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Aesthetic Anthropology: Constructing A New System of Contemporary Aesthetic and Art Criticism¹

I. The Context for Proposing Aesthetic Anthropology

The pervasiveness of consumerism, Internet plus, globalization, and excessive entertainment is having impact on every discipline, causing steadily growing obstructions with which scholars must cope. Aesthetics is among those disciplines confronting this fourfold complex problem.

Consumerism brings beauty and artwork into everyday life in the form of commodities. The ubiquity of cultural object imagery is becoming an important subject for aesthetic research, moving beyond the previous interest in fine art and niche socio-culture. The Internet-based dissemination of knowledge and aesthetic emotions makes it possible for aesthetics, a traditionally philosophical humanistic discipline, to become cross-disciplinary, integrating humanities and social sciences, even natural science in complex ways. Amid the conflicts and reconciliation between globalization and anti-globalization, the latest aesthetic experience belonging to the common people remains the main dynamic power in the generation of aesthetic cognition and emotion. The constant collision between local aesthetic experience and global aesthetic emotional unity highlights the regular inclinations that dominate the aesthetic emotions of earth-dwellers. Excessive entertainment places new fetters of everyday aesthetics on humans, who are deprived of fetter-breaking capacities as they immerse themselves in sensory pleasure. It is therefore urgent for aesthetic scholars all over the world to reiterate the need for free, well-rounded, balanced human development. Correspondingly, studies on the tragic humanism deserve high priority in Chinese aesthetics and art criticism.

195

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The theories and methodologies of aesthetic anthropology may help tackle these four challenges in the new era. Specifically, aesthetic anthropology is grounded in the concepts of philosophical anthropology and the methods of cultural anthropology: it takes local aesthetic experience as the core subject; it studies aesthetic mechanisms in specific historical and cultural circumstances, and seeks a solution to track down problems among the collection of local aesthetic experiences from now into the future.

II. Analyzing the Key Concepts of Aesthetic Anthropology

Modern anthropology has existed for more than 150 years. It differs greatly from classical anthropology in both core concept and signature methodology. In this section we present a run-down of core issues to consider when constructing the new system of aesthetics and art criticism based on the combination of differences in concept and methodology. These core issues constitute the primary aesthetic differences between modern and classical anthropology. Modern anthropology is characterized by the pursuit of objective scientific concepts and empirical research in the field, both of which serve to identify the material foundation and social historical traditions of the human spiritual world – that is, to elaborately depict local aesthetic experience and aesthetic institutions.

In a sense, however, aesthetic anthropology has followed the value orientation and behavioral patterns of classical anthropology, adopting the humanistic ideals of the latter. In the space-time continuum, aesthetic anthropology refers to the past, the present, and the future simultaneously. It represents a commemoration of the past, a pursuit and respect of utopian ideals, and an action for the present. Built on the past, aesthetic anthropology has also improved upon the past. In a nutshell, aesthetic anthropology is based on empirical evidence, while its value orientation is humanistic.

Three aspects may introduce the core issues and key concepts of aesthetic anthropology:

1. Field: The Very Place Within Which Local Experience and Dominant Culture Interact

Field investigation is an iconic method used in modern anthropology. However, anthropologists have yet to provide an ontological definition of “field.” There-

fore, “What is field?” is the first question posed in anthropology and aesthetic anthropology, a necessary and unavoidable question for the establishment of either discipline.

In anthropology, “field” is considered a natural, self-evident space, a space “beyond our living” where field investigation is conducted. From an everyday perspective, this definition presents no error of principle. Given the need to construct a discipline, if the concept of “field” has not undergone ontological construction and dialectical interpretation, and if field has neither a summary of its universality in the broadest sense nor an analysis of its specialty in the most specific sense, then it cannot serve as a first cornerstone for either anthropology or aesthetic anthropology to become a rigorous discipline. This lack is clearly unacceptable.

Given the spatial traits of field research in the past, we may offer both a closed and an open definition of “field.” Both definitions represent a summary of physical experiences and must be conceptualized metaphysically.

