

# RESEARCH ON FOREIGN BACKGROUND AND MUSICAL THOUGHT OF TENG GU

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## 1. Introduction

TENG Gu was born in Baoshan, Shanghai, China. He went to study in Japan when 19 years old, and went to Germany when he was 28. He specialized in Art History in the department of Philosophy at the University of Berlin and was trained in systematic Western art history approach. After returning he worked as professor of the University of Nanking, director of Art department of Zhong Shan Cultural Education Center etc. In 1937, Teng Gu, Zong Bai-hua, Chen Zhi-fo, Chang Ren-xia and other scholars founded "Union of Chinese Art History."

There were two people to complete the transformation of traditional Chinese historiography in modern china. One of them is LING Qi-chao, the other one is TENG Gu. The books of traditional art include painting biography, painting record, painting skill, painting comment, painting collectors or biographical chronicle, letterhead certificates and other commentaries, compile data, grade evaluation. As "founder" and "transformer", TENG Gu ended the traditional artistic writing style which had been used for thousands of years in China. What's more, he studied the rise and fall of art history with perspective of cultural history. Compared to FU Lei, ZONG Bai-hua, WU Li-fu, Hu Man and the others, TENG Gu's research is the closest to the western art historiography. It's more systematic and scientific.

Two intermediations had been achieved by TENG Gu, CHEN Shi-zeng and ZONG Bai-hua: One is combination of eastern and western culture, which is recognized Western progressive. They explained the essence of traditional Chinese art with western philosophy and scientific thought and analyzed the problem in detail; another is often overlooked by scholars, which is to intermediate art practice with art theory. It's rare in the art academia of modern China. TENG Gu had many years of painting experience, his Chinese paintings was commented as "unconventional grace, seems paintings by poet." His doctoral thesis had been highly commented by German art historian: "In terms of the relationship between people and the plastic arts in history, this paper has a great significance in understanding the art which have been existed thousands of years." [1]

The difference is they embodied the incisiveness and accuracy of the combination of Chinese and Western art in a different way. TENG Gu embodied in the painting techniques and Deng Yi-zhe embodied in the strokes of Chinese calligraphy which is vigorous and forceful. That is because Deng came from calligraphy family. He is the five descendant of DENG Shi-ru who is a famous calligrapher and seal Qing Dy-

nasty; CHEN Shi-zeng and TENG Gu are very similar. They are both good at painting, but CHEN Shi-zeng's "History of Chinese Painting" is focused on the relationship of painting techniques (the pencraft) which is rarely embodied in TENG Gu's history of Chinese painting; As for ZONG Bai-hua, he explained the aesthetic and psychological impact of Chinese traditional arts from the universality of "aesthetic experience", because his teacher Desuo stressed the experience in art appreciation.

Now the evaluation to TENG Gu focuses on his historical stages instead of the nature of his art, poetry, painting and music ideas. In fact discussion about the nature of art (music) accounted for one-third of TENG Gu 's artistic thought. He believes "if art is removed from culture, it won't have no value." "all the arts always tend to the rhythm of the music" [2] It's to guide the essence of all art, which shows his emphasis on music.

