Research on the Problem of Art Production Theory Since the New Period

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The issue of art production is an important topic discussed in China’s academia. The article first discusses the theoretical issues of early art production in China, mainly taking Mr. Dong Xuewen’s views as an example. Second, scholars have their own views on the discussion of the unbalanced development of art production and material production in the 1970s and 1980s. Third, this article uses the art production theory to construct the contemporary literary art form, and raises the art production theory to the essentialism to discuss the art production theory and the reflection theory. Fourth, the relationship between art production and art consumption is in large-scale comprehensive systematic research.

Keywords: art production theory, material production, reflection theory, art consumption

Introduction

Marxist literary theory has long been concerned about the issue of art production theory. Marxist literary theory in the perspective of political economy makes the theory of “art production” linking art and production of great significance. China’s focus on art production can be divided into three periods. The first period was from the 1970s to the 1980s. This period mainly focused on understanding and paying attention to Marx’s art production. In the re-reading of classic Marxism, and because of the continuous introduction of Western Marxists’ viewpoints on art production, Chinese scholars began to pay attention to the issues of art production theory and launched fierce debates about the imbalance between art production and material production. The second period was from the 1980s to the 1990s. During this period, people focused on explaining Marxist art production theory and advocated the construction of a theoretical system of art production. In the third period from the 1990s to the present, the development of this stage has moved towards practical application. Since the reform and opening up, with the rapid development of commodity economy, literary and artistic products have been oriented towards commercialization and popularization.

Early Art Production Theory

It was Mr. Dong Xuewen who studied Marxist art production theory earlier in China. He focused on important issues such as the concept of art production, the aesthetic significance of art production, the question of “what is productivity” in art production, and the relationship between art production and material production.
Regarding Marxist art production, from a macro perspective, he believes that the first thing that needs to be clear is that the scientific nature of the art production theory is indisputable, and points out that Marx’s concept of “art production” is a kind of strictly prescribed scientific language, not vague and ambiguous everyday language. He believes that from the perspective of Marxism, literature and art is above all a “spiritual productive force”, which means that literature and art is a kind of practical activity, which is created by human beings. Secondly, Marx’s artistic productivity has two aspects, namely “spiritual productivity” and “material productivity”. Therefore, in terms of subjective and objective relations, this is a good counter attack to the old materialism. Thirdly, Marx’s art production can regard art as “the acquired spiritual productivity” and can be used to explain the critical inheritance of literature and art (Dong, 1983, pp. 160-161). As early as 1985, Mr. Dong Xuewen’s “Theory of Art Production” gave an answer to the issues that people focused on at that time, such as what kind of production was art production, what it originally meant, and how it was not “consistent” with material production. In addition, Mr. Dong Xuewen also advocated the use of art production theory to construct China’s contemporary literary form, and he also published many works, such as “Theory of Literature and Art Towards the Contemporary Form” and “Contemporary Morphology of Literature and Art Theory: Research on ‘Marxist Literature and Art with Chinese Characteristics’” and so on. It is worth mentioning that He Guorui has written the classic book “The Principles of Art Production” on the theory of art production. This book introduces He Guorui’s major ideas on the theory of art production in detail, focusing on elaborating his ideas from the aspects of ontology, subject, object, carrier and receptor (He, 2010, p. 84).

