

Aesthetics and the Economic Beauty of Socialism Author(s): Linan Li

Source: *World Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall 2019), pp. 360-376

Published by: Pluto Journals

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/worlrevipoliecon.10.3.0360>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Pluto Journals is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *World Review of Political Economy*

JSTOR

AESTHETICS AND THE ECONOMIC BEAUTY OF SOCIALISM

Linan Li



Linan Li, PhD in economics, is an associate professor and deputy dean of the School of Marxism, Xiamen Institute of Technology. She is currently a visiting scholar of the Council for Research in Value and Philosophy, Washington DC, USA. Her research covers economic aesthetics and Marxist theory. She has published *Research on Economic Aesthetics* (co-authored with Chengquan Zhu, 2015, in Chinese) and many articles. Email: linan@cua.edu

Abstract: Some scholars have studied economic beauty with the lack of overall, systematic ideas. Basing on the previous research, this article focuses on the economic beauty and socialist economic beauty, and discusses the concept and characteristics of economic beauty. According to the definition and characteristics of economic beauty, the alienation of economic beauty appears in capitalist economic activities, which is rooted in capitalist production relations, and existed in its economic activities. Socialist economy avoids the problem of alienation of capitalist economic beauty. The value, humanistic care, and belief in truth, goodness and beauty in socialist economy are of great theoretical and practical significance.

Key words: economic beauty; economic aesthetics; economic beauty of socialism

Some scholars have studied economic beauty. First of all, some scholars have realized the role of beauty in economic and social development. For example, Kahneman (2012), who won the Nobel Prize in economics, used happiness as a starting point to analyze the trend of economic aesthetics. In the book *The Experience Economy*, Pine II and Gilmore (2012) elaborated that the transformation of economics was manifested in the consumption activities that people's consumption did meet not only the basic material needs, but also the spiritual and aesthetic needs at higher levels. Assouly (2013) pointed out in his book *Aesthetic Capitalism: Industrialization of Taste* that aesthetic motivation had become the main driving force of economic growth from the end of the 20th century to the present. Secondly, some scholars study the beauty in specific economic activities. For example, in *Economic Aesthetics*, Fan (2004) analyzed the economic beauty from production, circulation and consumption. Jin (1995) and Fan (2002) studied

WRPE Produced and distributed by Pluto Journals www.plutojournals.com/wrpe/

technical aesthetics. Wang (1997) studied the factors of beauty in tourism, clothing and cooking. To sum up, the research on economic beauty focuses on one or two economic activities, and lacks the overall and systematic research on all aspects of economic activities. Cheng and Hu (2002) elaborated that there existed economic beauty and economic ugliness in economics and economic activities, and made relatively comprehensive and clear stipulations on the definition and category of economic beauty. Li (2014) conducted an integrated and systematic demonstration and analysis of economic beauty in her article “Research on Marx’s Economic Aesthetics.” On the basis of the existing framework of economic aesthetics, this article would further study the definition, characteristics and specific contents of economic beauty.

Introduction: Connotation and Form of Beauty

The answer to what is beauty is often subjective, and the different subjects will give different answers according to different evaluation criteria. Therefore, aesthetic evaluation is a kind of value judgment based on more subjective factors, and it is the aesthetic judgment that the object satisfies the subject. The aesthetic evaluation is concerned with the aesthetic subject and the aesthetic object. Generally speaking, the aesthetic subject is human, and the aesthetic object is external and has countless connections with the aesthetic subject. Marx sated that labor creates beauty (see Marx 1975, 273). The essence of beauty comes from practice that is the unity of material and spirit (Li 1981, 14–15). Through labor practice, the aesthetic subject is connected with the object:

Beauty is from human being’s creative labor practice, which achieve the essence with truth and goodness in the object, so that the object can become the ornamental image which causes the feelings of love and joy. That image is beauty. (Jiang 1997, 13)

As for what is true and good, Wang (1982, 34–35) held that human social practice is regarded as truth in that it embodies objective laws or conforms to objective laws, and as goodness in that it conforms to the interests, needs and purposes of a certain class in that era, and as beauty in that it is the objective and concrete manifestation of man’s active creativity. Therefore, Li (1999, 480), a representative of the practical aesthetics, holds that beauty is the unity of truth and goodness, that is, the unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness.