## 2. The Source of TENG Gu's musical think

The art think of TENG Gu was mainly impacted by the "spiritual philosophy" of Croce, who insisted that the beauty can be analyzed, and art work also can be analyzed. In "the Aesthetics as the Performance of Scientific and General Linguistics", Croce divided the human knowledge into two parts: the intuitive knowledge and the knowledge of theory, the mental activity was divided into four forms accordingly: Cognitive activity (including intuition activity and logic activity) and practice activity (including utilitarian activity and moral activity). The former is imagination and knowledge about the individual material, which is aesthetic activity; The latter is "knowledge from knowledge", which is the knowledge of relationship, system and the scientific activities. In nature, the "intuition is accurate and correct grasp with strong clarity". "The Intuitive knowledge is the basis of the theory of knowledge." In the "Aesthetic principle", Croce proposed that the art is the intuition, and the intuition is the performance. The "performance theory" of Croce is very close to R.G. Collingwood, and they were criticized later. Considering the art is the creation of symbolic form of the human emotion in the "emotion and form" and "artistic problems", Susan Lange of the symbol aesthetic school inherited Cassirer's views. She stressed that the expression of Art is the human emotion rather than the individual emotions of artists, so she distinguished the difference between "performance" and "catharsis". Moritz Geiger made a distinction between happiness and joy, catharsis and performance in "The meaning of Art", and emphasized that the art was still the embodiment of spirit and emotion of human. However, after studying the aesthetics of Croce, XU Ping found Susan Lange and ZHU Guang-qian had misinterpreted the meaning of Croce. Firstly they confused the meaning of philosophical intuition and general psychological intuition in "the Aesthetics as the Performance of Scientific and General Linguistics". Secondly they confused that the relationship of the four formal logic of spirit activity is not the undertake of time. [3] Xu Ping was right. In fact, it's the same meaning of "emotional" of Croce and Susan Lange. Because Croce thought "The emotion expressed by artistic practices is the state of mind. Besides, it is impossible to perform. The art is the expression of emotion." Susan Langer believed that music is an illusion of "feeling resort in time", "the direct experience of time on us in nature is a kind of feelings passage in the function or events of life. This passage is felt by us as an inherent tension – a kind of physical, emotional and mental tension". [4]

TENG Gu inherited and developed this view of Croce -- art activity is the sum of intuition and emotion. Basing on this experience, he thought that the most significant

means of the life intuition is the mood lingering. The deepest intuition in life must be activities which arouse the deep and subtle emotion. Our inner experience will not be driven without emotional experience. “The ancient music education in this article is not merely referring to the ancient music education or the surgery of education coated with music. The meaning is to explore the art understanding of music taught by ancients to us and other related problem”, and “the music is the emotional expression of art”, he wrote in “Elucidation of Ancient Music Education”.

### 3. The Origin of propositions and the logical argument

The research on the nature of music by TENG Gu scattered in “Poetry and Painting”(December 1920),“the Dawn of Culture” (August 1922), “the Origins of Culture on Art” (April 1923), “the Art Comments from Artist “ (May 1923), “the Poetry Painter Dante G.Rossetti” (December 1923), “Arts and Sciences” (February 1924), “the Rhythm of Art” (January 1926), “the Nature and Form of Art” (June 1926), “the Elucidation of Ancient Music Education”(June 1940). In these studies, he did not directly propose the proposition and demonstration, and only borrowed the words of Waltir Pater that “All art constantly tends to the state of music”. It’s given away by Waltir Pater. This state in the music is the rhythm. After in-depth study of the art thinking of TENG Gu, we will find his art thinking is consistent in the logic. His thinking and logic is reflected in the following aspects:

#### 1. *The cultural concept guide all arts*

The Culture concept of TENG Gu is mainly reflected in the concept of cultural history and the concept of cultural values. Affected by German art historian in the 19th century, TENG Gu has been studying art in the grand view of culture, which is different from the other Chinese art historians in the same time. LIANG Qi-chao and Tsai Yuan-pei affected TENG Gu much during his study in Japan. He wrote in “the Origins of Culture on Arts “: “Two years ago I have read ‘the Origin of Fine Art’ of Tsai Yuan-pei in the ‘New Wave’, he cited the body decoration of our ancient nation, etc. Recently, Mr. LIANG Ren-gong (the honorific of LIANG Qi-chao) also talked about the art history of our country in his book ‘the Research Methods of Chinese History’. So these two articles left a deep impression on me. “So, TENG Gu considered that “ culture is the object of value, all the meaning of cultures, such as religious church, law, nation, customs, science, language, literature and art experience, and the necessary specialized methods on profession, is the concept of culture and its value. This is the German culture school advocator Rickert named “culture objective “for” Value “, which is recognized by everyone.