The Imbalance Between Art Production and Material Production

There was a great discussion about the imbalance between the development of spiritual production and material production in the 1950s, and then there was another discussion in the late 1970s, and scholars expressed their opinions one after another. In 1980, Pang Buzhi’s “A Survey of the Research on the Unbalanced Relationship Between Art Production and Material Production” (Pan, 1980, pp. 12-17) summarized the imbalanced relationship between art production and material production in the late 1970s and early 1980s from three aspects: the meaning of imbalanced relationship, the causes of imbalanced relationship, and the role of imbalanced relationship in socialist society. From this review, the scholars’ discussion of this controversy during that period can be seen clearly. In 2010, Hu Jufang’s “Research on the Unbalanced Relationship Between Marx’s Material Production and Artistic Production” believes that from the early 1980s to the present, the research on the “unbalanced” theory is divided into three branches: “One is the deepening interpretation of the dialectical relationship between the two production imbalances and balance represented by Zhou Zhonghou; the second is the research represented by Li Yisun. It starts from the new perspective of art as a form and category of social production, and analyzes the relationship between art production and the development of social material production from the main body of art production; the third is to explain the imbalance theory from the main body of art production represented by Yang Mingzhong and Yu Zhaoping” (Hu, 2010, pp. 77-80). These two research reviews have combed in detail the content of the debates of scholars from the 1970s and 1980s to the present, and have an intuitive understanding of people’s understanding of this issue. In addition to these, from 1950 to 1980, scholars’ attention to Marx’s art production was expressed in the imbalance between the development of art production and material production. But around 1990, due to the progress of society and the accumulation of
research, scholars are no longer limited to research imbalance, but to study the internal structure of literary and artistic production, hoping to inject their own views through the language characteristics of the works and the way of thinking expression. In this development process, many academic works with unique charm and far-reaching influence have appeared, such as Ye Xiangdong’s “On the Production Mode of Literature and Art”, Huang Shuquan’s “Duality of Writers, Works, and Readers in the Relationship Between Literary Production and Consumption”, etc. Their appearance allows people to see a different direction.

**Issues of Art Production Theory and Reflection Theory**

The concept of literary essence in the new period went from monism to pluralism. It treated literature and art from the perspective of production theory, and believed that literature and art could be regarded as a special spiritual production. The main representatives are Dong Xuewen and He Guorui. In addition to explaining Marx’s art production theory in detail, they also used art production theory to construct contemporary literary forms and brought art production theory to the level of essentialism. It is believed that the literary essence in the general sense is not static. With the development of the times, the literary essence has different connotations.

Dong Xuewen believes that when the “logical starting point” is characterized as “art production”, it is when the theoretical system of literature and art develops and matures. It is worth noting that this theoretical system conforms to the laws of history and meets the requirements of the times (Dong, 1998, pp. 4-5). Since the 1980s, the discussion of art production theory and reflection theory has become increasingly fierce. He Guorui advocated the use of art production theory instead of reflection theory. The theory of reflection is based on mental activities and is derived by explaining the origin and essence of a series of psychological phenomena. But for literature and art, this is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a materialization of psychological phenomena, that is, a process of production. Therefore, the previous cognition was too one-sided and it didn’t follow the scientific methods. The theory of reflection could not correctly understand literature and art. Correctly understanding literature and art is equivalent to using Marx’s art production theory as a basis for its research field, which allows people to have the theoretical reserves for constructing a Marxist literary theory system (He, 1991, pp. 70-85). He Guorui believes that the theory of art production has its rationality as a literary essence view. As a logical starting point, it is necessary to pay attention to the main body of art creation, highlight its dynamic and three-dimensional nature when examining art, take social life as the realistic basis and basic conditions for art activities, and take appreciation of art creation as a basis for judgment and an important source of power. Therefore, art production can’t be simply considered to be based on an economic perspective, but should be understood to be consistent with the unification of philosophical anthropology, historical sociology and personality psychology. Xiao Junhe also believes that Marx’s art production theory is still needed to guide literary and artistic creation. His analysis of the rationality of the application of art production theory has pointed out seven aspects, which also curbed the guiding role of the theory of reflection to a certain extent (Xiao, 1986, pp. 15-23). However, in the face of such a comprehensive analysis, scholars also put forward different views. Zhu Liyuan argued in the “Analysis of the Relationship Between Art Production Theory and Art Reflection Theory—Discussion with Professor He Guorui”: “Art reflection theory is the application and development of philosophy reflection theory in literature and art. Marxist epistemology is a dynamic reflection theory of dialectical materialism. The literary theory of art reflection theory should be based on philosophical reflection
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theory; but it is by no means the ‘reflection theory’ in the purely psychological sense that Mr. He said” (Zhu, 1992, pp. 54-60). In the relationship between the two, Zhu Liyuan proved through his theoretical research that He Guorui lacked corresponding theories as a prerequisite and support for his development while presenting his own views. One reason that He Guorui has no theoretical basis is that there is no clear distinction between epistemology and reflection theory. Another reason is that he has not specified the most direct relationship between production theory and art production. In the art field, production theory and reflection theory are different cognitions brought by different literary views, and they have their corresponding rationality. At the same time, they are inevitably affected and constrained by their own shortcomings. These are also reflected in the discussion of both of them.

