

Art for the Country—A Brief Discussion on Wu Lao's Art Growth Experience and Design Education Thought

Yuanyuan Liu

Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Xi'an, 710065, China

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Abstract: Wu Lao is a renowned Chinese educator in arts and crafts and a pioneer in modern exhibition design. From painting to arts and crafts, to modern exhibition design and design education, his artistic life has always been closely linked to the needs of the country. Art is the country, and design is the country; His design education concepts such as "governing without action" still have important value and significance today. Reviewing Wu Lao's artistic growth path and discussing his design education ideas will have beneficial insights and impacts on the cultivation and education of contemporary art talents.

1. Wu Lao's artistic growth experience

Wu Lao, a famous Chinese arts and crafts educator, painter, and modern exhibition designer, was born on January 16, 1916 in Xiawan Village, Yiwu, Zhejiang. The illiterate grandmother was Wu Lao's childhood enlightenment educator and the most solid support. Her grandmother often used stories to teach him how to be kind, behave upright, and sit upright. She sowed the seeds of kindness, beauty, and selflessness in his young heart, which became his unwavering belief in his lifelong commitment.

From 1924 to 1933, Wu Lao attended Yiwu Wanshui Elementary School, Pingzhou Elementary School, Dongyang County High School, and Yiwu County High School in Zhejiang Province. The beautiful scenery of the mountains and waters in his hometown, the mysterious murals in the temples, and the artists depicted in the ancestral halls were all the enlightenments of Wu Lao's aesthetic education when he was young, which laid an important foundation for his later career in art. At the same time, the physical education teacher who told him in elementary school to strengthen his body and serve his country when he grew up, as well as the opera program "Mother-in-law Sting", planted the seeds of loyalty to serve his country in Wu Lao's heart, becoming his motivation for artistic salvation and design rejuvenation in the future.

Wu Lao was admitted to the high school department of Suzhou Art College in 1934 and studied under Yan Wenliang, one of the founders of Suzhou Art College and a famous painter and art educator. Given the rapid development of domestic industrialization, Yan Wenliang keenly realized that "art is widely used, especially in the business community. The various products produced in China's business community are often crude and simple, and it is extremely urgent to increase their output in order to improve the art community." [1] Therefore, in September 1934, Suzhou Fine Arts College added a practical art department and prepared to build a character casting and plate making department. Printing and photography workshops cultivate practical art talents for the country. Yan Wenliang has

high hopes for students majoring in practical art: "I hope that students majoring in practical art at our school do not hesitate to stop and do not neglect the complexity of their work.[2]

When Wu Lao was admitted to Suzhou Art College, he did not enter the practical art department for study. However, after three years of exposure, the content taught in the practical art department will inevitably have a subtle impact on him. At the same time, the campus environment of Suzhou Vocational College of Fine Arts was like the school's educational philosophy of integrating Chinese and Western cultures. The tranquil and elegant traditional Chinese gardens coexist with magnificent and bright Greek architecture, and blend together in a wonderful way here. The combination of the smoke and trees of the stream bridge, the light of the pavilions and mountains, and the traditional aesthetics of teaching deeply infiltrated Wu Lao, laying a solid foundation for traditional aesthetics. The well-proportioned and magnificent Greek style school building coincides with Western concepts and techniques in teaching, and has had a profound impact on Wu Lao. The combination of Chinese and Western environments and education laid a solid foundation for his broad artistic path in the future.

In 1937, Wu Lao was admitted to the Sculpture Department of the National Hangzhou Art College and studied under the renowned sculptor and art educator Liu Kaiqu. In July of the same year, the Anti-Japanese War fully broke out after the Lugouqiao Incident. Shortly after, Hangzhou fell, and the teachers and students of Hangzhou Art College were forced to move south to Guixi, Jiangxi. At the critical moment of the Chinese nation, the spark buried in Wu Lao's heart when he was young began to burn. He resolutely left the once coveted Hangzhou Art School and began participating in anti-Japanese and national salvation activities.

