Where Is Contemporary Aesthetics Headed?—Reflections on *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*

Lu Yang

Abstract: In recent works on aesthetics, *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Jie Wang and his colleagues, is an outstanding one. As an interdisciplinary study, the book endeavors to explore the tension between classical theory and new phenomena. Among recent technological developments, new capitalism, and cross-cultural aesthetic studies, the rise of Chinese discourse stands out prominently. Three of the included cases are rather illustrative as Arnold Berleant's essay "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement" demonstrates, what insights can ancient philosophical aesthetics offer us in our postmodern society? Through his analysis of British television, David Margolies seeks to challenge the existing capitalist system on a purely artistic level. A third case is Jie Wang and Tian Shi's "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China," which poses crucial questions: what does emotional ethnography study, and how should emotional ethnography be defined within the Chinese context? All three demonstrate innovative awareness that bridges local and global perspectives. Among the 20 essays in this collection, Chinese or European-based leading scholars alike have made prominent contributions. Engagement, interdisciplinarity, and cultural politics can be regarded as the core threads of this anthology, as well as the general trend in the debates and construction of contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

Keywords: *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*; Contemporary aesthetic studies; Arnold Berleant; David Margolies; Jie Wang

Author: Lu Yang is Professor of Institute of Art and Aesthetic Education, Capital Normal University, and Professor Emeritus of Chinese Department, Fudan University. He works mainly on aesthetics, art criticism and cultural studies (Email: luyang@fudan.edu.cn).

标题：当代美学去向哪里？——谈《当代美学中的论争与建构》

内容摘要：在近年来的美学著作中，王杰等编撰的文集《当代美学中的论争

与建构》颇为引人注目。该书呈现出鲜明的跨学科研究取向，着力探讨古典理论与新兴现象之间的张力。统观全书，在当代技术发展、新资本主义及跨文化美学研究等诸多议题中，聚焦中国话语的崛起，构成其一大特色。其中，三个案例颇具代表性。阿诺德·伯林特在“介入性美学与艺术”一文中追问：古代哲学与美学能够为身处后现代社会的我们带来何种启示？大卫·马格利斯则通过对英国电视媒介的分析，试图从纯粹艺术的层面对现存资本主义体系提出诘难。王杰与石甜的“审美现代性：当代中国情感民族志初探”则提出了一系列关键问题，诸如何为情感民族志的研究对象，以及如何界定中国语境下的情感民族志研究等，体现出兼具本土关怀与全球视野的开拓意识。文集收录的二十篇论文中，中国与欧洲的领军学者均作出了重要贡献。“介入”“跨学科”与“文化政治”可视为贯穿全书的主线，也昭示着中国当代美学论争与建构的大势所趋。

关键词：《当代美学中的论争与建构》；当代美学研究；伯林特；马格利斯；王杰

作者简介：陆扬，首都师范大学艺术与美育研究院特聘教授、复旦大学中文系教授（荣休），主要研究方向为美学、艺术批评与文化研究。

Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics is an English-language anthology dedicated to cutting-edge contemporary aesthetic research. Jointly edited by Jie Wang (Zhejiang University), Zheng Shen (Zhejiang Sci-Tech University), and Armida de la Garza (University College Cork, Ireland), the book was published in 2024 by Brill, a Dutch publisher renowned for its high-quality academic works. Comprising twenty original articles, it is included in the *Cross-Cultural Aesthetics* book series, edited under the auspices of the International Association for Aesthetics. Structurally, the book is divided into five sections: 1. Classical Theories and New Phenomena: Technological Development; 2. Classical Theories and New Phenomena: Aesthetic Capitalism; 3. Cross-Cultural Aesthetics; 4. The Rise of Chinese Aesthetics; and 5. Interdisciplinary Aesthetics: The Intersection of Research Fields. Collectively, to a certain extent, it forms a distinct silhouette of the debates and constructive endeavors in contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