As the first space to generate original human experience, “field” is primitive, simple, and relative; it also is the very space wherein local experience and dominant culture interact with each other. All field research seeks to obtain original experience as its first aim, as such experience is the liveliest and simplest for human sensation and cognition to comprehend.

As we analyzed the dialectical relationship between local experience and dominant culture, we explored the ontological meaning of “field”. In the primitive space, local experience is not only considered to be the knowledge, emotion, tradition, and institution of a barren land, but also essentially to include communication with and infiltration into dominant culture. There are two ways to understand this notion:

On one hand, local experience is not culturally insulated, but rather influenced by the dominant culture at the periphery. Ripples of this peripheral influence reach the dominant culture, causing new influence. Such is the interaction between local experience and the dominant culture. In *From the Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society* by Xiaotong FEI, the “Elderly’s Politics” is not a primitive cultural phenomenon in a feudal rural institution. Instead, it is a specific form of Confucian culture like “governance with the power of virtue” or “government as

parents” in rural political structure.² Cultural concepts found in places of dominant culture and in rural institutions are like two same seeds of thought, one planted in the royal court and the other in the countryside – the difference in environment leads to the difference in presentation. This was demonstrated in a case in our field research. In a local performance gathering at Fuli Town, Yangshuo County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, there was both reference to mainstream political ideology – commodity economy – plus the local culture, which is the main way of telling cultural stories among the Zhuang nationality. The local tales of filial piety and the value system of mainstream political ideology were seamlessly knitted into one during the local performance.³

On the other hand, indigenous cultures in South America or Africa are entirely strange, if not marginal, to Westerners. Indigenous local experience seems unrelated to mainstream Western culture, but at the moment it is observed and chronicled, it becomes a component of and a reference frame for the mainstream culture. That is to say, being local is relative to being global and dominant. If there’s nothing global, there’s nothing local. For instance, the Law of Proximity and the Law of Similarity seem to be basic patterns of the savage mind, but how can there be any such pattern without the comparison frames of experimental thinking and modern categorical thinking? Therefore, local experience and the dominant culture coexist and communication between them occurs in the “field.”

Based on the discussions above, we believe that, although field is home to a host of primitive and simple human experiences, it is the very place in which local experience and the dominant culture are communicated. In a relatively mobile field culture, field is not a fixed closed-off space but a moving system of spatial coordinates. From a theoretical point of view, it’s necessary to attach a contemporary meaning to this “mobile field.” Field is not only the peripheral area of the Third World or a forsaken ancient village, but exists in every nook and cranny of our modern life, in geographical spaces like residential areas, hospitals, schools, cinemas and malls, and in special geographical spaces of humanistic interest. These are the basic features of “field”: any place that of-

² Fei, Xiaotong, *From the Soil: The Foundation of Chinese Society*, Shanghai People’s Publishing House, Shanghai 2006, pp. 40–43.

³ Wang Jie, *On Modern Aesthetics: Anthropological Reflections*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2014, pp. 11–14.

fers primitive experience, any place that offers conflict or communication between local experience and the dominant culture, and any modern geographical space that is primitive, simple, and relatively mobile. The understanding of field has undergone an ontological transition from a specific wilderness to the modern mobile field concept. “Mobile field,” which we propose as an ontological assumption, has the historical support of anthropology. “From 1979 to 1995, Xiaotong FEI proposed the juxtaposition of sociology, ethnology, and anthropology, during which the three disciplines regained vitality in China.”⁴ FEI proposed the need to develop this trio of studies in a cross-disciplinary, fitting, and concerted way.⁵ In fact, the closed-off concept of field to which we previously referred is similar to the subject of ethnological studies; the open concept of field is similar to the subject of sociology studies.

