequality and we will find that differences sometimes have nothing to do with inequality at all. Thus, she says that “social justice is not best pursued by the politics of difference or identity. Rather, what is required is a form of egalitarianism that focuses on human flourishing beyond the confines of cultural identity, and that combines a pluralistic vision of the good with a universalist commitment to equality” (16).

The concepts of neutrality and multiculturalism provide two different ways to deal with difference in Part II. Liberalism deals with the problem of difference posed by neutrality. In Chapter 4, Sypnowich explores Rawls’ theoretical hypothesis where reasonable and rational persons have the capacity to form, pursue, and revise a conception of the good, have the capacity to develop a sense of justice, and cooperate to design a social structure to ensure justice. Yet, this classification of reasonable and rational persons does not properly take into account children and mentally disabled adults. While the conception of justice that these reasonable and rational persons pursue may be based on reason, might remain a plausible concept. Sypnowich moves on to examining the problems of neutrality in terms of the vocabulary of “neutrality” itself (which is a subject-less perspective without one’s own identity, values or beliefs), the depth of neutrality (it seems that the neutrality upon which Rawls insisted conflicts with the morally substantive reasons for political liberalism), the source and extent of neutrality (because of Rawls’ arbitrary division between the political and the comprehensive, several political practical issues are excluded from politics). In sum, Sypnowich believes that Rawls’ emphasis on neutrality does not successfully address differences. Multiculturalists take the approach of accommodating difference by means of policies of multiculturalism, as espoused by Will Kymlicka. This mean not being prejudiced against cultures, allowing citizens’ freedom to choose their culture, but also incorporating special arrangements to protect cultures (91). Kymlicka insists we protect minority cultures in response to cultural oppression—because states can remedy injustice and inequality without undermining neutrality— and then ensure equal

autonomy for citizens to choose their way of lives and revise their choices. Sypnowich powerfully argues that “minority cultural rights protect the conditions for choice making in a minority culture, but they also inhibit the kinds of choices individuals may make” (Sypnowich 2017, 97). Furthermore, Kymlicka’s position seems to entail that every culture has an equal right to existence, so as to allow individuals to have sufficient choices in exercising their freedom and autonomy. However, it is worth noting that the disappearance of a culture does not mean that the culture was oppressed or that it disappeared due to oppression.

Can egalitarians give a better answer than liberalism when it comes to difference? Sypnowich answers “absolutely”. She gives the explanation about her new approach in Part III. In Chapter 6, Sypnowich responds with three challenges concerning the aim of material equality: levelling down, the problem of talent, and the matter of partiality (113). She argues that the flourishing approach calls for redistribution for the sake of everyone’s wellbeing rather than for the sake of achieving strict equality, basing this, however, on “the fact that ‘those with less have too little’” (115). She also embraces talents, which are closely related to human diversity and flourishing, where what she wants to do is to separate the relation between talent inequality and material inequality, rather than eliminating talent entirely (122). A wellbeing approach means living in a society with an egalitarian ethos, such that good relationships with families are to be “encouraged and fostered, within an egalitarian institutional context that assures us that such goods can be pursued guilt-free” (125). Sypnowich believes that “objectively worthwhile pursuits, autonomy, and contentment” (170) are indispensable constituents of flourishing. According to her approach, there are several things that we must keep in mind. Firstly, human flourishing is neither homogeneous nor uniform, but varies with individuals, namely, as different persons have different kinds of flourishing. Equality of human flourishing does not mean that everyone should achieve at the same level, “wellbeing takes diverse” (157). Secondly, there is no absolute tension between excellence and equality other than the basic threshold that flourishing should be equal, and where the relationship of them is fluctuating. Egalitarian perfectionism “focuses on flourishing as what we seek to make more equal, and thus gives up on maximizing excellence if this sacrifices some for others. However, so long as society meets a high threshold of equal flourishing, the position is prepared to moderate equality in order to provide opportunities for excellence” (144). But where is the threshold? Actually, there is no simple threshold, but a staggered threshold “to ensure that the flourishing of the worst off is constantly improved” (146). Thirdly, a flourishing society also has drawbacks, for example, the problem of individual contributions and adaptive preferences (146–150). Finally, living a good life is better than having the ability and freedom to choose a

good life, because choices made freely may be detrimental to flourishing, so as to supplement imperfections in autonomy in some fields, such as wealth distribution, primary goods, relationships, education, and environmental factors, all of which would have a significant influence on individuals' respective levels of flourishing, that appropriate interventions are necessary. However, at the end of Chapter 8, Synowich provides six "general principles about egalitarian human flourishing" (171–172) to help us develop a brief profile. Then she explains six considerations concerning the contribution of public good to the flourishing of individuals (181–186), but she also holds the view that national boundaries are necessary. The way to compromise is to keep a global vision while focusing on local practice (189–191), for example, the prospering of the arts and the conservation of historical buildings. Cultural worldliness is interested in distinctive contributions of different cultures, while moral worldliness is interested in moral duties to persons apart from cultures (196). The flourishing approach, which is the marriage of moral worldliness and cultural worldliness, guides us in acting toward the goal of allowing local populations to flourish so that they can cultivate their ability to engage in self-determination regardless of the desires and value assessments of others.