In the past, aesthetics was not a prominent discipline in Western academia. Philosophy departments often overlooked this marginal field or simply replaced it with the philosophy of art. For instance, Claude Imbert, former chair of the Philosophy Department at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, specialized in logic while also teaching the philosophy of art—but not aesthetics. In fact, the École Normale Supérieure, renowned as a cradle for philosophers, offered virtually no courses in aesthetics. In recent years, however, Chinese discourse has made a

significant impact on the international academic stage. Through the English written or translated works of leading Chinese aesthetic scholars such as Jianping Gao, Lang Ye, Xian Zhou, Zhirong Zhu, Liangzhi Zhu, Feng Peng, and Chengji Liu, as well as numerous other texts, this once-marginal discipline has been elevated to a prominent position.[1] Notably, Jie Wang has led his teams at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Zhejiang University in successive collaborations with institutions such as the University of Manchester and Durham University. These efforts include annual bilateral conferences on practical issues in Marxist aesthetics, which have established him as a key figure in international Marxist aesthetics research. Against this backdrop, delving into this English-language collection of 20 essays by scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Russia, Germany, and China, has been immensely rewarding. It constitutes a striking new sign of the rising Chinese discourse on the global stage of aesthetics.

The book opens with a preface that traces the origins of this collection. It emphasizes that aesthetic research has a history spanning two millennia, during which philosophers have tirelessly proposed theories in an effort to unravel the meaning of beauty. However, these efforts have also sparked numerous debates extending in various directions. Today, these debates encompass issues such as the aesthetic challenges posed by media and technology, cross-cultural aesthetics, and aesthetic methodologies—many of which are characterized by a strong forward-looking orientation. Thus, the book's purpose is to revisit established knowledge, explore new issues from fresh perspectives, and thereby undertake the contemporary mission of theoretical construction. To this end, the editors cite Arnold Berleant, former president of the International Association for Aesthetics and a contemporary American aesthetician, who argues that aesthetic research does not originate from first principles—that is, philosophy—but instead benefits from artistic practice.[2] However, since World War II, while artistic practice has evolved rapidly, breaking boundaries and expanding into numerous other fields, aesthetics has largely remained entrenched in Kantian theories that focused on logical analysis and linguistic studies. In light of this, how can traditional aesthetics respond to the profound transformations occurring in society, technology, and culture today?

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1 See Gao Jianping, *A Short History of Chinese Aesthetics in 20th Century*, Nanjing: Phoenix Education Press, 2025; Ye Lang and Zhu Liangzhi, *Insights into Chinese Culture*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2013; Zhu Zhirong, *Philosophy of Chinese Art*, New York: Routledge, 2022. etc.

2 See Wang Jie et al., "Introduction," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 1.

I. The Adaptation of Traditional Aesthetics

The above question is also the central theme of Arnold Berleant's essay, "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement," which opens the first chapter of the book. Berleant begins by asserting that, despite the long history of aesthetics, scholars and artists alike continue to grapple with the meaning and value of beauty, art, and aesthetic experience.[1] What insights can ancient philosophical aesthetics offer us today? What role should scientific methodology play? And how should we analyze the fundamental concepts and creative practices of aesthetics? Berleant contends that these questions lead us in different directions, with perspectives intersecting yet lacking a shared foundation.[2] Thus, the field of aesthetics, like the realms of politics and society, is marked by conflicting opinions, making consensus nearly impossible. As a leading figure in contemporary environmental aesthetics, Berleant expresses a preference for abandoning the dogmas of traditional philosophical aesthetics in favor of seeking breakthroughs through artistic creation and appreciation. However, this does not imply that aesthetic value is exclusive to art; natural landscapes and the human form are equally objects of aesthetic perception. According to pragmatic methodology, aesthetic value is considered meaningful only when linked to various art forms such as music, poetry, painting, drama, and fiction. Yet, from the perspective of philosophers, art has often been deemed insignificant. Since Plato, philosophers have consistently subsumed diverse perceptions and practices under overarching concepts and theories, privileging reason and order as a means to clarify the fog of experience.

In short, the age-old debate between rationalism and empiricism resurfaces, as Richard Shusterman, the American philosopher demonstrates in his *Body Consciousness:* amid philosophy's successive endeavors to exalt mind and spirit, the body occupies a highly significant position, though mostly in a negative register. Its enduring dominant negative imagery, such as prison, a distracting encumbrance, and the source of error and depravity, is on the one hand saturated with the prejudices of idealism; on the other hand, it remains overlooked by the bodily disciplines commonly practiced by Western philosophers.[3] For Shusterman, the arts of engagement first of all, are the arts of body.