Beauty is not a simple individual behavior, although it expresses a specific individual style for those who are engaged in beauty activities, and shows the maturity and symbol of the artist’s individuality. But Heisenberg argues that

distinctive individuality is merely a response, if not a mirror, to the “zeitgeist” as an objective fact. The zeitgeist contains some characteristics of world that transcend epoch and have eternal meanings (see Jin 2014, 126). Therefore, we could understand that the characteristics of beauty have obvious marks of epoch, that is, beauty has characteristics with sociality, historicity and value.

So, what is the form of beauty? Generally, balance and harmony are regarded as the categories of beauty, which has relatively few objections in all ages, although postmodern art tries to include asymmetry and disharmony into the category of aesthetics. However, the opposition between beauty and ugliness still exists. As far as economic beauty is concerned, we still tend to regard harmony, symmetry, and so on, which could cause pleasure and joy, as the forms of economic beauty.

Harmony is expressed in the different types of beauty. First, the beauty of formal harmony. The external size, proportion, texture and their combination of people and objects such as artworks are in balance and harmony (Zhou 2009, 235). Second, the beauty of content harmony. That is the harmony between subjective and objective, mind and matter, emotion and reason. Third, the beauty of harmony unity of form and content. From the perspective of materialism, the content harmony, which constrains the harmony unity of content and form, is the first priority, and requires formal harmony. Fourth, the harmony beauty between aesthetic subject and aesthetic object. The harmonious object prescribes the aesthetic subject, and only the harmonious aesthetic subject can observe the aesthetic object. The unity of the subject and object has become the highest realm that people pursue. Finally, the above mentioned harmonies are determined by the harmonious and free relationship between man and nature, individual and society, which is embodied in human beings with perfect, comprehensive and harmonious development. Only those who develop comprehensively and harmoniously can create harmonious objects and care for harmonious beauty. It can be seen from several types of harmonious beauty that harmonious beauty not only contains formal beauty such as symmetry and balance, etc., but also embodies the beauty unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness, as well as embodies the essence of beauty of human harmony and freedom. Therefore, in the study of economic beauty, harmonious beauty is the most important category.

To sum up, beauty is the unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness under certain social and historical conditions, opposite to ugliness. Beauty has characteristics such as sociality, historicity, and value. The main category of beauty is harmony, and the connotation of harmony includes symmetry and balance. On the contrary, ugly things in reality are regarded as “ugliness” as a social attribute of objective things, and ugly things in life are associated with despicable,

hypocritical and decadent things. Therefore, the content of ugliness contains something negative to human's life and nature, while ugliness is a concept opposite to balance, symmetry, integrity and harmony, etc.

The Connotation and Characteristics of Economic beauty

Economic beauty is social beauty, and social beauty is parallel with natural beauty, art beauty and other forms of beauty. From the perspective of the categories and fields of social life, social beauty is divided into economic beauty, political beauty and cultural beauty. Does economic activity in the contemporary world all have the characteristic of beauty? The answer is no. If we regard the alienation and opposite of economic beauty as ugliness, furthermore, a series of facts, such as serious polarization, frequent economic crime, excessive market competition, extreme egoistic way of life, lust and greed of external misappropriation, and so on, occurring in some developed capitalist countries, manifest that today's world beautiful economic phenomena are in company with ugly ones, and capitalist economic activity is not beautiful.

The Notion of Economic Beauty

In ancient China, the word "economy" originally meant "helping the people by the country" (Cheng, Feng and Ma 2008, 1), while in the ancient Western world, it meant family management. Some economists defined "economy" with the allocation of resources to obtain wealth. For example, Keynes (2001, 1) argued that "any action accomplished for the greatest possible saving of money, time and effort is said to be economic. And economy means using our resources carefully and wisely so that we get the maximum net return of utility from them." Thus, as Keynes argued, economy is saving. The meaning of "economy" is clearly illustrated in *Modern Political Economy* (Cheng, Feng and Ma 2008, 1): First, "economy" refers to economic activities, including production, distribution, exchange and consumption; Second, it refers generally to national economy of a country, or one branch of national economy, such as agricultural economy, industrial economy, and so on; Third, it refers to total social production relations and economic basis; Fourth, it refers to saving.