The Relationship Between Art Production and Art Consumption

From the context of consumer society theory, people can have a different understanding of Marxist art production theory. In this process, it is not difficult to find its own modern significance and advanced predictability (Wang, 2009, pp. 109-114). Beginning in the 1980s, Chinese research turned to the study of literary and artistic consumption. Hua Jian put forward his own views on the issue of literary and artistic consumption from the perspective of society in “Literary and Artistic Consumerism”. In the concept of literary and artistic production and consumption, it is necessary not only to follow the important expositions put forward by Marx and Engels, but also to pay attention to the specific consumption status of Chinese artistic production in the practice of life, for example, the dominant position of art production under the market economy gives way to art consumption. Wang Qinshao believes that the relationship between art production and consumption should be re-understood. In today’s market economy environment, artworks also need the appreciation of artists and consumers. What the artist has to do is to take on his mission and responsibility for the development of spiritual civilization from his own perspective. To a greater extent, he should promote the ideological progress of consumers through excellent works, and also allow consumers to participate in the construction of spiritual civilization (Wang, 2002, pp. 92-97). Chen Dingjia seriously considered that under the current market economy environment, different stages of social development have created different art production and consumption relations. He believes that for the development of both art production and consumption in the economic environment, it can’t be allowed to play freely, but it should be ensured to be completed in subjective macro-control, and the economic benefits brought by art production should be correctly applied and handled (Chen, 2000, pp. 93-98). The above two scholars have interpreted the relationship between production and consumption in a socialist economic environment from a different perspective. The difference is that one of them pays more attention to the active role of the artist in the entire development environment, and the other is to closely connect the social benefits with the development of art. But the different views of both also emphasize the importance of artistic production and the significance of the development of socialist art. Since the 1990s, some scholars have made different reflections on the literary production mechanism, literary consumption, aesthetic cultural practice and cultural research paradigm. Since then, there have been important empirical studies on the marketization of literary production and the prosperity of the cultural industry. In addition, the study of urban culture, aesthetic culture, cultural resources, etc. is also a part of cultural production and consumption, with different degrees of progress. In addition, the research on art production theory is now more comprehensive and
the fields involved are more extensive. Tao Dongfeng and Zhu Liyuan have solved the problems of China’s literary works creation and aesthetic field based on the theory of art production and mainstream criticism of Western culture. Their ideas and expressions have a good reference for people. Some scholars have not only used this model of art production and consumption research to express their thoughts in literature, but also extended them to the art production of ancient Chinese poetry and opera dramas, for example, to highlight their main ideas. The study of art production and consumption is no longer limited to individual problems, but is in a large-scale comprehensive systematic study. Therefore, the analysis of the reality of art production and consumption in contemporary China is one of the research hotspots that people admire.

Conclusion

It can be seen that China’s contemporary art production situation is extremely complex. The accumulation of feudal culture for thousands of years, the national and democratic revolutions of the 20th century, the socialist system and Marxism’s profound shaping of modern China for more than half a century, the market economy tide and the impact of the information media revolution and the reform of the economic system in the eastern and western regions of China and so on will all inevitably affect the spiritual and cultural life of contemporary China and make contemporary art production present a unique character. In contemporary China, there is not only a serious imbalance between various types of art production and consumption, but also a huge gap in the status, scale, level, opportunity and cost of art production and consumption between urban and rural areas, between eastern and western regions, between different social strata and among different age groups. Therefore, contemporary China’s art production and consumption and spiritual and cultural construction have unique complexities and seriousness. Opportunities and challenges coexist. In-depth study of China’s contemporary art production, consumption and cultural industry issues is an urgent issue before people. Only by following the pace of contemporary art production theory can people have a way out. And only then can the theory of Chinese art production continuously expand and enhance its own strength.

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