1 See Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 9.

2 See Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 9.

3 See Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, ix.

So, how can traditional aesthetics address the monumental changes in society, technology, and culture today? Berleant notes that he has previously proposed shifting the focus of aesthetic research away from foundational principles and toward the direct experience of art, particularly the insights offered by cutting-edge contemporary art.[1] Half a century ago, philosophy underwent a linguistic turn, with language becoming scripture and Wittgenstein its messiah. Today, it is only natural to speak of an artistic and cultural turn. The question, however, is where to begin: with Descartes' methodology of doubt, Locke's sensations and reflections, Hume's impressions, or Husserl's transcendental ego? If we trace it back to the latter half of the 19th century, Bergson comes first, followed by Dewey, and then Merleau-Ponty—yet no "orthodoxy" has been established. By the mid-20th century, Berleant argues, art underwent a dramatic transformation in its practices, mediums, and cultural functions.[2] Art is no longer a self-contained object to be contemplated disinterestedly for its own sake; it must inevitably engage with social and cultural change. Technological and stylistic innovations are particularly significant. In this context, Berleant quotes a passage from his earlier work, "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," written in the 1970s:

> Of the many changes in cultural experience, two seem to have had special significance for the arts. The first was the rise of industrial production, which transformed the characteristic features that objects possessed and led to the use of new materials, objects, and techniques in artistic practice. Second were the fundamental social changes that came about through increasing democratization, in particular the emergence of population masses and a corresponding mass culture, generating new perceptual activities and reaffirming for the arts. (Wang 12)

Berleant's point is that aesthetic experience necessarily evolves in tandem with changes in the social environment and the material and technological conditions of artistic production. This evolution blurs the boundaries between creators, appreciators, performers, and artworks, while their functions increasingly overlap and integrate. It also expands the scope of aesthetic sensitivity. Traditionally, aesthetic sensitivity has focused on the senses of sight and hearing. However, with

1 See Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement," edited by Wang Jie, et al., *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, Leiden: Brill, 2024, 11.

2 See Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Arts of Engagement," edited by Wang Jie, et al., *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, Leiden: Brill, 2024, 12.

the rapid advancement of digital technology, new channels and forms continue to emerge. From immersive sculptures, viewer-activated artworks, and the visual power of optical art to the subtle influence of shapes, colors, and magnified scales in abstract expressionism on the perceiver's body and psyche, all of this demonstrates that the art object is no longer passive. It is no longer content to be framed and viewed from a distance for disinterested contemplation. In essence, the transformation of artistic forms has precipitated a second major shift in human history. Consequently, a participatory and integrative aesthetic attitude is poised to become the mainstream in the art world.

II. A Marxist Aesthetic Analysis of Television

David Margolies, Professor Emeritus at the University of London, contributes a thought-provoking essay titled "Social Value and Aesthetic Judgment: Television in the UK." Television was once scapegoated for the irreversible loss of traditional ways of life, prompting calls to turn it off for an hour each day so families could talk or go for a walk. Pioneering studies on television audiences, such as Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* and Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, emerged between the 1970s and 1990s. Although television has since waned in prominence—first under the onslaught of computers and then mobile phones—Margolies asserts that it remains perhaps the most widely disseminated medium in the world. As a socialist engaged in television research, Margolies seeks to challenge the existing capitalist system on the purely artistic level. He cites Bertolt Brecht as a model for rejecting passive art and instead fostering interaction between audiences and dramatic characters. British television rarely engages its audiences interactively, often conveying the impression that reality is immutable. This is particularly evident in afternoon murder mysteries and evening drama series.

Margolies argues that social value should be a central category in Marxist aesthetic studies.[1] The question of how the aesthetic criticism of British television influences social value thus becomes the main thread of his essay. Margolies admits he is not a television enthusiast, but this detachment allows him to perceive anomalies in what others take for granted. He notes that Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, "the medium is the message," from his 1964 work *Understanding Media*, has been overused to the point of cliché. Nevertheless, it remains crucial for understanding how the mode of information transmission affects audience

1 See David Margolies, "Social Value and Aesthetic Judgement—Television in the UK," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 33.

responses.[1] Margolies uses the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as an example, noting that it was founded in 1922, initially operating as a radio service before venturing into television in the 1930s. After World War II, television became its primary focus. In its early days, BBC announcers were exclusively male, seated with solemn formality, and spoke with the standard Received Pronunciation of the educated middle class. It was only in recent decades that regional accents began to gain acceptance. Today, BBC news presenters include both men and women, with diverse accents, casual attire, and freedom of bodily movement. However, this progress did not happen overnight; female newsreaders were initially required to keep their legs hidden beneath the desk to avoid any sexual connotations. Margolies also observes that early television screens were small—far smaller than today's laptop screens—and expensive, serving as markers of social status. Yet from the outset, these miniature devices were not purely private possessions. During significant events, such as the broadcast of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, neighbors would gather around the small screen. This illustrates that television, as an electronic device bringing the outside world indoors, played an indispensable role in cultural dissemination.

