

A Study of Marx's Thoughts on Beauty

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Abstract: *In Marx's works, "the way of mastering art" and other expressions about beauty are mentioned. Do these expressions mean that Marx thinks about human existence, human comprehensive development and human liberation from the anthropological intention of beauty? In this paper, Marx's knowledge formation track is investigated from Marx's learning experience from middle school to university and life experience in his youth, tracing the ancient Greek origin of Marx's aesthetic tendency, citing Marx's image data in the eyes of western scholars, and analyzing the implication of Marx's thought on beauty.*

Keywords: *Marx; The way of mastering art; Aesthetic thought*

In Marx's discourse, there are not many direct expressions about beauty, but he mentioned people's "way of mastering art" in the world and put forward that "people produce according to the scale of beauty", which undoubtedly give us profound enlightenment: Marx's expression of beauty is not accidental. There seems to be a main line lurking in Marx's thought, that is, beauty is a very important feature of human existence. Through the trajectory of Marx's growth and the logic of his discourse, we explore the discourse behind his texts and the inner tendency of his subconscious, and reveal the outline of Marx's philosophical logic on beauty.

1. Marx's reference to "the way of mastering art"

Marx mentioned man's "artistic mastery of the world", which is one of the four ways of man's mastery of the world, namely the theoretical, religious, practical — spiritual and artistic ways. In Economic Manuscripts 1857-1858 he said: "The whole, when it appears in the mind as a whole of thought, is the product of the thinking mind, which grasps the world in its own way, which is distinct from the artistic, religious, practical — spiritual mastery of the world."^[1]

Marx's manuscript was not published during his lifetime until 1902, when it was discovered among Marx's posthumous manuscripts. It was first published publicly in 1903 in Berlin's New Times. After the manuscript was published, the topic "the way of artistic mastery" attracted little attention in the Western world. It was not until the 1940s that scholars in the Soviet Union began to cite the concept of "the way of mastering art" in their discussions of art and aesthetics, but it remains unclear what exactly this proposition implies.

As for the connotation of "the way of mastering art", there are several aspects based on the understanding of the academic circle: First, "mastering the world" means "understanding the world" and "reflecting the world". Second, the way to master art is to reflect the laws and nature of the objective world through concrete images, which is a kind of image thinking and image reflection theory. Third, the way to master art is to reflect the general through the individual, reflect the common with the personality, and integrate abstraction into the image, which is a high unity of personality and common, concrete and abstract, sensibility and rationality, similar to the understanding of the typical. Fourth, the way to master art is to experience and understand social life—artistic thinking, creative activities of artists with certain artistic creation ability, the use of necessary means and methods of artistic creation and the result of creation is the work of art.^[2]

Here we believe that Marx's idea of "the way of mastering art" is related to the idea of beauty of ancient Greece and modern western philosophers.

2. Marx's preference for beauty and art when he was growing up

From the perspective of the environment in which Marx grew up, the secondary school he attended was Friedlich Wilhelm High School, which was influenced by the Enlightenment in the 18th century, and most of the teachers in the school were deeply influenced by Kant's thought. Hugo Wittenbach, Marx's

high school history teacher and headmaster, and a close friend of the Marx family, strongly endorsed Goethe's ideas. In addition to Hu Guo, many of the teachers in this high school had important influences on Marx's future thinking.