TENG Gu guided his study to all arts with these two views. In the letter to WANG Tong-zhao early in January 1921, he introduced himself “Now I also study from many aspects: philosophy, literature, drama and painting. The painting emphasizes on the criticism.” He criticized that now the cultural studies confined to their respective fields. Literature researchers pay little attention on art, art workers know little about literature. It’s very clear that the criticism of TENG Gu is to get through these barriers between different arts.

## 2. *The intermediation of people with world*

TENG Gu explained the nature of art with three concepts: “perpetual mobility and consecution”, “the will to live” and “XIANG”(phase), combining natural philosophy of ancient Chinese and Greek to discuss art. In philosophers of these two great ancient civilizations, the nature of the world is movement. Those natural phenomena don't have a rest in a moment, such as the alternation of day and night, the circulation of seasons. The research purpose of the natural philosophers and scientists is to find these laws hidden behind the phenomenon. The explanation in Chinese philosophy about the working of universe is embodied in the “live” (or endless), “imaging”, “follow”, “Poles come to know”, “Change”, “YIN and YANG eventuality” in the “YI Jing” (“Book of Changes”), and there is always a “method” hidden in all those transitions and flow. These “methods” were interpreted as “to move and methodical” by DAI Dong-yuan, it means all things tend to move and rich clarity. Greeks like to explain the cosmos with harmony and order, which is same in ancient Greek philosophy, Aurelius Augustinus, Thomas Aquinas, Wilhelm Leibniz, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Hegel, Joseph von Schelling and so on. TENG Gu exclaimed, “Greeks is rich of exquisite talent to found the visible in unreal and intangible things.”

In fact, there are a lot of similarities in explaining about the world between Greece and China, such as harmony, clarity, order, method. In Chinese philosopher's view, the purpose of follow is to avoid conflict or disadvantage, but tends to harmony. The performance or the result of everything is rich of clarity, is order. The difference of the explanation on world between China and the West should not just be limited to the conception, but should be studied comprehensively from its purpose, motivation, results, etc. Maybe that's why TENG Gu criticized the limitations of study in modern China.

TENG Gu used the “will to live” to finance the relationship between the people and the world. In “the Nature and Form of Art”, he wrote “The birth of art comes from the relationship between man and the world,.....Human beings were born in this world, we subsisted in this world. When they make an effort to survive every day, they will generate some feelings of world. This is a kind of survival feeling which was poured into the attitude about the phenomenon world. Art is something expressed such feelings.” The “will to live” of TENG Gu is obviously affected by the “will to power” of Nietzsche. In “the Art Comments from Artist”, he referred to the name of Nietzsche in a clear. Riegl, also affected by Nietzsche, explained the inevitability of change in art with “Art will” (the inner impulse to create art forms). Why people should comply with the testimonies of universe running? It's because “if God created fetish, these saints will divine; if the universe changes, these saints will follow”, TENG Gu explained with “ZHOU Yi”.

## 3. *Arts as the intermediary of intermediation to “people - world”*

In ancient Chinese, the running of the universe reflects a XIANG (representation), what the Artists do is to explore the unique value of nature from the “XIANG”, and express in the works. The harmony, proportion, balance, order of universe in Ancient Greek art embodied in the temple buildings. The concept of “small universe” reflects in the human body sculpture, which corresponds to the “big universe”. The perfect painting was done in the Renaissance. At that time, western completed the “great-art system” - architecture, sculpture, painting, the classicism aesthetic system also tends to be perfect. Besides the great art, Greece also communicated with the outside world

or God by theater performances. In the first memorial ceremony, performers were singing and dancing around the altar to praise the Bacchus. In 560 BC the tyrant Pisistratus moved Dionysian Memorial from village to Athens, which was the predecessor of the drama. Hegel believes the less bound of the material, the stronger the conception, the higher of the freedom and liberation. And the spirit of art will be more consistent. "Romantic art choose painting and music as its absolute form" to achieve the absolute spirit, which is the performance rich in heart, perfect and have eternal value. [5]

So, why the expression of art should experience the vitality of the universe and life? TENG Gu explained with Chinese ancient philosophy: This is because people are full of anxiety, boredom, ideal, desire when they survive in the world. People have the nature of "stirred by things and move". The feelings stirred by things induced in heart and were spoken out. Ambitions were expressed with poetry. If the words are lacking, they will sigh; if the sigh is lacking, they will sing the holiness; if the singing is lacking, they will dance. This is also recorded in "Yu Shu". So the art is an intermediary thing, through which human exchange with the world or the God. Life is expressed with beauty and exact form. Those ordinary people cannot perceive, while only those artists who have a keen sensibility of life can capture this moving and create order.