The classification of economy is more complicated. From the macro and micro perspective, there are micro-economy, medium-economy, and macro-economy; From the virtual and real perspective, there are real economy and virtual economy; From the regional perspective, there are domestic economy, regional economy and world economy; From the perspective of process, there are production economy, trade economy and investment economy; From the perspective of industry, there are primary industry economy, secondary industry economy and

tertiary industry economy; From the perspective of participators, there are manufacturer economy, government economy and consumer economy; From the perspective of social form, there are primitive social economy, slave social economy, feudal social economy, capitalist social economy, socialist social economy, and communist social economy; and so on.

To sum up, “economy,” on the basis of certain production relations, is the general term of economic activities of various sectors of national economy, including production, distribution, exchange, consumption, etc. The economy is always based on a certain production relationship, and involves various sectors of the national economy, and includes economic activities of various categories. Generally speaking, human economic activities include production, exchange, distribution, consumption, and these four links constitute a complete field and operation process. In this process, as Marx (1986, 26) said, “Production thus appears as the point of departure, consumption as the final point, distribution and exchange as the middle.”

According to the connotation and characteristics of beauty, we conclude that economic beauty, i.e., the beauty of economy, refers to the unity conforming to both economic regularity and purposiveness in economic activities, on the basis of certain production relations, in various sectors of the national economy, such as production, distribution, exchange and consumption, etc. Among them, the “truth” in conformity with the law/regularity is mainly shown in economic activities conforming to the law of economic operation and development, as well as the law of human activities, while economics is a discipline that studies the laws of economic operation and economic development. The “goodness” in conformity with the purpose is shown in two aspects: One is, from the perspective of the goal of economic activities, in that the ultimate goal of economic activities is to serve people, and to achieve free and all-round development of human at last; The other is, from the perspective of the subject of economic activities, in that economic activities reflect people’s imagination, creativity and enthusiasm.

It should be pointed out that economic activities as practice are closely related to certain economic thoughts (or theories). We know that activities are guided by thoughts, and thoughts come from activities/practice. Therefore, when we study the beauty of economic activities, it is inevitable that economic activities cannot be completely separated it from economic thoughts (or theories). The beauty of economic activities (economic beauty) is closely related to the beauty of economic thoughts (economics beauty), and the pursuit of the ideal of beauty in economic activities needs the guidance of the thoughts of beauty in economics, and the beauty of economic thought is the abstract of beauty of the economic activity. Thus, the beauty of economic activities must be guided by certain economic theoretical beauty. For example, sustainable production and sustainable

consumption of economic beauty are guided by the aesthetic thought of “unity of man and nature.”

In fact, the connotation of economic beauty has a broad sense and a narrow sense (Li 2014, 63). Broadly speaking, economic beauty includes beauty of economic theory and beauty of economic activities. In a narrow sense, it only refers to the beauty of economic activities, that is, the beauty of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, basing on certain relations of production. This article focuses on its narrow sense.

The Characteristics of Economic Beauty

Marx once said that “Man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty” (Marx 1975, 277). Similarly, economic activities as one of the human practice can be constructed with the standards and laws of beauty. Economic beauty, as a kind of social beauty, also possesses the general characteristics of beauty, namely, sociality, historicity and value.

Economic beauty has characteristics of historicity. “The so-called *general conditions* of all production, however, are nothing but these abstract moments, which do not define any of the actual historical stages of production” (Marx 1986, 26; italics in the original). From the perspective of social form, the egalitarianism of distribution in primitive society has simple connotation of economic fairness, but low productivity and poor living conditions are not the ideal mode of human survival. The division of labor in slave society had led to the emergence of classes, in which some people specialized in mental activities such as art, and craftsmen makes the products of labor both in the form and in the creativity, but the social status of slaves equals to horses and cattle in slave society, which, therefore, is not ideal social form. The strict hierarchical system in feudal society and the alienated labor in capitalist society are both the obstacles to realizing the economic beauty. The communist society, as the highest social form, is the ideal society of human beings, and is the society with full connotation of economic beauty. We could imagine that in such a society, human beings have achieved free and all-round development, and alienated labor, commodity fetishism and money worship have disappeared. In the process that mankind enters communist society, the economic beauty in all sorts of social forms would only be relative beauty, and has certain characteristic and element of economic beauty with historicity. In the process of social development from the lower level to the higher level, the economic beauty is also becoming more and more perfect (see Figure 1). For example, compared with capitalism, socialism has more beautiful features, but compared with communism, it is relatively beautiful.