After debating different ideas, Synowich concludes that what egalitarians seek is the promotion of equality of flourishing. Everyone has a right to flourish, but people are able to achieve different levels of flourishing depending on factors including their environment, the effort they make, and their natural talents. Some people's flourishing might be under the basic level. Society should help people flourish, and the more radical goal is to achieve equality in flourishing. The flourishing approach posits an ambitious goal in guiding us to live well, and as such it encounters the criticism that the flourishing account is utopian. Synowich maintains that, while the flourishing approach does have a utopian urge, it is markedly different from utopianism: "Utopia has been defined as an 'ideally perfect society whose members live the best possible life,' or an 'imaginary ideal society'" (213). Her approach seeks to ensure that human beings live flourishing lives, which looks close to an ideal of perfection, but the goal is not perfection per se, because the idea of egalitarian flourishing allows for people being imperfect, vulnerable, and even flawed.

This is a very exciting account of how living a good life may be possible for all. However, there is some tension in her theory. Firstly, in Chapter 6, Synowich argues that "everyone's access to opportunities for developing talent should be as unfettered as possible" (121), and as the result of talent development, "the talented among us provide discoveries, ideas and works of art that enhance our culture, shape our society's institutions and practices, and improve our standard of living, health and quality of life" (121). Even for those who have an unusually high

level of flourishing, for example Mozart, sufficient benefit is still possible. On this point, Sypnowich writes, “those who lack the talent of a Mozart can nonetheless derive enormous fulfilment from, if not performing his music, then listening to it” (Sypnowich 2017, 144). But there will be a conflict, or a diminishment at least, when encounter a situation that “we could instead provide special education for children with disabilities to significantly improve their levels of flourishing” (146). Secondly, “personal contentment is an important feature of flourishing” (140), and thus the basic level of flourishing will vary from person to person, as well as vary in terms of the material aspect of emotions, and therefore, Sypnowich should relate her staggering thresholds to human diversity, but she does not. Thirdly, a staggered threshold approach refers to keeping the basic level on an upward trajectory (146), once everyone has achieved it, the basic level of flourishing will be raised. This means that state intervention will only occur through equalization and that it will do nothing for the promotion of geniuses. Additionally, the primary goal of the human flourishing approach is for everyone to reach a basic level of flourishing, however, those who are stubbornly below the basic level of prosperity will indirectly hinder the development of talents. Fourthly, the flourishing account is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it contains much more than a singular conception of resources, welfare, opportunities, races, gender, and even cultures, and to some degree, we can say flourishing extends to cover all of these areas. This is precisely its merit. On the other hand, the flourishing account is too ambitious, too hollow, and too weak in its argument for specific themes, because when we put it into practice, it inevitably depends on conceptions of resources, welfare, opportunities, races, gender, and cultures. Last, but not least, one huge hurdle is the concern that this account is committed to coercing people to flourish.<sup>1</sup> It risks going against the will of those who choose to live a life of less flourishing. The egalitarian flourishing account is based on the assumptions that we can discern what is a flourishing life and that everyone wants to live such a life. But what about someone who wants to lead a life of hardship for some reason, or people who have special interests and accordingly do not want to live the type of life that Sypnowich describes as flourishing? Can we push such people to have a home, a stable job, sufficient friendships and other relationships?

It goes without saying that this is a book which provides a serious academic discussion of political philosophy and which contains a wealth of primary and secondary literature, discussing specific topics in depth. Sypnowich is very familiar with Marx’s works and arguments in the context of contemporary political philoso-

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<sup>1</sup> This idea comes from Owen Clifton, who is a member of the political philosophy reading group in Queen’s university.

phy, and she is also adept at relating ideas from canonical works to current topics. When combining these things together, she is able to give Marx's views a contemporary perspective. In the process of reading her work, I often marveled at her keen thinking and unexpected arguments. For example, she uses Marx's famous idea of the "all-round development of the individual" (135) to argue that in order to flourish, human beings should be understood in all their diversity; she uses Marx's slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (147) to argue for separating between contribution and distribution, and promoting individual responsibility for human wellbeing (147), also using this slogan to support the argument that human flourishing should not be conceived of as a monolith, there instead being multiple models of flourishing.

In general, this book is quite interesting; it provides a framework for discussing politics and political philosophy and it also provides a new horizon for thinking about contemporary political themes. I recommend it to everyone interested in topics in contemporary politics.

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