After studying in the University of Bern, Marx transferred to the University of Berlin to study law, which was largely based on his father's advice. At that time, the University of Berlin upheld the brand new concept of "integration of teaching and research". It was founded by Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Prussian Minister of Education, and philosophers Fichte and Hegel all served as the president of the University of Berlin. It was at the University of Berlin, the top university in Germany at the time, that Marx turned to philosophy. After becoming interested in Hegel's philosophy, Marx also joined a "Doctor's Club" composed of young students and teachers. In the "Doctor's Club", Marx's brilliant thinking, deeply appreciated by the core figure of the organization is Marx's teacher, theology lecturer Powell and others. It was also under Powell's advice that Marx made up his mind to study philosophy and applied for a doctorate. In 1839, Marx began the thematic research of his doctoral thesis, completed seven volumes of reading notes, and gradually determined the topic of his thesis. In the following year, he began to write his doctoral thesis. For the doctoral thesis topic and other considerations, Marx chose to apply to the University of Jena philosophy department for a doctorate degree. Goethe was president of the University of Jena, founded in 1558. The philosophy department of Jena University is where Hegel got his doctorate and taught for a long time. It was while at Jena that Hegel wrote his famous *Phenomenology of Mind*. Marx's doctoral thesis was so well received by the jury that in April 1841, the University of Jena awarded Marx, at the age of 23, his doctorate.

The focus on beauty marked the new humanism of 19th century Germany. It was a model and an enduring goal for the new humanism, and Marx as a German of that era could not help but be influenced by it. While at the University of Bonn, Marx continued his interest in romance and beauty. He attended Schlegel's literary lectures on "The Question of Homer" and "The Elegies of Propertius", as well as his courses on "Greek and Roman Mythology".^[3] During this period, Marx belonged to a group called the Bonner Poets (which also included Greene and Geibol), whose interest was in the revival of Greek aesthetic ideals, especially those of beauty and harmony.^[1]

After he became interested in philosophy, Marx once criticized Hegel from Kant's point of view. However, when things in reality could not be explained by Kant's theory, Marx reviewed Hegel again. This ideological change also became an important step in the development of Marx's thought. Although he was still criticizing Hegel's idealism, he was also accumulating Hegel's dialectic thought. At this point, Marx painfully abandoned his poetry and his romanticism, and turned it into a study of Hegel. Marx at the University of Berlin and what we are going to say here is that Marx used Kantian philosophy to criticize Hegel, which means that Marx was very familiar with Kantian philosophy, and although he made the conversion, it cannot be said that Marx was influenced by Kant, and the conversion does not mean that he completely rejects all Kant's ideas. Similarly, Marx abandoned his favorite poetry and Romanticism, but it does not mean that Marx denied all the contents of Romanticism, just as Marx's texts have left a variety of vivid and classical expressions of Marx's poetic language, poetry, romanticism, beauty has been unconsciously embedded in the lines of Marx's various texts, It's a subtle form of expression, a skeleton that requires an X-ray eye to penetrate. So we need to be careful as archaeologists to peel away Marx's texts and background material bit by bit with a little archaeological brush to see the light of day.

It is true that Marx in the later period was somewhat different from Marx in his youth. Marx in the later period criticized and turned to Kant, Hegel and Romanticism, but it does not mean that Marx completely denied all the contents of Kant, Hegel and Romanticism. Marx should be looking for a realistic way to the ideal in dialectics and history. Just as scientific socialism inherits and surpasses the thoughts of Utopian socialism, it does not mean that he completely negates all thoughts of Utopian socialism, but dialectical negation of utopian socialism, sublation, criticism and reservation. It further scientific the ideal blueprint of utopian socialism, carried on the scientific logical operation, and planned the practical path. Marx's conception of communism contains elements of utopian socialism, romanticism, western philosophers' aesthetic thoughts, and ancient Greek thinkers' ideal values.

The ancient Greek philosophers provided Marx with an anthropological insight into complete and harmonious human existence, which was incorporated into his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, and also underlies much of the political economy of the *Critical Outline of Political Economy* and *Das Kapital*.^[4] It was the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus who had the deepest influence on Marx and led him to this path. Epicurus' attention to atomic parity and the fusion of science and ethics attracted Marx, so it is no wonder that Marx wrote his doctoral thesis on Epicurus' atomic theory. McCarthy, an American scholar, described Marx's influence on Epicurus' thought as follows: "What initially attracted

his attention to this topic was Epicurus' fusion of science and ethics, and the philosopher's attack on Aristotle's whole system, which foreshadowed later Marx's critique of Hegelian metaphysics. The thirst for knowledge should serve the thirst for happiness, and theories that harm happiness should be rejected".^[1] It can be seen that Marx in his youth has been deeply influenced by aesthetic thought, and in the development of Marx's later thought, he has buried the ideological clues about beauty.