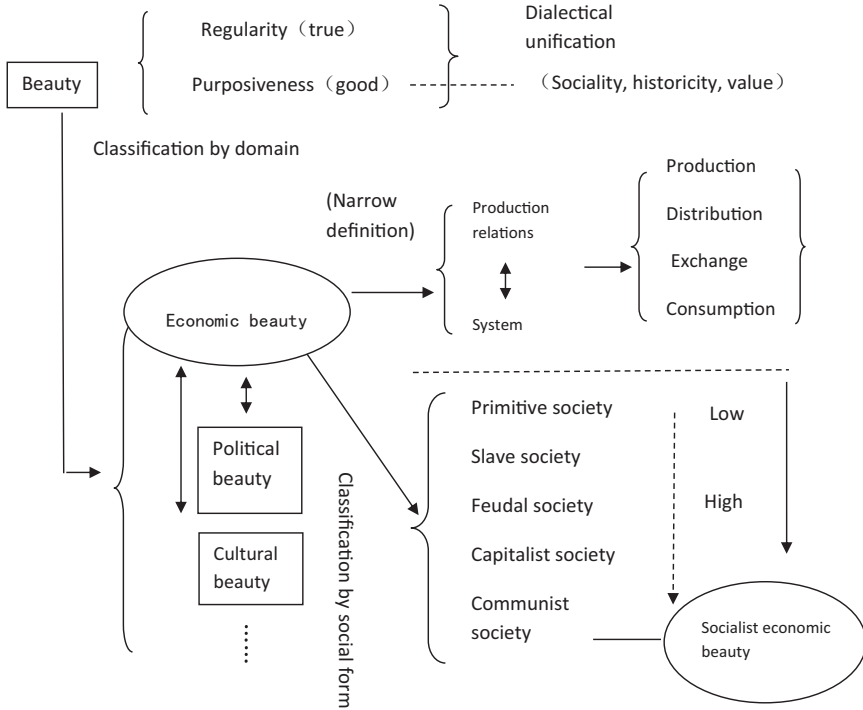


Figure 1 Beauty, Economic Beauty, and Socialist Economic Beauty

The sociality of economic beauty is closely related to social beauty, and economic beauty is a form of social beauty. “Social beauty is the original aesthetic category from Chinese aesthetics into modern history, and is widely known in Chinese aesthetics” (Zou 2007, 86). Furthermore, “Western modern materialism philosophy flourished, but its aesthetics did not create social beauty; Chinese aesthetics does not have the materialistic philosophy with the western model, but has the cultural tradition to form social beauty” (Zou 2007, 87). That is to say, China has the cultural soil to generate social beauty, at the same time, it can discover, construct and develop Marxism discourse on social beauty of production practice and economic activities. A lot of contents and expressions of social beauty appear in economic domain and economic activities. Social beauty comes from social practice and economic activities as Marx’s assertion that “it [labor] produces beauty” (Marx 1975, 273). At the same time, social economic activities directly manifest social beauty. “The essence of man is the free subject with the unity of truth, goodness and beauty in practice” (Deng 2008, 109), while “the essence of man is no

abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (Marx and Engels 1976, 4). Economic beauty has characteristics of sociality, and can only be realized and perfected in social activities, especially economic activities.

Value of economic beauty means that economic beauty cannot be far from value judgment, and cannot remain value neutrality, which is the same as aesthetics. Once the declaration of “the end of art” has been issued, it was exactly the end of the value-neutral aesthetics that separates subject from object, opposite to which does resurge Marxist aesthetics that “the essence of beauty is the essence of human beings” (Deng 2008, 109). Economic beauty, as the unity of “truth” and “goodness,” reflects people’s imagination, creativity and enthusiasm, which embodies the value/purpose to serve the people, and promote the free and all-round development of the people. Therefore, the value of economic beauty is self-evident. Marx’s interpretation of economic beauty is based on the clear stance of the proletariat. Therefore, in socialist economic activities guided by Marxism, the value of economic beauty must first be based on the proletarian position, which is significantly different from capitalist economic beauty.

