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A Self-Sufficient Revival

The war destroyed everything. At the same time, it was a source of creativity. On one hand, humankind was brutalised, while on the other, it renewed itself. Such adaptability has spurred the history of humankind towards a higher goal, and art towards a greater flowering.

We shall not discuss ancient history for the moment. Let us talk about modern history.

The motherland [China] struggled during the few years of war and survived. Countless lives were lost and properties, damaged. The turmoil was unprecedented in history. However, the motherland has also shown strong determination and incomparable vitality, conquering all difficulties and bringing forth a new and strong culture.

In the arts, music, drama and drawing are the three genres which have shown vast improvement. While they have not caught up with international standards, they have come close enough. In the past, we had been critical of artists on two issues: immaturity of skill and lack of awareness. Most of the so-called artworks were fragmented, disorganised, or soulless, and certainly could not be considered complete and flawless works of art. During the long years of war, however, most artists endured the trials of life and were influenced by the spirit of the times. When it came to technique, they dedicated themselves to hard work and research; when it came to consciousness, they awoke to the need to ground their subject matter in reality. Thus, radically new fruits of labour were produced.

If we look at other parts of the world, it is easy to notice how the art scenes in Western Europe and the Soviet Union produced magnificent results during the war. These people fulfilled their duties as citizens and demonstrated their mission as artists, reconstructing tall buildings from what was just rubble and debris. In short, they were the lead actors on history's stage and the cultivators of cultural gardens.

Regrettably, when we look at ourselves, what have we to show? While we helped with some fundraising before the outbreak of the Pacific War, in artistic quests we are but only a tributary of the motherland. After the fall of Malaya, we could only go into hiding and ignore all other matters. Of course art was neglected. When we recovered from the war, we should have risen forcefully to advance and develop. But some of our members have lost their lives, while others have found new occupations. Only a few have remained in the old practice. Of this minority, the pressure to make ends meet and the lack of art materials have naturally resulted in a dearth of new artwork. In terms of quality, we must admit that we are only beginning to learn. The weakness in technique and lack of content speak for themselves. An especially pressing problem, we feel, is that local art is out of touch with the zeitgeist. Although art itself need not belong to any particular forms of consciousness, if this generation — us today in the 1950s — does not keep up with these ever changing times, leading and moving things forward, what else is there left to say?
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