Alongside the ontological pursuit of the definition of “field,” the subjects of aesthetic anthropology extend to every part of society – the untouched ethnic spaces as well as the unique urban spaces. Therefore, combining the disciplines avoids the mistake of studying only the ethnic minority or the wild for aesthetic anthropology. Clarification is also made in the local experience of aesthetic anthropology by studying spatial location and spatial range. There is an additional need, however, to clarify the specifics of local experience, including material life of daily necessity and cultural life like arts, traditions, and institutions. Once a researcher refines aesthetic experiences by collecting and interpreting local experience, the subject of aesthetic anthropology obtains a firmer, stronger foothold, for example, the continuous field investigation on contemporary Chinese films conducted by Professor Jie WANG’s team at Zhejiang University.

2. Context: Cultural Space for the Interaction between Aesthetic Institutions and Social Customs

Compared to the notion of “field,” context is a concept of recycling, cultural history, and flexible compulsion. Context is the cultural sphere of field, the imma-

⁴ Hu Hongbao, *History of Chinese Anthropology*, China Remin University Press, Beijing 2005, pp. 6–7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5. In the speech on the Celebration of Ten Anniversary of the Establishment of Institute of Sociology and Anthropology of Peking University and Symposium on Discipline Construction, ‘co-existence of three disciplines’ was expressed as ‘co-existence of multiple disciplines, October 31, 1995.

terial manifestation of field specific to the space and time. Context holds sway in the generation, development, and change of local aesthetic experience.

Microscopically, the generation of context is based on human practice and cognition. Macroscopically, its generation is dually driven by the aesthetic institution of ideology and the social customs of daily life.

We have amassed massive raw materials representing the experience of Heiyi Zhuang Nationality⁶ in the studies of social customs, and conducted comparative research in aesthetic institution between Chinese and Western aesthetic experience.⁷ These two types of work concur with field research, using context analysis as the primary method.

Context analysis occupies a prominent position in aesthetic anthropology. If field investigation targets the material basics of local aesthetics, context analysis places greater focus on the cultural sphere of local aesthetics. Revolving around the dialectical relationship between local aesthetic experience and the dominant culture, field research and context analysis are geared toward objective, empirical foundation and humanistic values. The two methods are complementary and provide methodological support for the theoretical system of aesthetic anthropology.

3. Style of Practice and Orientation of Values: Inheritance and Innovation

When it comes to value orientation, aesthetic anthropology advocates the humanistic concern and tragic complexity espoused by classical anthropology. With human dignity, freedom, and emancipation as its mission, aesthetic anthropology requires aesthetic researchers to evaluate the decisive function of capital and ideology properly; to follow trends closely and grasp the subtle relationship between local aesthetic experience and global transmission of

200

⁶ Fan Xiujuan, *Aesthetic Anthropological Study on Folksongs of Zhuang Ethnic in Black Suit*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin 2013. Cheng Xuejun, *Aesthetic Anthropological Study on Culture of Zhuang Ethnic in Black Suit*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin 2013.

⁷ Tony Bennett, *Culture, Governance and Society*, Orient Publishing Centre, Shanghai, 2016. Wang Jie, "Aesthetic Habits, Cultural Conventions and Free Governance: Theoretical Interpretation of Chinese Contemporary Aesthetic Experience", *Social Scientist*, 12 (2012), pp. 120–126.

aesthetic culture; and to strike a balance between compulsory influence and respectful protection. In the process of globalization and modernization, tragic clashes are inevitable. This inevitable cultural logic in real life compels us to raise the banner of tragic humanism and provide theoretical support and guidelines for those who support the good life.

The quest for local aesthetic experience draws upon researchers' memories of the idyllic lifestyle, childhood, hometown, space of the weak, and traditional agriculture life, and stimulate their hope that by finding a connection between marginal cultures and the dominant culture; they will find a way to improve and adjust the relationship between the two cultural forms while also contrasting, balancing, and coordinating those forms.

While exploring local aesthetic experience, scholars of aesthetic anthropology may on one hand trace back to a nostalgic past in their hometown; and on the other hand, assume a futuristic utopian new world. If the nostalgic past is tantamount to obsessing on the primitive experience of agricultural society, the utopian new world portrays the pragmatic expectation of an industrial capitalism or other social forms, such as communism in the future. These two value orientations lead to two modes of practice for aesthetic anthropology: inheritance and innovation.