The Main Content of Socialist Economic Beauty

Socialist economic beauty is the embodiment of economic beauty in the socialist stage. Socialist economic beauty accords with both general and special characteristics of economic beauty. Socialist economic beauty has characteristics of sociality, historicity and value. As far as social history is concerned, socialist society is established on the basis of criticizing capitalist economic system and avoiding social problems that capitalism cannot overcome. Socialist economic beauty can fully reflect the social beauty that is closely related to real life. Advocating labor by practice is to truly realize that labor produces beauty, with the value to accomplish free and all-around development of human beings. Socialist economic beauty has a clear stand of value. Under the guidance of advanced, scientific and revolutionary Marxist theory, the socialist economic construction would realize the combination of theory and practice, with scientific advanced theory premise and practical operability.

Therefore, socialist economic beauty is, under the guidance of Marxist political economy and on the basis of socialist production relations, a unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness in the economic activities, including production, distribution, exchange, consumption. Conforming to regularity refers to according with the law of economic operation and development, as well as the law of human activities. Conforming to purposiveness means that the ultimate goal of

socialist economic activities is to realize the free and all-round development of people. From the perspective of the subject in socialist economic activities, people's imagination, creativity and enthusiasm are more fully displayed than in previous times.

Socialist Relations of Production as the Foundation of Economic Beauty

As for the relation between production and distribution, Marx states:

Before distribution becomes the distribution of products, it is (1) distribution of the instruments of production, and (2) (which is another determination of the same relation) distribution of the members of society among the various types of production (the subsuming of individuals under definite relations of production). The distribution of products is obviously merely a result of this distribution, which is comprised in the production process itself and determines the structure of production. (Marx 1986, 33–34)

That is, the ownership of productive factors and the relations of production determine the relations of distribution. Before the beginning of production, the ownership of the productive factors participating in the distribution is also the result of distribution. The result of distribution is closely related to certain relations of production. Marx points out:

All production is appropriation of nature by the individual within and by means of a definite form of society. In this sense it is a tautology to say that property (appropriation) is a condition of production. (Marx 1986, 25)

Therefore, we can know that economic beauty in economic activities is also closely related to production relations. For example, under the socialist production relations, the public ownership of property provides the possibility of macro-planning among the various sectors of the national economy and enables the economic activities of various sectors to develop in a more proportional and coordinated way.

Socialist System as the Guarantee of Economic Beauty

Production includes general production and special production. Just as Marx states:

Production is not only particular production, but it is invariably a definite social body, a social subject, that is active in a wider or narrower totality of branches of production. (Marx 1986, 24)

WRPE Produced and distributed by Pluto Journals www.plutojournals.com/wrpe/

Each form of production produces its own legal relations, forms of government, etc. [...] To recapitulate: there are determinations which are common to all stages of production and are fixed by reasoning as general. (Marx 1986, 26)

The general production as an abstract element is meaningless to the analysis of reality, while the special production is synonymous with ownership, and each form of production corresponds to a certain “legal relationship.” Therefore, economic beauty such as productive beauty is closely related with ownership and legal rights. As far as the existing social forms, socialism with public ownership is more progressive than capitalism with private ownership, and can avoid the ugly phenomenon of economic activities in capitalist society.

Therefore, production practice has an inevitable connection with political, social and other systems. Economic system, especially ownership, decides certain mode of production. To a certain extent, ownership is synonymous with production, that is, production must be the production of a certain ownership. Socialist economic system, which is essentially different from the capitalist economic system, is formed in the practice of socialist economy, and decides the nature and direction of socialist economy too. From another perspective, Socialist economic system provides socialist economic beauty with systematic guarantee and support, eradicating the ugly behavior in capitalist economic activities and practice.

Economic Beauty in Socialist Economic Activities

With the guarantee of the socialist economic system and the guidance of Marxist political economics, socialist economic activities, compared with capitalist economic activities, have the characteristics of harmonious development and orderly operation. Production, consumption, exchange, distribution and other economic activities reflect the unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness. Among them, socialist productive beauty is the key to the beauty of economic activities, because productive labor is the important content of both the essence of human and the essence of beauty. Socialist consumption beauty shows the value of economic activities of human beings. Socialist exchange beauty embodies the beauty of economic order. Socialist distribution beauty is the basic demonstration of beauty of socialist economic system.