The advent of television dramas further propelled capitalism's drive to extract profits through technology. In 1955, the "independent" television network was established, introducing advertising to the screen. This marked a new revolution, comparable to the printing revolution of the 16th century. The spread of printing allowed ordinary people to read and interpret texts independently, without relying on the ruling class's interpretations. Television enabled audiences to scrutinize the on-screen world with their own eyes, free from blind adherence to official narratives. Margolies points out that initially, audiences regarded the on-screen world as self-evident reality—"seeing is believing" (Wang 35). Advertisers capitalized on this by promoting products like soap, showing clothes washed dazzling white or muddy football boots restored to pristine condition. The inclusion of soap advertisements in television series gave rise to the term "soap opera." While audiences were not necessarily compelled to purchase advertised products, the commercial effect of television advertising lay not in encouraging specific purchases but in subtly molding audiences into consumers. For instance, laundry detergent ads depicted mothers proudly displaying their immaculate sheets or toilets scrubbed spotless. The key was not to recommend a particular brand but to implant the idea that cleanliness is vital for family and child safety—a marker of domestic happiness. Through such

1 See David Margolies, "Social Value and Aesthetic Judgement—Television in the UK," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 34.

indoctrination, the definition of humanity shifted from the thinking beings to the shoppers. As a parody of Descartes indicates, "I shop, therefore I am."

Margolies contends that contemporary British television dramas have a similarly brainwashing effect, albeit less overtly than advertisements.[1] He analyzes two series: *Bodyguard* (2018), which aired in mainland China the following year, and *Fleabag* (2016). The former features three popular themes: sex, violence, and the threat of terrorism. The drama's twist—revealing a character of Asian descent as the mastermind—is criticized by Margolies as abrupt, lacking the logical clarity of an Agatha Christie mystery. David Budd, a war veteran returning from Afghanistan, becomes a police sergeant in the Metropolitan Police's Royalty and Specialist Protection unit and is assigned as the bodyguard for Julia Montague, the Home Secretary and a frontrunner for prime minister. Montague is ruthless in pursuing her goals, repeatedly placing herself in perilous situations. David, ever diligent, finds her rhetoric advocating violence to combat violence fundamentally at odds with his own beliefs. Margolies draws attention to the opening scene of the first episode, set in a crowded train carriage on a weekend. David's sharp professional gaze detects a suspicious Asian woman heading to the restroom, where she is discovered wearing a suicide vest. David calmly engages her in conversation, showing her photos of his children to evoke empathy, ultimately persuading her to surrender. He hands the woman over to the police as a victim rather than a perpetrator, saving the lives of all passengers. During interrogation, however, she boasts of her expertise in electronic explosive devices and organizing terrorist attacks. Margolies finds this like an external solution, artificially tying the plot together. While the narrative initially seemed to champion gender equality, this final twist renders that "equality" hollow and hypocritical.

What, then, does *Bodyguard* signify for the aesthetic discussion at hand? Margolies remarks that it is because of:

> A plot of complexity, tense scenes of mortal danger, sexual tension and a sex scene, and glimpses of bureaucracy as self-interested and corrupt. The photography and intensity of colour are psychologically stimulating, but if we pose any "why" questions, they are not answered in the plot. If, for example, we ask why is the woman a terrorist, the question appears to be irrelevant—terrorism is simply a fact. The notion of the reality presented has not even a hint of different possibilities; We are habituated to expecting a reality that is

1 See David Margolies, "Social Value and Aesthetic Judgement—Television in the UK," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 37.

> severely limited, a reality that, despite its intense colour, has only black and white possibilities. (Wang 38)

Margolies concludes that if we are Marxist critics, we must heed Marx's famous dictum from his *Theses on Feuerbach*: philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.[1] From this perspective, contemporary British dramas like *Bodyguard* and *Fleabag* merely cater to audiences' thirst for stimulation, offering spiritual opium while evading genuine social realities. Thus, works that raise questions and challenge reality are the ones that truly embody social value. Margolies argues that just like documentary content, fictional narratives in television dramas have their social formative force as well. As he repeatedly stresses that philosophy and art are not content merely to interpret the world; their greater mission is to transform the real world, this tenet of Marxist philosophy and aesthetics has, in fact, been perfectly embodied in a number of hit Chinese TV dramas of recent years, such as a series of cross-strait spy thrillers from *Silent Glory* to *Confrontation* that eloquently illustrate the ultimate necessity of national reunification.