In April 1938, Wu Lao participated in the "Zhejiang Returning to the Hometown Field Service Corps" directly led by the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. He gave speeches, performed plays, wrote slogans, and drew propaganda pictures in the Jinhua and Tianmu Mountains areas of Zhejiang. Through this series of activities, he promoted the resistance against Japan and mobilized the masses in the local area. In October, Wu Lao arrived in Yan'an and enrolled in the Fine Arts Department of Yan'an Lu Xun Art College.

When Wu Lao recalled his study and life of Lu Yi in Yan'an, he wrote: "This is a collection of outstanding young people from all over the country. For the common goal of fighting against Japan, we all get together to be close to each other and exchange needs. We are like brothers and sisters. We learn together and learn from each other. The whole Yan'an is full of passion and vitality... In the days of Yan'an Luyi, I am eager to learn the basic knowledge of Marxism Leninism, improve my profession, and also participate in various social activities." [3], Wu Lao created a large number of woodcut prints and promotional paintings with anti Japanese themes, such as "The End of the Anti Japanese War". The revolutionary ideal of resisting Japan and saving the country was better realized in Lu Yi, and this experience of Lu Yi also laid the foundation for the young Wu Lao's ideal and direction of artistic salvation and artistic power.

At the end of 1938, Wu Lao, inspired by the policy of "going to the enemy's rear", participated in a team led by Cheng Fangwu and rushed to the rear of the Anti Japanese War - the Jin Cha Ji Border Region. In September 1939, the North China United University arrived in Fuping County, the Jin Cha Ji Border Region, and established four departments: Social Sciences, Literature and Art, Workers, and Youth. Wu Lao was appointed as a teacher of the Literature and Art Department (renamed as the College of Literature and Art in October 1940). Under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions behind the enemy lines, Wu Lao engaged in art education work while also creating a large number of woodcut prints, woodcut textbook illustrations, promotional posters, etc., reflecting the life behind the enemy lines and promoting resistance against Japan.

In the summer of 1943, Wu Lao was arranged by the organization to return to Yan'an for repairs due to illness, and participated in the Yan'an mass production movement, transitioning from intense struggles behind the enemy lines to intense production activities. Subsequently, he joined the Art Group of the Propaganda Department of the Political Department of the Yan'an Shaanxi Gansu Ningxia Jin Sui Joint Defense Army (referred to as the "Joint Defense Army"). The main

representative works of this period include woodcut prints such as "Sending Public Grain", "Spring in Nanniwan", and "Through the ages, the world shines". In November 1943, the central government decided to hold the first Labor Heroes' Congress and Border Region Production Exhibition in Yan'an. Xiao Xiangrong, who was then the Minister of Propaganda Department of the Political Department of the Joint Defense Force, organized a design team consisting of four painters, Zhang Ding, Wu Lao, Zhao Yu, and Zheng Cangbo, to be responsible for the design of the venue and exhibition. This was an attempt and a beginning for artist Wu Lao, and his first step in practical art. The ideal of being a painter gave way to the needs of the country, and he made the needs of revolution his first need, laying the foundation for the path towards arts and crafts and exhibition design.

In September 1945, Wu Lao joined the art team of the North China Literature and Art Troupe, led by Ai Qing. At the end of the same year, he served as a faculty member in the Department of Fine Arts at the School of Literature and Art at North China United University. The resurgence of war forced them to withdraw from Zhangjiakou and travel between Guangling in Shanxi and Shulu and Zhengding in Hebei. While participating in the land reform movement, they taught and painted while also doing propaganda work. In the early spring of 1947, Wu Lao and others went to Wuqiang, Hebei to conduct research on the creation of folk New Year paintings. They also hired New Year painting artists to guide the creation of New Year paintings in the Art Department of the College of Literature and Art at North China United University. Taking this opportunity, the teachers and students of the Art Department created a large number of New Year painting works with widespread influence in the local area. In August 1947, Wu Lao's book "How to Write Art Characters" was published by Xinhua Bookstore in Jizhong. This booklet is illustrated with plain language and is easy to explain. From the most practical and convenient perspective, it teaches people with a slight cultural foundation how to write art characters, making a great contribution to the popularization and education of art characters as an important weapon of propaganda and struggle during the Anti Japanese War.

