

MFM E-Letter

March 2010

Issue No.7

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Random Thoughts – Reflections on East-West Convergence 东西融汇随思录

The snow fell heavily in London, arriving from Bangkok and Sydney on Christmas Eve was both a cultural shock and climate change. I immediately felt the depressive mood of people struggling to come out of the economic crisis. It's strange how the weather affects our confidence and mood. Maybe confidence will return to Britain once the sunshine arrives in the summer. Regent's Park is usually teeming with life in May and June when the flowers are in full bloom. It has been a turbulent year since my E-Letter 'Taking Pulse of the Global Economic Crisis with Chinese Medicine' in February 2009. We can see the green shoots of recovery in the form of stock market rises and the resumption of economic growth in the US, and with China taking the lead in achieving a near double digit growth rate as well as an over heated property market. It appears that we are coming out of recession, or is it a mirage of wellness based on the huge deficit in trillions of printed dollars? This is a burden that our children will have to repay in the future. In the meantime, the capitalist system will reinvent itself with more regulations as I forecasted in my last E-Letter 'The World Beyond 2010?', and will settle again in the comfortable world of speculations and credit creation until the next bubble bursts.

The extraordinary bitter cold weather from London, Berlin to Washington and Beijing tends to put a chill into their relationships. The Copenhagen conference on global warming ended in disagreement. Governments of the world have not given us confidence in their ability to deal with the real issues effectively and in harmonious collaboration with each other. Again national self-interest and power politics have taken priority over seeking effective solutions to problems. Let us not get too depressed about this, at least the harmonious good will was shown by nations in their rescue efforts in response to the Haitian earthquake. If nations can deal with each other on equal terms and respect each other's values and differences then the problems of the world will have a better chance of being resolved. No nation or culture should impose its identity on others without respecting their national and cultural values. Economic competition between nations and multi-national corporations tends to bring about a negative environment for world harmony.

The polarisation of civilizations between East and West, between the Third World, the developing countries and the advanced countries, is an expression of their respective basic cultural values as well as economic imbalances. Economic concerns are occupying most of the attention of the current world with leaders trying to solve insurmountable problems. More attention should be paid to the basic building block of a society in its social values and cultural heritage on which economic infrastructures are built. When you look at the economy of a society you cannot divorce it from its culture in the form of social values, artistic

expressions as well as intellectual achievement. In his recent speech on housing, Obama insisted that America 'MUST' lead the world after the current economic crisis, and that the 'GREATNESS' of America will lead the world out of deep recession. He also insisted that he made the right decision in injecting trillions into Wall Street but will recover every dime and return it to American people. But he did not mention that the money was printed for the occasion. He is right in his assertion that America should repair its education, housing and health systems and tackle the huge deficit and its increasing jobless population. He also compared America with China and suggested that China "has more problems than us". In his speech he forgot the important ingredients that make a great civilization; namely social moral values and artistic and intellectual attainments as expressed in cultural achievements which define greatness in a nation or civilization that inspires the whole world. The true meaning of leadership is not purely in terms of economic superiority, social structure or military power, but also an enlightened society.

Since the May 4th movement in 1919 China has abandoned her traditional culture by adopting the vernacular language and a popular form of arts and literature instead of the formal language and classical culture. The collapse of imperial Qing Dynasty after the 1911 republican revolution of Sun Yat Sen forced China to reinvent its modern culture. In my study of the history of art and literature, I have noticed that modern societies on the whole have embraced the popular form of cultural expression as part of the process in the rise of the consumer society created by capitalism. The creation of Jazz, popular songs from Elvis, The Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the West, and the Shanghai school of popular songs and culture during the 1930s and 1940s and its current development in Taiwan, Hong Kong and its increasing popularity in mainland China, are all manifestations of this artistic cultural trend. Indeed popularism in arts is a continuation of the movement towards decorative folk art forms, as seen from the rise of the 18th century European decorative art which represents a shift from the Flemish and Italian classical art forms of Gothic, Mannerism and Baroque paintings of 17th Century Europe. Chinese classical arts were formal by nature which can be seen in its landscape paintings and classical poetry. Tang poetry (唐诗) has fixed formats of the number of characters and of the number of lines that should rhyme together; whereas Song poetry (宋词) has a different formal character, line and rhyme formations which the poet has to follow in his poetic creation. Modern Chinese poetry from Wen Yi Duo (闻一多), Xu Zhi Mo (徐志摩) to Bing Xin (冰心) are all examples of modern free forms in vernacular language; with the exception of Máo Zédōng (毛泽东) who wrote his poetry in classical Song format. Apparently Mao's two favourite books, Lao Tse's *Tao Te Ching* (老子道德经) and Sun Tzu's *Art of War* (孙子兵法) were his constant bedside reading. Both books were written in classical language.