III. Ethnographic Studies of the Structure of Feeling

Jie Wang's contribution to this collection, co-authored with Tian Shi, is titled "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China." The original Chinese text was published in *Zhejiang Social Sciences* (Issue 1, 2021) as part of a three-article series in the "Contemporary Aesthetic Issues" column edited by Jie Wang. The authors begin by stating that research on the structure of feeling occupies a crucial position in contemporary aesthetic studies, as it forms an essential foundation for aesthetic experience and many cultural activities.[2] However, in Chinese aesthetics and literary theory, theoretical research on this topic remains relatively underdeveloped. Consequently, Chinese academia, criticism, and cultural administration lack a systematic and in-depth understanding of the structure of feeling in contemporary Chinese society. This hampers their ability to anticipate trends in cultural policy-making and major literary creations, limiting their capacity to meet the demands of the era. To address this gap, the authors propose using examples from contemporary Chinese

1 See David Margolies, "Social Value and Aesthetic Judgement—Television in the UK," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 40.

2 See Wang Jie and Shi Tian, "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 213.

literature and art to grasp the structure of feeling in modern Chinese society through emotional ethnographic research.[1] By studying the shared aesthetic objects of different social groups and ethnicities, they aim to explore the theoretical framework of China's aesthetic modernity, thereby enabling aesthetic research to contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

So, what exactly is the structure of feeling, and what does emotional ethnographic research entail? What constitutes emotional ethnographic research in China? The "structure of feeling" is a core concept in cultural studies, introduced by Raymond Williams. Viewing culture as the entirety of a way of life, Williams uses the "structure of feeling" to describe the organizing principle of that entire way of life. The structure of feeling refers to the vivid, concrete instances of social experience embedded in a particular life or community. Its distinctive features are self-evident and require no external analysis to elucidate. As Williams describes in his *The Long Revolution*: The term he would suggest to describe this phenomenon is "structure of feeling." It is as firm and definite as the word "structure" suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and intangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the living, particular result of all the elements in the general organization.[2]

Thus, the structure of feeling simultaneously expresses both conventional and unconventional experiences of the social and material world. According to Williams, these structures of feeling subtly shape systematic beliefs, ideas, and modes of communication, even as they themselves are shaped by lived experience. On one hand, the structure of feeling refers to the formal constructs of culture; on the other, it refers to the immediate experience of culture as it is felt. Specifically, it embodies the shared values of a particular class, society, or group—a collective cultural unconscious. While this perspective underscores the materiality of culture and rejects its treatment as purely spiritual activity, it also presents a new emotional experience and horizon for aesthetics.

Williams applied his concept of the "structure of feeling" to analyze many 19th century novels. He observed that 19th century writers often resorted to deus ex machina solutions to resolve the ethical and experiential contradictions of their time.[3] For instance, men and women would escape loveless marriages by dispatching their partners to their deaths or driving them mad—all in the span of a few pages.

1 See Wang Jie and Shi Tian, "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 214.

2 See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1961, 48.

3 See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1961, 49.

Alternatively, a protagonist might suddenly inherit a fortune, transforming from destitution to opulence. Characters who struggled within the existing social order might sail across the seas to distant lands to fulfill their ambitions. Perhaps the best example is Mr. Micawber from Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This incorrigible optimist, always lost in whimsical fantasies, remains impoverished and unsuccessful in 19th-century England. Yet, at the novel's end, news arrives that Mr. Micawber, having emigrated to Australia—a land originally used as a penal colony—has finally achieved his dreams and succeeded in his endeavors. Could distant, unfamiliar Australia be the promised land for dreamers? From the perspective of Williams's "structure of feeling," these fantastical tales express a shared emotional structure, reflecting the unconscious and conscious desires lurking beneath the mainstream culture of 19th century society. Thus, the mission of cultural analysis is to uncover genuine life within the documented culture, particularly in literature.