#### *4. All arts eternally tend to the rhythm of music*

For this proposition, TENG Gu explained with the theory of Chinese classical literature. It's recorded in "Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong)" that "Gentleman should be careful even when staying alone. ZHONG means no expression of passions; HE means passions of moderation... When people actualize the mean, the universe will be in their place. All things will grow and be cultivated. "Doctrine of the Mean" reflects the principle of caution, balance, moderation and harmony of Chinese ancients. This idea is also reflected in "YUE JI" (the book of music): the "YUE" is the HE of universe. The LI (Rites) is the program of universe. The HE makes universe harmony. The program makes things different. So the meaning of LI can turn everything to a certain order. It's recorded in "YUE JI" that people have the nature of moving and being moved when touched by something. Poetry, song and dance started from heart. The rhythm of music has touched the basic form of universe -- harmony and order. In TENG Gu's view, this is where rhythm of art started. So he summarized that all arts eternally tend to the rhythm of music. Of course, this is also the essence of Western classical art. From this point, the interpretations about the origin of art between China and the West have a lot in common.

In summary, the music thinking of TENG Gu is as follows: Art was born in the "human's will to survive". Life is full of uneasiness, depression, idealism and desire. Art removed this curtain to give an exact and fine form of the life. It directly faced the most profound aspects of the intuitive life. Human kind experience true life from art. Art completes the mission of communication between the world and human. It can be briefed into four sentences: "perpetual mobility and consecution" is the truth of the universe. Moving is the essence of art. Organization is its form. And all arts eternally turn into the rhythm of music. In one sentence it can be briefed that the essence of art is "dynamic".

#### 4. Supplementary about TENG Gu 's explanation of Western natural philosophy

Teng Gu's discussion on "perpetual mobility and consecution" of universe are mainly originated from Chinese ancient philosophy. He did not discuss deeply on the natural philosophy of ancient Greece, while only epitomized with "Great Harmony". To better understand the meaning of "perpetual mobility and consecution" in universe by TENG Gu, it is necessary to add some explanations to the nature in Western philosophy and science.

Around 5th century BC, the natural philosophy in ancient Greece has been arisen suddenly as "miracle". Thanks to Near East civilizations, many natural philosophers sprung up, such as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Euclid, Archimedes, etc. In this period Arabs brought writings and mathematics from the East. It's because the formation time of Greek philosophical and scientific thought started the Milesians represented by Thales. It's a rich city closed to Asia Minor, which is in Turkey's Mediterranean coast now. This civilization was later extended to these cities of Ionia district, rather than the first generation in the Greek mainland itself. It's the place where Thales brought the geometry into the Greek world.

Human kinds have different ways to understand the nature, such as language, arts, mathematics, science, history, etc. Math has always been the most sophisticated human intelligence, the most complex and mysterious way of thinking in science. It is a ladder in key of rational thinking during human rising. Math requires computing concepts and verified logical thinking. "Thanks for names and numbers, the human ability of understanding can finally subdue the world." [6]

For the ancient scientists, the mathematics has a bond with astronomy (initially astrology) and witchcraft, "From the point of their social role, it's more appropriate to say Thales is a wise man or astrologer than 'the first one scientist', though he is often called 'scientist'." [7] "Why astrology became the first science instead of medicine after the earliest and perfect development? And why it became the prototype of development of physics eventually? This is mainly because the prediction of the motion result of the stars can be calculated to demonstrate. This task was originally processed by mathematicians who treat math uniquely. The advances in physics and biology are to find a formula and a law to find the mathematical model. ""The Alchemist arbitrarily introduced the mineral into medicine: for example, salt as the fulcrum to make disease better..... It was used to treat disease raging in Europe never been seen since 1500—Syphilis, which is a new disaster..... The powerful treatment of syphilis is chemical metal-- mercury. This is a new alchemy which developed into modern science - chemotherapy, life chemistry - a milestone. [8] This is the meaning of ancient alchemy. It's a very natural thing to develop from mathematics to astronomy. It is a test of cultural temperament and thought.