Cultural values therefore are expressed in the arts, literature and music of a society at a particular time. The current explosion of free expressions in film, media, fashion as well as internet publishing was not possible before not only due to the technological limitations of the time but also due to different cultural values. Sensuality was very much a taboo subject avoided by painters of both European classical art and Chinese formal art. Painters rebelled by depicting naked women and men in religious stories, and erotic art in old China was fringed by mainstream art. The same expression was adopted by sculptors in Medieval Europe with the sterile naked sculptures very much following the Greek and Roman tradition in order not to offend religious establishment of the time. In China, folk arts developed in parallel and separately to the mainstream formal fine arts; similar to the 18th Century Japanese Ukiyo-e school of the Floating World (浮世绘) woodblock art which only gained popularity and acceptance when wealthy Japanese collectors started to collect them in the

20th Century. For the artists the central aesthetic concerns are expression of their artistic sensibility. But in their expressions they reveal their value judgement through their artistic and literary imageries. There are no differences between French Symbolic, Romantic sculptors and the Japanese woodblock artists such as Utamaro and Kuniyoshi because they all express cultural values inherent in their society. While master painters in the Ba Da Shan Ren (八大山人) school painted the naturalistic scene of man and nature in harmony, their counterparts in Europe simultaneously emphasised the struggle between man and nature (as seen in Turner's works on the sea and tidal wave) and the religious paintings of the Pre-Renaissance time as well as the nostalgic vision of European fables represented by more recent painters such as Sir Edward Burne-Jones in his 'Mirror of the Venus'. These works are all expressions of the respective social and cultural values of East and West. Modern consumer arts are expressed in packaging and branding. They are very much part of the commercial value of consumer appeal and marketing. During the Yuan Dynasty when the Mongols ruled China, their lack of sophistication or understanding of Chinese classical culture translated into an age of popular performing arts that gained mass appeal. This example shows that popularism in art is not just a modern phenomenon.



Sir Edward Burne-Jones, *Mirror of Venus*
Source: Gulbenkian Museum Lisbon



Utagawa Kuniyoshi Ukiyo-e
Source: Nagoya TV



European Classical Painting
Source: bbs.tom.com



Ba Da Shan Ren,
Nature ink painting



Ba Da Shan Ren,
Classical Landscape



J.M.W. Turner, *Shipwreck*
Source: Tate Gallery, UK

The contrast in Eastern and Western cultures is vividly illustrated in the differences between Chinese medicine and Western medicine. Chinese medicine focuses on the holistic harmony within the body, maintaining and regulating this harmony physically and psycho-emotionally to achieve wellbeing; Western medicine, on the other hand, focuses on the intervention and cure of diseases to achieve physical wellness. Both approaches are the expression of their