Given the four challenges of the times, the protection and inheritance of "local aesthetic experience" pose a global difficulty. We cannot make "local aesthetic experience" develop in pace with the times simply by offering protections. "Local aesthetic experience" cannot truly grow into a solid cultural entity with only the help from others. In the globalization and Internet era, every local culture is challenged by invading foreign cultures. When a local culture fails to resist or absorb a foreign one, a significant objective remains finding ways to make the traditionally closed-off "local aesthetic experience" more adaptable, and to strengthen the capacity of "outward transmission."

The excellent quality of local aesthetic experience cannot be obtained solely dependent on others. Indigenous innovation is truly needed. There is an urgent need to pass on and improve traditional aesthetic experiences, to utilize modern cultural capital, and to take an effective approach to overcome the crisis

of fissures between value and value-in-use of “local cultural and art forms” brought about by cultural capital.

III. Major Ways to Enhance Aesthetic Anthropology

1. The Shortcomings of Current Cultural Anthropology Methodologies and the Solutions

1). *To Strengthen the Philosophical Anthropology Dimension*

When local knowledge is guided by philosophy, general knowledge will precede local knowledge. Without philosophy, all acquired knowledge is simply scattered attempts at understanding reality; it is not science.⁸

Claude Levi-Strauss “gave anthropology a rational training and won respect for the first time for a social science.” This respect was extended because Levi-Strauss adopted structuralist concepts to systematically analyze scattered anthropological records, thus making anthropology a systematic discipline.⁹

When interpreting and analyzing anthropological records, which philosophical stance or school of thought is the correct one upon which to rely? Is it structuralism or psychoanalysis? Is it hermeneutics or existentialism? It is hard to settle upon one single answer. Inevitably, multiple philosophical approaches must be taken to analyze complex anthropological records. During this process we, on one hand, resort to thinking from a “meta-philosophical perspective” to critique the prerequisite of materials and construction of aesthetic anthropology; on the other hand, we take Marxism’s historical materialism as the starting point and main objective. In the final evaluation, we conduct effective analysis of the basic subject – local aesthetic experience based on all the actual materials of aesthetic anthropology, with an aim to generate holistic aesthetic experience and interpretation.

202

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1996, p. 3.

⁹ Wang Jie, *On Modern Aesthetics: Anthropological Reflections*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2014, pp. 71–72.

2). *To Break Through the Limits of Simple Fieldwork and In-depth Interviews*

By placing aesthetic anthropology in philosophical context, we aim to solve the methodological defects of being scattered and shallow. Fieldwork includes observation, one-on-one interviews, in-depth interviews, and group questionnaires, etc.; these methods yield a daunting amount of first-hand materials representing local aesthetic experience. The first issue that arises is how to interpret those materials.

Generally speaking, simple analysis, summary, and deduction after fieldwork seldom enable us to explore local aesthetic experience at a deep level. Summative local knowledge, also known as ethnography,¹⁰ offers a panoramic view of indigenous residents' culture. As the field of anthropology grows, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of indigenous residents – immerse ourselves in their experiences – to enable such in-depth exploration. Only then can we understand their understanding, and find the very structure of aesthetic cognitive emotions in the field.

3). *To Transcend the Limits of Empirical Research Limited to Contemporary Aesthetic Studies?*

The foundation of anthropology as an empirical social science lies in having first-hand empirical research materials. Empirical materials are drawn from anthropological methods like field investigation, in-depth interviews, thick-description ethnography, and so on. However, empirical researches in anthropology cannot cope with every problem. On one hand, we must ask whether it is possible to collect objective first-hand materials; on the other hand, we must study and ponder the structure of contemporary Chinese people's aesthetic emotion and its complex presentation.