Witchcraft, alchemist and natural philosopher all believe that nature is a regular system. There must be mutual induction, same primitive element or mysterious relationship between the microscopic structures of the human body and the things in nature. The alchemists think they are mercury and sulfide. Natural philosophers think they are four elements. What they do is to find these order and primitiveness.

No matter how the identity of Thales is-- scientists or magus, on the one hand, he stressed that "God is everywhere". On the other hand, he was completely out of divinity when he explained about nature, "Let God aside." Thales thought the world around the substance "material" is the original material the same composition made of water.

Thales believes substance "material" around world is composed of substance like water. This substance theory (water is the element material) has always been the basic think-

ing of pre Socratic school. In 535 BC Anaximenes proposed the concept of “Qi” and “force”. Finally Empedocles used the “four elements” – air, fire, water, earth, and the attraction or repulsion from “love” or “hate” to explain the formation of universe. This theory is very similar with ancient Chinese theory of “WU Xing” (Five Elements theory) and “YUAN QI” (vitality theory). This characteristics of diversity and abstraction was played to extreme by Pythagoreans. Mathematics was also introduced into philosophy, which constitute the material world in some perfect form. Pythagoras School found the most abstruse mathematical order of the universe during the study on strings and tone. This research finally found the harmony between mathematics and music. He also used the “irrational” which is broken to the world to the origin of universe and to the microscopic structure, order.

Socrates, Plato, Aristotle all inherited this way. The Worldview of Aristotle reflects the unity and universality. He believed the world we experienced is a real of substance. In his view, an object is combined into an indivisible mixture by the basic material and paradigms. In “Metaphysics”, he said: all things have their own structure, generated from it firstly, and finally into its (Entity is always the same, just change its shape). It is the element and primitive of all things. This primitive is the fifth element “ether”. It is also the element dynamic of the universe. The other four elements has its own “natural position” and make circular mechanical movement in the universe. This mechanical concept of substances constitutes the basis of the characteristics of classical aesthetics, which adulterate harmony, order, people and other factors. This aesthetic thoughts affected people for nearly 2000 years. Greek philosophy was in the “maid” **status** in the first six centuries of Christianity. The heritage of Greek philosophical was re-excavated and shine in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which is the Arabs large translation time. This is the reason TENG Gu did not explain how the Chinese “perpetual mobility and consecution” embodied the “harmony and order” in Greek philosophy.

Chinese traditional philosophy is metaphysics keeping the overall impression to experience and contemplate the universe in a thinking made of spontaneous, emotional experience, exploring the nature of universe. This is very clear to the ancient Greek philosophy at first, but the ancient Greek philosophy finally embarked on a road exploring the physical structure of universe in the concept, reflecting a strong will.

TENG Gu accepted this speculative and theoretical thinking during his study in Germany. Combining Chinese and Western art together, He regarded art as science, studied traditional Chinese art basing on the philosophy analysis, and then grasped the essence of art.

### 5. Western art theory cannot explain the Chinese art?

In the study of TENG GU, a kind of voice is growing in the modern China. Many researchers think it's impossible to analyze Chinese experiential art with the Western philosophical theory of rational thinking. The sound has also happened to other scholar of studying abroad in modern China. But this conclusion is not absolute. The key of explanation or not is whether four financing were done: the art creation and art theory, explanation on Chinese or western philosophical theory, the financing between Chinese and western; Chinese classical and modern language. On the surface, there is a great difference between Chinese and western art. In fact the difference between eastern and western art is not so realistic and lyrical. Western art is not entirely realistic. Chinese art is not all decent. If you appreciate original works of Western classical painting, you will find a lot of shapes about realistic image. Take trees for example, they are very similar