different cultures and intellectual traditions. Chinese medicine came from a philosophical and holistic tradition whereas Western medicine stems from the scientific worldview developed after the Renaissance. The Age of Enlightenment in Europe was a reaction to the heavily religious society of the time. The reaction to mysticism and the belief in God was symbolised by Galileo's Tower of Pisa experiment and the logic of reasoning as expanded by Descartes, Kant and Newton. Joseph Needham's work on the science and civilization of China illustrated how science and philosophy interacted throughout Chinese history and were contributory to the invention of silk, compass, gunpowder, paper and printing. However, philosophy in the form of Taoism and Confucianism and later Buddhism tended to dominate China's social and cultural values, and therefore the scientific rationale of logic and empiricism did not develop there to the extent compared with her European counterpart. Eastern and Western intellectual traditions developed in parallel to each other but with minimal interactions except some trading through the Silk Route. Chinese medicine is very much steeped in Chinese philosophy and culture. The Yin and Yang balance of the body stems from the concept of change in the I Ching and the more sophisticated concept of the creation of cosmos expanded later in Lao Tse's *Tao Te Ching*. Western medicine models itself on scientific experiments in the form of Evidence Based Medicine, building upon a body of knowledge of chemistry, anatomy and physiology. The current interaction and integration of the two medicines epitomises the global situation in which East and West find themselves during their political and economic encounters with each other, and indeed points the way towards integration and collaboration between these two civilizations. How Chinese medicine and Western medicine synthesises or coexists will show the nature of synergy we may expect to see between these civilizations in other spheres. While the Chinese are cultivating their health, the Westerners' diseases are being treated. This may sound like an exaggeration because the West does begin to notice the importance of health promotion and preventative medicine, and the Chinese are using Western medicine to treat serious diseases such as cancer, Aids and heart by-pass surgeries. The integrative approach of using both Western and Chinese medicine is being pioneered in China since the 1950s. The West is behind in this sense, especially due to the new EU directive which will have a further effect of preventing the development in the integration of good innovative medicine in Europe.

How do we achieve wellbeing and happiness in the modern world? Coping with technology occupies most of our time as we use e-mails, mobiles and the latest computer software while surfing the internet. All these activities are taking away our time for thinking, artistic creation and the art of face-to-face conversation that brings emotional satisfaction and human fellowship – both are essential for our wellbeing. Individualism is now replacing the family as the basic unit of the modern social fabric. Progress is a double edged sword which brings both the positive and negative elements. Should we have a fresh look at traditions while maintaining progress? Should humans struggle against nature or live in harmony with nature? Should science dominate social development or should we further develop our spiritual and philosophical worldview as the guiding principle of social development? Maybe we should integrate the two together? These are some of the essential questions awaiting answers at this moment in the history of human civilization. Our leaders are not offering us any answers, instead they are preoccupied with economics and wars.

Rana Foroohar, in a leading article entitled 'The Economic Identity Crisis' (Newsweek February 2010) suggests that economies around the world are desperately searching for a brand new theory of everything in economics, while questioning the values of free market forces which are the essence of capitalism. 'Free market forces' means relentless competition between economic entities that creates the dynamics of economic progress. This economic theory does not encourage stability or harmony, it is a constant replacement of the old by the

new which is more efficient, advanced and aggressive in the survival game as symbolised by Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest in the evolution of species. The Nobel prize laureate in economics Joseph Stiglitz suggested that such a process is not always efficient in economic terms by asserting that "markets were not efficient and not self-correcting, and now, huge cost in the trillions of dollars are being borne by every part of society". Capitalism now runs into turbulence. Alan Greenspan in his book 'The Age of Turbulence' described vividly this flaw in a free market economy by stating that "aggressive competitions engender instability and unhappiness, causing anxiety and poor health to human beings due to uncertainty". Now economics is not just affecting our pocket, it is affecting our health! The world may destroy itself in our relentless quest for profits and material consumption. Again, economists now are inventing new theories based on the uncertainty in social economic behaviours. They are now constructing the theory of behavioural economics, just like physicists who arrived at the theory of uncertainty in their search for a theory of everything relating to the physical world. The relationship between the consciousness of the observer and the observed in terms of speed and time has parallels in the economic dynamics between market forces and human behaviour. Of course, the theory of contradictions and dialectical thoughts in progressivism in coping with uncertainties and probabilities has been a favourite subject of philosophers. In Taoism the concept of 'De' (德) is the inherent process of nature according to Tao (道) which is different from the concept of 'Li' (理) that conceptualises the organic pattern and the principle of organisation in nature. The difference between the two is that 'De' accepts uncertainty in the form of Yin and Yang interactions whereas 'Li' is a concept similar to the scientific rationale of an objective truth – a theory of everything ultimately.