Beauty of Socialist Production

Production refers to the activities and processes in which human beings create social wealth, including the creation of material wealth, spiritual wealth and the reproduction of human beings themselves. It's also known as social production. Production in the narrow sense only refers to the activity and process of creating material wealth, that is, the production of material formation. The production of

materials is the foundation of the existence and development of human society (see Zhang 1998, 15). “The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself” (Marx and Engels 1976, 42). Production is the key to economic activities, production determines the quantity, mode and nature of distribution, exchange and consumption. Production is also the performance of human nature.

Labour and the social relations between people realized in labour are the real essence of human beings; the essence of human being is the free subject of truth, goodness and beauty, which is based on social material production and labour process. (Deng 2008, 109)

As can be seen from the sociality of economic beauty, social beauty is all closely related to production. Therefore, the beauty of production mainly refers to the unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness in production activities on the basis of certain relations of production. The beauty of socialist production refers to the unity conforming to both socialist productive regularity and purposiveness in the process of socialist production. Socialist productive regularity refers to that the production activities of the socialist society, basing on socialist public ownership, are more in line with the development law of modern mass production than before, and are able to organize social production according to planning and needs, avoiding the blindness, anarchism and cyclical economic crisis of capitalist production.

Socialist productive purposiveness is embodied in that socialist production activities can provide a guarantee for the freedom and all-round development of people. For example, humanized management could motivate the workers’ subjective initiative with enthusiasm, and creativity, and workers as master and owner allows them to participate in production decision-making, and beautify the working environment. At the same time, manufacture aesthetics and artistic design for production maintain both technical and economic significance, which will not only bring undoubtedly material benefits, but also aesthetic enjoyment. The socialist economic system with public ownership at least as the main body, an institutional guarantee for the comfortable and beautiful production environment, is manifested in that productive development by the people is just for the people.

Beauty of Socialist Distribution

Production, distribution, exchange and consumption are an integral part of economic activities, and they affect and interact with each other.

A definite [mode of] production thus determines a definite [mode of] consumption, distribution, exchange and *definite relations of these different moments to one*

another. Production in its *one-sided form*, however, is in its turn also determined by the other moments. For example, if the market, i.e. the sphere of exchange, expands, production grows in volume, and becomes more differentiated. Changes in distribution, e.g. concentration of capital, different distribution of the population in town and country, and the like, entail changes in production. Lastly, production is determined by the needs of consumption. There is an interaction between the different moments. This is the case with any organic entity. (Marx 1986, 36–37; italics in the original)

As for the distribution system of capitalist economy, Marx (1975, 273) describes, “The better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker.” The more the workers produce, the more value they create, and the more perfect their products are, the less they consume, the more valueless they become, and the more deformed they are. Labor has completely become a force of alienation. At its root, private property of capital is the culprit of alienation, “The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*” (Marx 1975, 300; italics in the original). The sublation of private ownership is an important way and means to solve the alienation of labor and alienation of human, and is the way to realize distributive justice. Therefore, the socialist distributive beauty, based on the public ownership, lies in the socialist system of distribution according to work, and even distribution according to one’s needs at the highest stage of socialism, i.e., communist society.

Beauty of Socialist Exchange

The exchange in economic activities is called economic exchange or market exchange. It refers to the process “in which people exchange their activities and labor products, and exchange is an element of social reproduction” (Zhang 1998, 18). In economic activities, exchange is the medium of production, distribution and consumption.

Circulation itself is only a definite moment of exchange, or it is also exchange regarded in its totality. Since *exchange* is only a mediating moment linking production and distribution (which is determined by production) with consumption; since consumption moreover itself appears as a moment of production, exchange is obviously also comprised in production as one of its moments. [. . .] Exchange appears to exist independently alongside production, to be indifferent to it, only in the last stage, when the product is exchanged directly for consumption. [. . .] Thus exchange in all its moments appears either to be

directly comprised in production, or else determined by it. (Marx 1986, 36; italics in the original)

According to Adam Smith, the tendency to exchange is both common and unique to mankind. Therefore, exchange generates division and cooperation.

The division of Labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. (Smith 1909, 18)

Because exchange is an activity between people. Therefore, the role of exchange is reflected not only in the improvement of economic efficiency, but also in the promotion of human development. So in this sense, exchange has the connotation of beauty.