to Chinese painting techniques. Similarly, Chinese landscape painting and the statue of Buddha painting in Tang Dynasty clearly show the western painting techniques. The mistakes of those oppositions were most of them had no creative practice and experience, even not seeing the original works. Then they were simply explained from theory to theory. The worse is they made the three categories of the realistic art, abstract art and ideas art in the development of Western art seriously opposed. So the difference between Chinese and Western art is not completely clear. The difference between shape and meaning should not be limited in scope between Chinese and Western art. It should be manner and ideas to create art by the artist. As an artist and theorist, I have been exploring this area. The recent creation of landscape painting has proven that Chinese and Western painting can be achieved in techniques, principles, mood, taste, etc.

DENG Yi-zhe is also a Chinese and Western scholar. He took the BI FA(technique of calligraphy) as core, discussed the two unity of architecture in history and logic: one is about the imagery system of creation “TI<sup>1</sup>-form-YI<sup>2</sup>-LI<sup>3</sup>”, and another is the psychological system of appreciation: “vivid - lifelike – Qi Yun (artistic conception)”. He believed that the painting only embodies the highest purely spiritual, which is able to be compared with calligraphy. And the evaluation standard of “vivid - lifelike – Qi Yun” is the absolute spirit or absolute freedom of Hegel.

In the development of Western art, various art genres and styles are not incompatible like water and fire. Athens temple reflects a solemn rhythm: respect for life and thinking. Some sculptures, such as “Gaul and his wife” and “Dying Gaul”, have touched the edge of hearts and life. The tight brow of “Epicurus Avatar” filled with sorrow and pain. The loss and depressed mood finally erupted like avalanche or baroque violence on the relief frieze of the great altar Pergamum after falling in the hands of Romans Octavian. After made a profound reflection on the death of Christ to redeem the world, Michelangelo began to realize that people like God who is beyond nature and conquering the world is doomed to fail. So the most profound humanity and survival problem - what is the purpose of life? What is the relationship between secular values and timeless intangible value? Linking himself dangerous situation, he injected the tragic sense of existential into art, broking out in a huge passion. “Non vi si pensa, quanto sangue costa” (You cannot imagine how much effort I spent) .[9]Pieter Bruegel the Elder inherited Michelangelo’s awareness. There is many symbol of blind man trying the road in his works; As for Vincent van Gogh who is the late impressionist and expressionist art, passion outbreak in strokes and colors. It’s already without any restraint and conceal.

Visibility, the rhythm, life, feeling, spirit, universe are the essence of arts rather than the visual differences on the surface. So TENG Gu using music, which can show the absolute freedom of the intangible art, to guide the spirit and essence of art. It is not too far that this comes from his deep understanding on the true meaning of art.

## 6. Conclusion

In short, TENG Gu completed the new transformation of Chinese art history theory with western art history research methods. His art ideology included historical and

1 Mean chirography, such as regular script, running hand.

2 Mean artistic conception, rhyme or charm, etc. here mainly refers to draw shape with the calligraphy pen.



cultural concept, scientific concept, Darwinism concept, salvation concept of culture (art) and many other factors. On this basis, TENG Gu intermediate his musical ideas with the nature of painting, sculpture, architecture art, condense in the rhythm, life, universe, emotion, absolute freedom and other deep spiritual significance. As the founder of modern Chinese art history, his artistic thought still worth learning and research. It already became an important part of cultural heritage in modern times of our country.

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## Summary

TENG Gu is a famous art historian in Republic of China. Together with early Chinese scholars studying abroad like ZONG Bai-hua, ZHU Guang-qian, DENG Yi-zhe, MA Cai and FU Bao-shi, he constructed a framework of early Chinese Art. We still know his influence after a century. In his artistic thought, the essential music idea occupies 1/3. He had given music the highest position among all arts and cultures. In his view, culture won't have any value if art is removed. And all arts follow the rhythm of music.