During a forum on social responsibility and enterprise in Beijing, I delivered a speech on the creativity of Yin and Yang as a model of economic development that China should adopt as its intellectual contribution to a new economic theory for the 21st Century. This speech was delivered on the 24th of January 2010 after the award 'Outstanding Business Leader, China 2009' was conferred to me. I hope that the award will somehow make my idea carry more impact. My sincere thanks to all those who voted for me!



This is an overwhelming year that brought me much emotions and corresponding mental reactions. No words can adequately convey the momentous sense of change that occurred. Firstly my daughter got married in a far away city of Sydney somewhere down under in the southern hemisphere. A positive personal change but nonetheless an emotional occasion. But significant global change has also occurred recently that raised my instinctive concern. The convergence of East and West beyond economics is beginning to surface in the clashes of cultures and values as symbolised by Google's threatened withdrawal from China. This business issue has over-spilled into a political issue after Hilary Clinton's intervention and the Chinese reactions to this intervention. From this incident we can clearly see the clashes of values and ideologies that may become the signature of the coming decades. The East-West integration in terms of cultures and civilizations (and not only in medicine) is becoming a central issue beyond economics. Either we integrate and collaborate or there will be tragic consequences that will retard human progress for generations. Google has now taken over Coca-Cola as the symbol for 'Americanism'. The motto of "do no evil" is being translated into Chinese as "do as we do". While globalisation is a necessary trend for progress, diversities and regional varieties are essential colours to human existence. If China is

Westernised totally by the values that are represented in McDonald's, Hollywood or Google, it would be a tragedy. Indeed the disappearance of indigenous cultures of different countries due to globalisation would be tragic for mankind. The Chinese are worried that their traditional culture will become endangered species like the tigers and the pandas. The momentum of reviving and reinventing Chinese culture is gaining force in China, not a good moment for Google to assert its Americanism in China. Withdrawal or not, Google will continue eyeing the 'Chinese steak'. Globalisation should not be translated as standardisation by Western values. A multi-cultural world is obviously a better option for our future.

As I flew over the massive lakes and land of Australia I felt a sense of discovery of a new continent very much like Columbus and other explorers during the European Age of Discovery. But I did not come to conquer, indeed I felt a sense of enlightenment on my first day with the way Australia is integrating East with West. To my amazement during the many contacts with the Australian establishment, academics and the general public, Chinese and other Asian cultures manage to live side by side in this new land. The people of Australia are forward looking with the sense of excitement for the future. Chinese medicine is much more accepted by both the establishment and the consumers than in Europe, as I noticed during the World Congress of Chinese Medicine in Melbourne in which I delivered a keynote paper on comparative Chinese-Western medicine in clinical diagnosis as part of my thesis on integration in medical methodology. Australia has approved a national bill of legalisation and recognition of Chinese medicine which is ahead of many countries in the West including the UK. An old friend and colleague has just been appointed professor of Chinese medicine at Sydney University and the National Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies was formed under the chairmanship of another old friend, Professor Lin. Through the circles of my new son-in-law, I have come to know that Australians are generally hardworking, pragmatic, positive and fair-minded. Despite the economic crisis, the confidence of the people of Australia seems to be at a positively dynamic height. I wish that this positivity will spread to the UK, US, Europe and the rest of the world. The positivity of Australia coupled with substantial Indian GDP growth, combining with the contribution from China's 8.7% GDP growth in 2009 and the possibility of 11% growth predicted for 2010, should lead to some form of economic recovery. That is if China can avoid being overheated by inflation or experiencing a collapse in its property market. Of course recovery does not mean that the current fundamental problem of overwhelming deficit, unemployment and credit inflation is being solved. Global financial system remains the same, it is still based on the outdated economic theories and financial speculations which are clearly faulty in the light of the current crisis. This is now the historical moment in which we need to consider reinventing ourselves in the image of an East-West synergy.