First, we believe that neither “Zero Degree Writing” nor “documentaries” can be totally objective, and the same is true of “thick description” in anthropology. Any scholar who knows the relationship between subjective stance and objective description and who grasps the nature and structure of subjective-objective relationships can achieve relative objectivity while conducting empirical research.

¹⁰ Wang Mingming, *What is Anthropology*, Peking University Press, Beijing 2003, pp. 64–65.

The Team of Contemporary Aesthetics and Art Criticism at Zhejiang University conducts a study on the very place where contemporary Chinese aesthetic experience occurs – contemporary Chinese films. By accumulating, classifying, and sublimating aesthetic experience, the Team combines empirical data with aesthetic experience, reviews comments by candidates for graduate and post-graduate students or by post-doctoral research fellows, truthfully presents the public's common aesthetic responses to contemporary Chinese films, and thus chronicles the structure of the audience's aesthetic emotion. The Team has discussed the following movies: *Lost*, *Hidden Man*, *Ash Is Purest White*, *The Great Buddha+* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. By performing thick description of aesthetic cognitive emotion, the Team seeks to find a path toward ethnic aesthetics and provide cognitive and emotional support for practical ethics.

On the other hand, aesthetic researches are bound to come to an assumption of ethical outlets, and it is impossible to grasp the value stance of any research without having a direction for ethical practice. Hermeneutic anthropology master Clifford Geertz said, "The basic mission of hermeneutic anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to let us know the answers of other people who graze other sheep in other valleys, so that these answers can be put on records of anthropology open to inquiry and retrieval."¹¹ The mission, then, is to set up a platform for equal interaction between hosts and guests. Thick description in itself is both the process and the result of this interaction. Geertz also advocated "the need to put oneself in these predicaments," but his approach is fundamentally different from Marxist historical practice. The former ends in "thick description," while the latter must perform social practice for cultural governance, spiritual and social innovation, and even the free and equal development of all human beings. The living soul of Marxism lies in paying attention to, critiquing, and transforming reality. From Marx and Engels all the way to modern or contemporary Western and Chinese Marxists, these researchers are not concerned about reality but rather engaged in social revolution and constructionist movements.¹² The humanistic stance we advocate is rooted in the social and historical practices of Marxism, mirroring the connection between theoretical research and social practice. It also can be seen in the integration of

204

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, New York 1973, pp. 33–34.

¹² Wang Jie, "Questioning Style of Aesthetics to Social Reality", *Social Scientist*, 3 (2011), p. 6.

theoretical research into people's real concerns. This represents the ethical and practical outlet for aesthetic anthropology.

2. Basic Methodology of Aesthetic Anthropology

The basic methodologies of aesthetic anthropology are threefold: 1). To study the aesthetic significance of primitive experience and art texts in the specific cultural context rather than simple form studies; 2). To pay special attention to avoiding any form of culture-centrism or cultural superiority and to conduct field work flexibly (e.g. via observation, interview, dialogue, writing aesthetic ethnography), using the series of discussions on contemporary Chinese films as an ethnographic research of contemporary aesthetic and emotional structure; and 3). To return to the original intention of anthropology, which is to study and expound upon humanity and humanism. Tragic humanism is still of importance to contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

3. Coping Strategies of Aesthetic Anthropology

To cope with the ubiquity of entertainment in everyday aesthetic life, we call for a return to the awakening of tragedy in aesthetics and art criticism, and the all-round development of people in a humanistic structure. To settle down the converging power of the global community of aesthetic culture, we expect self-assertion of the subjectivity of local aesthetic experience and that local culture to become more adaptable and to be transmitted outwardly under the premise of diversity. To reject the pervasiveness of artwork in the era of consumerism, we insist upon adhering to and perfecting the metaphysical principles of aesthetics, and propose that art criticism be critical in nature. To cope with the presence of Internet-based aesthetics and art criticism, we are developing a multi-disciplinary methodology for aesthetic research and a multi-disciplinary path to art criticism.