It should be pointed out that exchange activity is not only the movement form of the material itself, but also exclusive ownership is the premise of exchange, and the transfer of ownership by payment is the essential content of exchange behavior. In the period of communist society, the exclusive ownership disappears, and exchange becomes a kind of communication of sufficient information, which is fundamentally different from the exchange in capitalist society for the final goal of profit maximization. However, in the society of socialism, the exchange of the exclusive property still exists to a certain extent and within a certain scope because of lower stage and degree of socialist development, but the final purpose of its exchange is to meet people's needs.

Exchange beauty reflects the beauty factors of equality, freedom and harmony in exchange activities with contracts, rules and orders. The socialist system guarantees the realization of exchange beauty in economic activities. First of all, under the socialist economic system, exchange activities are conducive to stimulate the spirit of self-improvement and self-reliance. To pursue their own interests, individuals should have responsibility, mission and power to develop their talents before exchange. Second, the exchange is conducive to the formation of equal spirit with rights and obligations. Finally, exchange activities cultivate people's awareness of cooperation, competition and innovation. Marx once said,

If the economic form, exchange, in every respect posits the equality of the subjects, the content, the material, both individual and objective, which impels them to exchange, posits *freedom*. Hence equality and freedom are not only

respected in exchange which is based on exchange values, but the exchange of exchange values is the real productive basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. (Marx 1986, 176; italics in the original)

Beauty of Socialist Consumption

Marx pointed out,

the important point here that production and consumption, if considered as activities of one subject or of many individuals, appear in any case as moments of a process in which production is the actual point of departure and hence also the dominant moment. Consumption as a necessity, as a need, is itself an intrinsic moment of productive activity. (Marx 1986, 31)

Therefore, consumption and production has identity. "Production is Consumption; consumption is production" (Marx 1986, 30) The distinction between the two is expressed as follows: "All investigations into the former are concerned with productive and unproductive labour, those into the latter with productive and non-productive consumption" (Marx 1986, 30). Secondly, consumption is the purpose of production. "Production creates the material as the external object for consumption, consumption creates the need as the internal object, the purpose of production." Finally, regarding production and consumption,

each provides the other with its object, with production supplying the external object of consumption, and consumption the notional object of production. Each of them is not only directly the other, nor does it merely mediate the other, but each of the two, by the fact of its taking place, creates the other, creates itself as the other. (Marx 1986, 30)

Therefore, the beauty of consumption must be influenced by the beauty of production. However, because of consumption as different economic activity, consumption beauty has its own connotation and characteristics.

The beauty of consumption refers to the unity conforming to both regularity and purposiveness in consumption activities on the basis of certain relations of production. The socialist consumption beauty refers to the unity of conforming to both regularity and purposiveness in socialist consumption activities. The regularity of socialist consumption beauty refers to the matching proportion between consumption and production, advocating moderate consumption, green consumption, and healthy consumption. The purposiveness of socialist consumption beauty is to make all production benefit all people with aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic experience in the process of consumption. Socialist

consumption beauty avoids only pursuing profit as the starting point and ending point to produce consumer goods.

According to Featherstone (2007), the most important feature of the consumer society is a large number of symbols and images that fill the daily life of contemporary society. The original “natural” use value of commodities disappeared, making the commodity become a sign in the sense of Saussure (Saussure 1980, 101). Therefore, consumption should not only be understood as the consumption of use value, the use of physical objects, but mainly as the consumption of signs, which result in new problems.

In a consumer society, people’s consumption of goods is not based on the urgent demand for the use of value and enjoyment, but on the fact that it is a symbol and a framework constituted by symbols. This self-contained symbolic framework has been extended to social and political cycles, especially to communication and culture. All relevant symbolic concepts have finally been condensed and externalized into consumer goods. Cultural control is obviously a tacit control that capital controls consumption of production, that is, a manipulation of consumption in the way of cultural control. (Chen 2012, 12)

This kind of aesthetic materialization has brought a variety of problems, that is, the ultimate goal of consumption of goods is pointed to the object, not the person. Some activities of consumption deviate from the experience of consumption beauty, and become a symbol for vanity and greed. Capitalist producers, meanwhile, put aesthetics into marketing only for endless profit, which lies in the fundamental economic system of capitalism.