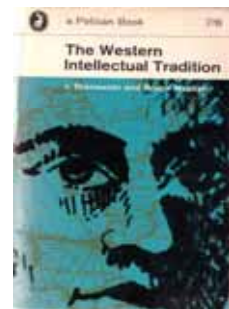
Reflecting on the above thoughts, I notice a pattern of links between social-economic activities and the corresponding cultural-artistic mode of a civilization. These patterns tend to determine the value judgement of a society in its reactions to outside interventions. During the Qing Dynasty the Emperor of China rebuffed the envoy sent by Queen Victoria with some polite words expressing that the Middle Kingdom (China) did not need anything from the West since the Chinese always viewed themselves as the central civilization whose superior values and culture, barbarians should adhere to. It is quite ironical that this arrogant attitude is now being adopted by the West. America elected itself as the representative of the West and chose to become the guardian and the policeman of the world as it exports the values of freedom and democracy together with the



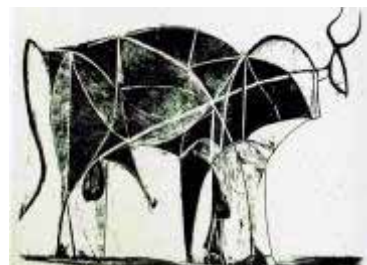
consumerism and free market economy to China. Indeed the Open Door Policy of Deng Xiao Ping has benefited China enormously as China is in the midst of a mixed economy reconciling the market economy with her form of socialism so proudly displayed at the 60th Anniversary of the PRC. I personally attended the Beijing celebration on October 1st 2009. It was an emotional moment for the Chinese nation.

On the other side of the globe, even in the midst of a crisis of confidence during an economic meltdown, America's sense of moral high ground is abundant in the way it deals with China and other countries. To build a harmonious world with stability and prosperity for all, we need to learn to respect each other's culture and values. The history of the world has illustrated to us many episodes of military domination and economic exploitation being overturned by positive forces that eventually resulted in the fall of many empires and conquerors.

As these random thoughts flow, I begin to recall my student days when I arrived in London to seek knowledge from the West. My personal journey in East-West convergence began when I was dumped into European civilization by my progressive family at the tender age of seventeen. I had to change my Chinese way of living to the new Western environment rather drastically, like clumsily learning to eat chicken with a knife and fork instead of using chopsticks. My training as a young scientist gave me the confidence to investigate the Western scientific rationale. With rudimentary English I struggled through a heavy work on *The Western Intellectual Tradition*¹ and many other books in the Reading Room of the British Museum Library. I was involved in many activities, debating on many social, cultural and intellectual issues with my European friends as a self elected representative of Eastern tradition. As a young man I experimented with the European use of colour, light and space in painting and at the same time contrasted it with the use of shades seen in traditional Chinese paintings. I discovered the subtle link between the modern impressionist painters like Picasso and modern Chinese painters such as Qi Bai Shi (齐白石).



Both artists use a subtlety of expression in a bold and undetailed way that expresses holistic symbolism rather than delicate life-like details of classical paintings. Arriving in an alien land, I was fascinated by everything, including the music of Leonard Bernstein in his 'West Side Story', in which he portrayed the American dream with the flair of popular music, Jazz and Latin rhythm, blended with European classical elements. I was also fascinated with European opera, saw Carmen several times, and was addicted to the voice of Pavarotti while remaining faithful to Chinese folk music and listening to Cantonese and Peking opera with equal thrills. It was an exciting time for me until I realised that I had to earn a living. I wonder how much my two Western educated sons, who are DJs and are very much into the music of electronica, sympathise with the symphonic music of Beethoven, Mozart, or the exquisite yet noble lyrics of classical Chinese music.