In June 1949, the Art Supply Society of North China University was officially established, with Wu Lao serving as the president. In September 1949, the Art Supply Society was under the leadership of the school, under the responsibility of Wu Lao and Zhang Ding. The Art Supply Society led by Wu Lao presided over the venue design of important national conferences and explored new technologies for mass production of the Five Star Red Flag, serving the country with practical art.

In April 1956, the Preparatory Committee of the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts was established, with Wu Lao serving as a member. In November, the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts was established. From 1956 to 1957, Wu Lao served as the chief designer of art design for China Agricultural Exhibition and hosted the "Exhibition Design Special Course" at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, cultivating the first batch of exhibition backbone talents who had undergone systematic professional training for New China. In October 1957, Wu Lao was transferred to the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts. In 1958, Wu Lao served as the chief designer of the National Industrial Transportation Exhibition. In September of the same year, he participated in the establishment of the "Decoration" magazine and served as the executive editor. In October of the same year, the first exhibition design work in the history of New China, "Exhibition Art Design," was published, which played a crucial role in promoting the development of exhibition design in China. In 1961, Wu Lao was appointed as a member of the "Arts and Crafts Textbook Writing Group" of the Ministry of Culture. From 1979 to 1984, Wu Lao served as the Vice Dean of the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts. In 1988, Wu Lao became the first president of China Industrial Design Association Exhibition Design Association. On December 17, 2009, he passed away due to illness at the age of 94.

2. Wu Lao's design thought and art education Concept

2.1. Practical and aesthetically pleasing

As a component of material culture, arts and crafts have dual attributes of spirit and material. Mr. Wu Lao has emphasized in many discussions on arts and crafts that attention should be paid to the

relationship between practicality and aesthetics in the creation of arts and crafts. Arts and crafts should not only meet people's material needs in various aspects such as clothing, food, housing, transportation, and use, but also meet people's spiritual needs for beauty. They have artistic value and are harmonious and unified with practicality and aesthetics. The creation of arts and crafts is closely related to human life, and must be subject to the needs of actual life. Life is the source of infinite creativity, and excellent creativity is nurtured in life. Practicality is an important principle in the creation of arts and crafts. The essence of the beauty of arts and crafts is the beauty displayed under the principles of practical needs in life.

2.2. Content and Form

Wu Lao once used the layout arrangement in book binding design as an example to illustrate the relationship between artistic design content and form. Art and design works express the content contained in the design work itself through rich visual forms, and the relationship between content and form is inseparable. The requirement of content determines the expression of form, but it is not advisable to only emphasize content and negate artistic expression forms. Neglecting the meaning of content and only pursuing the beauty of artistic form can also make the form meaningless. Therefore, all means of expression (form) must depend on the purpose of expression (content), and the purpose of expression can only be achieved through the means of expression (concretization). To achieve a harmonious unity between content and form, it is necessary to have a precise grasp of the design content, and also necessary to have an extremely deep understanding of the various techniques and patterns used in artistic expression forms.

2.3. 'Governance through inaction'

In art education, Wu Lao advocates "governing without action". Inaction is not about inaction and letting go, but about respecting the growth laws of life and the development laws of art education. It cannot be artificially intervened, making art education singular and standardized. Wu Lao pays attention to creating an independent and free artistic atmosphere in his teaching, respects students' independent personality, stimulates their imagination and creativity, and encourages them to create freely. Many teachers and students benefit from this independent and free artistic and academic atmosphere, becoming outstanding talents in the field of art or design in the future.

3. Conclusion

Throughout Wu Lao's life, the ignorant youth in the Jiangnan water town harbored a simple and beautiful longing for art. From Suzhou Art School to Hangzhou Art School, as he increasingly touched the true essence of art, the invaders' iron hooves shattered the youth's dreams. From then on, my immature shoulders shouldered the heavy responsibility of resisting Japan and saving the country, enduring the baptism of cruel wars, and also shouldering the heavy responsibility of designing and revitalizing the country. In the spring and autumn of 1994, Wu Lao's artistic life was always closely integrated with the needs of the country. He adjusted his artistic direction according to the needs of the country and devoted his whole life to the country.

References

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