IV. Film Criticism with Aesthetic Anthropology: The Examples of *Wolf Warriors II* and *The Wandering Earth*

1. The box office earnings of *Wolf Warriors II* amounted to 5 billion yuan, a great case of phenomenal film in recent years. The amazing box office yield of contemporary Chinese films stems from the public's need for better cultural life. Yet much remains to be done before the caliber of local culture is presented accurately in films. The Team at Zhejiang University has invited expert and schol-

arly deliberation; presented multi-dimensional, comprehensive discussions of *Wolf Warriors II*; analyzed the single case for advantages and weaknesses; and sought growth points for Chinese culture under critiques.¹³

After the critical debate, we have offered a comprehensive presentation of the film's success and dilemmas and provided constructive opinions of the film with thick local features. Those who engage in the debate believe that the film's domestic success has multiple cultural or contextual causes; for instance, the film was aired on several important historical memorial days, which triggered emotional responses among the Chinese. However, the film's overseas box office earnings are not as good as in domestic areas, which means that the aforesaid "local aesthetic experience" cannot be grasped by overseas audiences – i.e. it is not globally adaptable or capable of good outward transmission. The team suggested that in order to increase the film's worldwide acceptability, filmmakers should find a balance between "local experience" and "global acceptance."

The traditional Kungfu representation of national pride satisfies the psychological needs of domestic filmgoers, and creates an aesthetic mode of fighting back as opposed to non-resistance which mirrors the lack of masculinity in China's major metropolitan areas. The expression of emotional nuances in the film is somewhat rough, given the film's setting of international humanitarian relief; and makes it difficult to touch people with the power of tragic humanism. A truly world-wide film may be achieved by depicting simple events in a simple life.

After comparing the film with other classical movies made in China and elsewhere (such as *007*), debaters have offered critiques on the choice of a main social theme versus a marginal one; the expression and moderation of nationalism; the balance of aesthetic-cognitive structures in third-world countries, developed countries, and China specifically; the choice of main character image; and the audio-visual presentation of the film.

As in this case, we have encouraged group discussion and presented the source of local aesthetic experience in contemporary reality. We have borrowed from

¹³ Wang Jie, Gao Youpeng and Zhou Xiaoyan, "Utopia: A Story of Man—A Discussion on Warrior Wolf II", *Shanghai Art Review*, 5 (2017), p. 4.

anthropological critiques to explore the generative rules and future orientations of phenomenal Chinese films.

2. The box office income of *The Wandering Earth* reached 4.6 billion, and it is subsidiary to *Wolf Warriors II*. It has become another phenomenal Chinese film. Our film reviewing team in Zhejiang University conducted an aesthetic anthropological analysis of it. Although the film has achieved tremendous box office success, it is not judged as a landmark Chinese science fiction film by discussion. On one hand, the film meets the rational needs of the current Chinese film market, but violates its own presupposed rational context and becomes the product of irrational emotions. On the other hand, the success of emotional control in industrial film can be attributed to the absence of profound tragic humanism. The industry has controlled human emotions to a precise degree. But this kind of manipulation is based on the technical level of cultural industry, which is far from true aesthetic emotion itself. This technique of industrialized and technical emotional manipulation is actually a manifestation of aesthetic ethical imbalance. This imbalance directly leads to the distortion of aesthetic emotion and its separation from reality. It is a kind of spiritual and cultural stimulant that breaks away from the daily emotions of the masses and from the simple state of human nature, and attempts to have direct impact on human perception with extreme emotions. This mood comes and goes quickly, and this kind of emotional control is ubiquitous in movies. In the era of fast food culture, this effect is beyond reproach. It's like eating an ordinary breakfast – you don't experience a residual aftertaste for three months afterward.