3. The profound connotation of Marx's aesthetic thought

Habermas believes: "There is a so-called 'alienated expressionist model' in Marx's early works, and young Marx borrowed this model from the aesthetic works of Kant, Schiller and Hegel".^[5] Maclellan, the author of Marx's biography, points out that Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844 discusses human alienation and its overcoming: "It makes people think that Marx's model of human behavior is a model of art. He draws material from Romanticism, especially Schiller, to depict the image of human. This idea of human alienation finding only the objects suitable for them, the attempt to associate freedom with aesthetic activities, the description of the comprehensive human, all these are derived from Schiller's Letters. And it's also possible that there was more of a peer influence of the same nature, because in Paris Marx spent a lot of time with Heine and Helwig, two poets who were trying to embody the German romantic ideal."^[6] And Wessel, a Western scholar, pointed out that "communism in the context of Marx is actually the answer to Schiller's questions about philosophy in the Book of Aesthetic Education."^[5] As a biographer of Marx, McClellan must have made a field study of Marx's life and writings with sufficient first-hand facts to illustrate this point of Marx. McClellan also looked at Marx's theory of all-round human development from an anthropological perspective, and suggested that Marx's theory of all-round human development belongs to an artistic model, which comes from Schiller. Marx spent a lot of time in Paris with the romantic poet Heine and others. Marx undoubtedly had romantic aesthetic ideals.

Marx said: "It is true that animals also produce. It makes a nest or dwelling for itself, such as a bee, a beaver, an ant, etc. But an animal produces only what is directly needed by itself or its young; Animal production is one-sided, while human production is comprehensive; The animal produces only under the control of immediate bodily needs; man produces even without the influence of bodily needs, and only without the influence of such needs does he really produce; animal produces only himself, and man produces the whole of nature; The products of an animal belong directly to its flesh, while man is free to face his own products. Animals produce according to the scale and needs of the species to which they belong; man can produce according to the scale of any species and apply the internal scale everywhere to objects. So man is produced according to the measure of beauty."^[7] Human beings and animals have the lowest level of desire in the external world, this relationship by destroying external things to satisfy their desires, external things have an attachment to the loss of their own independence and freedom, animals have always been like this. But man has a second relation, which is the pure epistemic relation of things, a kind of aesthetic relation. This kind of relationship is not only the relation of cognition, but also the relation of production. When people produce according to the scale of beauty, people get rid of the one-sidedness of production, and human production is comprehensive. People get rid of the production that pure flesh needs to produce not only themselves, but also the whole nature, and human production should be the presentation of internal aesthetic scale in external objects. As Marx said, "The worried poor have little sense of even the most beautiful sights; Traders who sell minerals only see the commercial value of minerals, but not the beauty and characteristics of minerals; He has no sense of mineralogy. Therefore, in order, on the one hand, to make human feeling human, and on the other hand to create human feeling compatible with all the richness of human nature and nature..."^[7] Thus, Marx believes that if human beings are in the first kind of relationship, they belong to the same feeling as animals, rather than human feeling, and human feeling should be able to appreciate the beauty of things such as food. Free and happy labor is just like what Marx described in the German Ideology: "Hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, animal husbandry in the evening. Criticizing after supper does not make me a hunter, a fisherman, a herder, or a critic."^[8]

4. Conclusion

Through the above analysis, we can see that the beauty expressed by Marx is closely combined with practice. In practice, human beings should master the world with beauty as the scale and in an artistic way, and the most important practice of human beings is production labor, so people should master the world in an artistic way in production labor. In this way man will remain identical with his own

characteristics as "the kind of man", and thus exist as a man. To master the world in an artistic way with beauty as the yardstick is essentially a way of labor, and artistic creation is labor creation.

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