Jie Wang and Tian Shi argue that, in the academic context of contemporary society—amid the clamor of multiple contexts and overlapping discourses—emotional ethnography may serve as an important theoretical method for grasping the authentic structure of feeling in our own era.[1] Through the critique and analysis of avant-garde art that embodies this new structure of feeling, we can hope to transform the emotional structure of contemporary individuals and, in turn, change the world. This aligns closely with Margolies's emphasis on Marxist aesthetics' ultimate goal: not merely to interpret the world but to change it. In other words, aesthetic modernity signifies a revolution ultimately. But what about ethnography? As a method borrowed from anthropology and ethnology, the authors contend that employing emotional ethnography to conduct in-depth, concrete, and systematic research on the structure of feeling in contemporary society is necessary. The challenge lies in the severe fragmentation currently plaguing ethnographic and anthropological research. While case studies and local materials are abundant, they lack theoretical synthesis and refinement. Can fieldwork and empirical research alone solve all problems? Clearly, a binary answer is elusive. The authors suggest that philosophical anthropology may offer theoretical tools for addressing contemporary issues in ethnology and anthropology.[2] Philosophical anthropology

1 See Wang Jie and Shi Tian, "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 216.

2 See Wang Jie and Shi Tian, "Aesthetic Modernity: A Preliminary Exploration of the Ethnography of Emotions in Contemporary China," *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Jie et al., Leiden: Brill, 2024, 220.

has raised a question—perhaps one of the most critical questions of our time: Can trust still exist between people? Is it still possible to form shared beliefs? Answering these questions requires a deep analysis of the structure of feeling in the corresponding era. After presenting a series of case studies, Jie Wang and Tian Shi conclude:

> Since Raymond Williams' "feeling structure" theory, the feeling structure study has become an important approach in contemporary aesthetic studies. However, many new phenomena have emerged in the three domains of contemporary Marxism (class, race, and gender). Racial and ethnic issues have frequently erupted in Europe and the United States. In contrast, in the study of contemporary Chinese literature and art, theoretical debates have continued. The theory of "feeling structure" has some limitations, lacking in historicity and empirical evidence. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the ethnographic approach to the study of "feeling structure." (Wang and Shi 222)

Specifically, this involves using contemporary Chinese literary and artistic works as objects of study, employing ethnographic methods that delve deeply into the works themselves to uncover the structure of feeling in contemporary Chinese society. This, in turn, reflects the consistent and tireless efforts of Jie Wang and his team in recent years. They have established a Chinese literary criticism base, studied the folk songs of the Black-Clothed Zhuang in Guangxi, and organized seminars on films ranging from *Wild Goose Lake* and *The Great Buddha Plus* to *The Sacrifice* and *The Battle at Lake Changjin*. They have also produced the documentary *Water Gives Me Life*. Through these endeavors, they have embodied an insider's ethnographic approach, profoundly exploring the complexity of the structure of feeling in contemporary Chinese society and the possibilities for reconstructing China's cultural value chain. In this sense, the above essay can also be seen as a reflection of the research objectives of Jie Wang's team in recent years.

Among the 20 essays in this collection, leading Chinese scholars and those based in Europe have made significant contributions. Examples include Tyrus Miller's "Adorno, Stiegler, and Industrial Schemata of Experience," Qingben Li's "Industrial Development of New Media Arts in China," Fabio Vighi's "Baudrillard, Hyperreality, and Emergency Capitalism," Alexander Petrov's "Contemporary Aesthetics Issues: New Horizons for Researches of Economic Aesthetics in Economic Sociology," Yongjian Wang's "Practices, Reflections and Inspiration of Art Involvement in Community Revitalization in Japan," Zheng Shen's "New

Research Directions of Marxist Aesthetics: A Case of Contemporary China," and Zhuofei Wang's "Aesthetics of Atmosphere and Intercultural Studies." In this light, *Controversy and Construction in Contemporary Aesthetics* serves as a concentrated intersection and integration of contemporary Western aesthetics and non-Western aesthetics. Experts from various fields freely express their perspectives, presenting diverse viewpoints and discussing the potential for integration across emerging areas of aesthetic research. Generally speaking, the aestheticism of "art for art's sake" is no longer celebrated; instead, interdisciplinarity and boundary-crossing have become the prevailing trend. New topics such as aesthetic anthropology, economic aesthetics, neuroaesthetics, design aesthetics, surrealist aesthetics, media studies, reflections on the culture industry, and the visual imagery of music have emerged. In some respects, this proliferation of ideas evokes Plato's *Symposium*. It may well become a hallmark of aesthetics in our new era.

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