However, if the film proposes to depict a significant theme, which represents death and despair to all audiences, the public will be disgusted if the filmmaker presents it in this fast-food way. Take this film as an example. Imagine that the earth's population has dropped from more than 7 billion to 3 billion, each family has been cut in half directly, and each family must face the choice of which family member lives or dies. The grief would be enough to immerse mankind in despair for decades, or even centuries. For example, the losses of the Tangshan and Wenchuan earthquakes still cause people pain. In this film, more than 3 billion people died: what should be the state of collective emotions? We cannot imagine that kind of sadness on earth, with corpses littering the landscape, and death ice sculptures of relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues everywhere. We really cannot imagine how long it would take for human beings to appease

from this disaster. In such a context, the lyric words and sentences that middle school students blurt out – such as “hope is something as precious as a diamond” – seem so frivolous; the phenomenon of father-hatred brought about by the adolescent rebellion seems so childish; the fact that teenagers wandering around during the rebellious period happen to save the earth, seems that much more comical. In the film, all these features are important to plot cohesion.

The emotional atmosphere stems from the context of the death of 3 billion people. Of course, this sentimental manipulation technique is not only seen in *The Wandering Earth*, but also in many other Hollywood blockbusters. The crux of industrial movies lies in breaking away from the presupposed context, but also from the context of the times. This phenomenon is similar to direct injection of emotional hormones to stimulate the audience. Filmgoers want to enjoy aesthetic spiritual products, but they only buy industrial cultural hormones – sometimes stimulants, sometimes tear bombs, which lack the ethical and moral construction of the future. From this point of view, many of the emotional complexities of this film are the products of ethical imbalance, which fails to satisfy the needs of the masses for a better life.

In addition, misunderstanding of modern tragedy creates a problem in positioning the emotional outlet of the film. The film presupposes a disaster in human history. This vast martyrdom brings pain, destruction, and despair. Resistance and salvation are human instincts. The essence of tragedy lies in the incompleteness of salvation. After all, the old times will pass and the new society will come. Between the old and the new, the result of salvation is not important. The process of salvation represents the glory of humanism, due to the release of individual or collective cognition, emotion, and will. Thus the suspenseful ending will be more meaningful.

Although the absence of modern tragedy leads to so many problems in the creation of this movie, Chinese-style misery provides another kind of spiritual choice. Rooted in Chinese experience, Chinese-style misery inspired the collective efforts of the characters to fight against their fate, whatever the result would be. This is more valuable than despair and failing to act caused by physiological oppression in disaster movies. From this perspective, this film shows its unique value.

V. Reflections on Aesthetic Anthropology

1. Theoretically, aesthetic anthropology and art criticism are similar; however, differences remain, mainly in that the research subject of aesthetic anthropology is active aesthetic experience, rather than material artwork. Therefore, aesthetic meaning flows amid multiple contexts and forms the object of aesthetic anthropological research. Thus the discipline is obviously contemporary.

Aesthetic anthropology has the systematic structure of aesthetic theory; boasts metaphysical critical thinking; and features the completeness, systems, and unity of ontology, methodology, and value theory. Art criticism is the application of aesthetic and philosophical theory, with stress placed on theories that are critical, practical, and guide the future.

2. In terms of methodology, aesthetic anthropology combines the empirical research methods of philosophical anthropology with those of cultural anthropology, and strives to solve complex issues of contemporary aesthetics by taking a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach.

Both Chinese and Western anthropology boast long histories. Anthropology, through the course of its development, has different priorities and means of expression, but is consistent in research perspectives and the openness and inclusiveness of research methods. In the Internet era, aesthetic anthropology has become a system open to any research on humanity's aesthetic issues, so there are enough academic resources to solve complex issues in contemporary aesthetics.

3. There is a prejudicial view that aesthetic anthropology can only study the aesthetic culture of ethnic minorities and cannot study the complex problems of contemporary aesthetics, which we believe is a slightly biased misunderstanding of the discipline. With our metaphysical arguments of field, we have opened up more space for research: aesthetic anthropology methodology includes methods from both ethnic aesthetic studies and sociological aesthetic studies.

After a long period of accumulation, aesthetic anthropology has gradually developed a theoretical system. Through ontological construction and reflection

on methodology, we are basically able to solve the aforementioned four complex problems of our times. We expect more aesthetic researchers to discuss aesthetic anthropology with us, so we may promote contemporary aesthetics together.