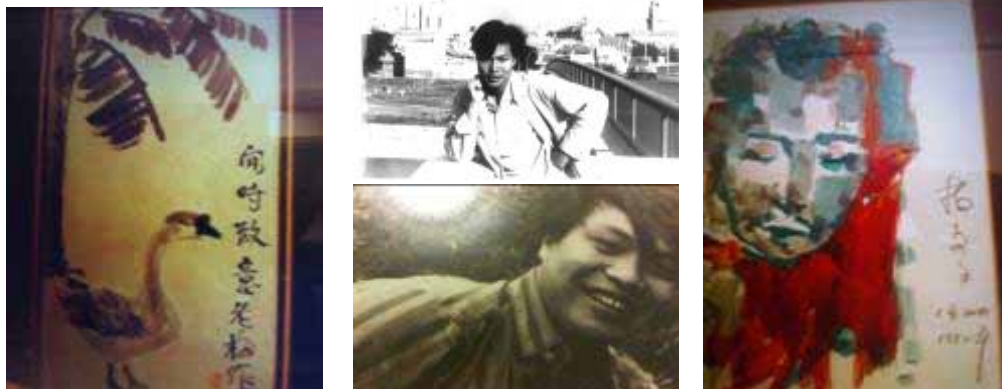
Pablo Picasso, Cow abstraction
Source: pic.nma.org.cn



Can the essence of classical form of art or music be integrated with modern popular music? Or indeed can modern motion art of the cinema, whether from Hollywood or independent studios be married with the classical performing arts of the stage? These are the questions

1 (1962) J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish

awaiting the younger generation who are hugely influenced by popular art, and who grew up without much of the influence of the classical tradition. My musician sons, my artist daughter and their colleagues who are in the glamorous media industry are amongst the young artists who have to answer these questions in their future artistic creation without the corrupting influence of commercialism.



My artistic experiments as a young man

At this moment of personal reflection, I cannot imagine my words will clarify any secrets of life, society or civilization. To reveal the complex web of life and existence, or the ultimate simplicity of our universe, we will have to progress from our primitive Type I civilisation to Type II and Type III as described by theoretical physicists. At this moment in time, I can only express my random thoughts in broader forms. Like a scholar reaching for the horizon of enlightenment through arts, literature and inspiration without much complex logic or structured scientific knowledge. Perhaps this is the “way” we may enter another dimension – the realm of happiness. To do this I have to summon my Chinese spirit and Western mind, somehow integrating the two to express my passion for life in a bilingual poem.

生命颂（木兰花）

道非可道观其妙，统辉宇宙之玄音。
万物之宗乃阴阳，振荡浩然之正气。
地久天长人间乐，泛生和谐之仁心。
茫茫天涯大海广，赐我诗圣之胸怀。

Odes to Life

(The Chinese version above is written to the rhyme of Song poetic format “Mu Lan Hua”)

At the beginning,
The symphonic spirit of the universe is conducted,
In its vibration the mysterious wave of Tao prevails,
The Tao that cannot be explained,
The Tao that cannot be named.
But in its inexplicable power
Is the creation of everything,

Through the interactions of Yin and Yang.
In the miraculous energy of change,
At one moment in the eternity of time,
Life begun on this wonderful Earth.
Giving birth to our dreams,
Of happiness under heaven.
And between heaven and earth,
The consciousness of life vibrates in harmony,
In the boundless sea and seamless sky.
The cosmos sings in the poet's soul,
For the noble freedom of being.
Genuine energy is thus summoned.
Cultivating harmony in our mind,
As our hearts expand like an ocean,
Absorbing all the creatures of god's creation;
The intricacies of existence,
Awake the human intellect.
With our yearning for happiness,
Our passions are collected
Together into eternity.
As our hearts grow,
In the mirror of the poet's soul.
We sing the joy of life.

May pure happiness be your attainment in the new year of the Tiger!

Man Fong Mei 梅万方

London 伦敦

8th March 2010
2010年3月8日

THE MFM E-LETTER

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