Chandrasekhar (1996, 75) said,

This “shuddering before the beautiful,” this incredible fact that a discovery motivated by a search after the beautiful in mathematics should find its exact replica in Nature, persuades me to say that beauty is that to which the human mind responds at its deepest and most profound.

The search for beauty leads us to the discovery of truth and goodness. The socialist economic development and reform with Chinese characteristics is a creative activity both in the past and in the future. Socialist economic activities with Chinese characteristics show socialist economic beauty, which reflects the good will of socialist economic development to realize social ideal of people’s free all-round development of communist society under the guideline of socialist political economics with Chinese characteristics.

Funding

The research and writing are supported by the Fujian Province Social Science Planning Project (FJ2018MGCA011).

References

- Assouly, O. 2013. *Aesthetic Capitalism: Industrialization of Taste*. [In Chinese.] Translated by Y. Huang. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.
- Chandrasekhar, S. 1996. Shakespeare, Newton and Beethoven or Patterns of Creativity. *Current Science* 70 (9): 810–822.
- Chen, Y. 2012. “From Marx to Baudrillard: Postmodern Transform of the Relation of Production and Consumption.” [In Chinese.] *Journal of Wuhan University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, no. 12: 902–908.
- Cheng, E., and L. Hu. 2002. *The Methodology of Economics*. [In Chinese.] Shanghai: Shanghai University of Economics and Finance Press.
- Cheng, E., J. Feng, and Y. Ma. 2002. *Modern Political Economy*. [In Chinese.] Shanghai: Shanghai University of Economics and Finance.
- Deng, X. 2008. *Western Aesthetic History*. [In Chinese.] Wuhan: Wuhan University Press.
- Fan, Y. 2002. “A Philosophical Interpretation of Technological Aesthetics.” [In Chinese.] *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, no. 7: 89–95.
- Fan, Z. 2004. *Economic Aesthetics*. [In Chinese.] Beijing: China City Press.
- Featherstone, M. 2007. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- Jiang, K. 1997. *Beauty in Creation*. [In Chinese.] Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press.
- Jin, H. 2014. “Wholeness and Intuition—A Survey of Heisenberg’s Scientific Aesthetics.” [In Chinese.] *Philosophical Research*, no. 8: 122–126.
- Jin, Y. 1995. *Practical Aesthetics—Technical aesthetics*. [In Chinese.] Changchun: Jilin University Press.
- Kahneman, D. 2012. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. [In Chinese.] Translated by X. Hu, A. Li, and M. He. Beijing: Zhongxin Press.
- Keynes, J. N. 2001. *The Scope and Methods of Political Economics*. [In Chinese.] Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House.
- Li, L. 2014. “Research on Marx’s Economic Aesthetics.” [In Chinese.] *Studies on Marxism*, no. 11: 60–67.
- Li, Z. 1981. “Kantian Philosophy and the Establishment of Subjectivity.” [In Chinese.] In *On Kantian and Hegelian Philosophy*, edited by Institute of Philosophy of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 14–15. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House.
- Li, Z. 1999. *Aesthetics: Three Books and Four Lectures*. [In Chinese.] Hefei: Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Marx, K. 1975. “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, by K. Marx and F. Engels, 229–346. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K. 1986. “Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58.” In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 28, by K. Marx and F. Engels, 5–537. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., and F. Engels. 1976. *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Pine II, B. J., and Gilmore, J. H. 2012. *The Experience Economy*. Updated edition. [In Chinese.] Beijing: China Machine Press.

- Saussure, F. 1980. *Course in General Linguistics*. [In Chinese.] Translated by M. Gao. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Smith, A. 1909. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of Wealth of Nations*. Edited by C. J. Bullock. New York: P. F. Collier & Son.
- Wang, C., ed. 1982. *Introduction to Aesthetics*. [In Chinese.] Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Wang, K. 1997. *Outline of Tourism Aesthetics*. [In Chinese.] Beijing: Tourism Education Press.
- Zhang, Z., ed. 1998. *Dictionary of Economics*. [In Chinese.] Beijing: Economic Science Press.
- Zhou, J. 2009. "On the Theory and Historical Value of Harmonious Aesthetics." [In Chinese.] *Social Science Front*, no. 1: 231–238.
- Zou, H. 2007. "A Reflection on the Creation and Constitution of the Category of 'Social Beauty'." [In Chinese.] *Academic Monthly*, no. 10: 86–91.