of it can be credited to the gracefulness of the female body and the elegance of its lines.

Apart from indirectly contributing their naturally beautiful bodies to art, women have also influenced artistic culture with their kind and gentle personality, giving male artists spiritual encouragement and sympathy, implicitly increasing their interest and labour in the arts. In general, almost all great artists, even philosophers and scientists, have been nurtured with feminine care. Successful artists often have loving mothers, sisters, female friends, and invariably, a gentle and loving wife, or lover. This sufficiently proves that the success of male artists is generally dependent on the love, protection and encouragement of women.

However, it is now the 20th century. Most women have been freed from the shackles of domesticity. As for “equality of the sexes,” we should not only compete for equality in economics and politics in society, but also work for equality in artistic creation. Hence, I hope that everyone here will contribute towards the future creation of the arts. If this cannot be achieved, at the very least support and encourage your siblings, husbands, or children. Then, the future path of Chinese artistic culture will be filled with promise!

I know that in the past and now, this school has seen many special talents in the arts and is also an active promoter of the fine arts. This is obvious just looking at the art facilities and the passion with which Principal Liew regards fine arts. I believe this is a very good sign that the seedlings of art have sprouted in the society of Nanyang. Furthermore, according to our statistics for the annual fine art exhibition held by the Society of Chinese Artists, your school boasts the most students visiting the exhibition. This shows that you have an unusually strong interest in the arts. I am filled with gratitude and admiration for Principal Liew’s passion for and promotion of the fine arts.

To end, I should apologise for having rambled on so much and tiring you for more than an hour in this dreary hot weather. I shall end the talk here. Thank you!

ENDNOTES

1 Liew Yuen Sien (刘韵仙) was the principal of Nanyang Girls’ High School from 1927 to 1966.
became common practice; anyone who could wield a brush to write would also be able to paint, partly also because calligraphy and painting use similar materials.

Fourth, painting schools and other like organisations promoted calligraphy and painting, causing the people to value them as well. Many emperors and members of royalty were well-trained artists in their own right and were a great encouragement to the commoners. Although works by these schools were not exceptional, they could be credited with motivating artists beyond the school to seek the truth and improve their art.

Fifth, calligraphy and painting were related to the direct revelation of a person’s self-cultivation and emotions. They could thus broadly and closely reflect the prevailing art philosophies of the different eras. Calligraphy and painting also had many unique theoretical interpretations, such as Xie He’s Six Principles of Chinese Painting (谢赫六法论), which became the most important manual in Chinese painting and which further brought about the growth of unique styles.

In summarising the above, it may be seen how calligraphy and painting became the gems of Chinese art. As for the spiritual and technical gains, there are even more praiseworthy achievements, the most important of which are: one, the nimble use of lines and brush techniques that gives the painted image liveliness, enhancing the strong emotional interaction between the painter and the viewer, and evoking deep resonance and sympathy; two, the amazing changes of the ink — when an artist is overly focused on the mechanical changes of light in the natural world, the unrestrained display of the subjective soul is hampered. By working on the consistency of the ink instead, one can produce a charm that is exceedingly beguiling and inexplicably alluring. Three, the simplified representation of form — all things in the universe are captured and distilled by the mind, which retains the essence and discards the dregs. Thereafter, through movements of the wrist, succinct and forceful images appear in the painting, making it easy for viewers to focus their attention on the core theme. Four, the blending of the real and the implied — the appearances of all things in the world are varied and disorderly, each with its certainty and ambiguity. The artist has to express infinite artistic concepts with finite materials. Due to a forthright composition of ink and empty space, he can create a sense of reality in the unreal, and a sense of the illusory in the real. This makes for a lofty and profound style.

By mentioning each of the above, it is sufficient to know that our [Chinese] fine art, developed over a long period of time and nurtured by deep thought, emanates proudly from a distant place on the Asian continent [Singapore]. In addition, this influence has more recently made ingress into the impenetrable field of Western art. This is a truth with abundant evidence, such as the abandonment of objective portrayal by the Post-Impressionists, who moved towards expressing the subjective soul, and the Fauvists’ distancing from Cubism and their focus on the treatment of the surface. Among artists like Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse, some emulated with lines and brushwork, others categorised colours and composition, while others gave expression to artistic concepts. In conclusion, their generation cleverly assimilated nourishment from Chinese art and skilfully used our techniques. We may call them Chinese artists of the West, even though the materials they used were very different.

Yet, if we reflect for a while, we will realise that this is actually cold comfort. What has become of the rich legacy of our forefathers? Although a filial descendant will emerge from the hundreds of thousands to continue or accomplish what the forefathers have not been able to, most descendants are pitiful souls who accept uncritically and complacently.

Indeed, things of the past have their intrinsic souls, but these cannot become our life. We are still able to walk and move because of our living bodies. Life places upon us the mission of creating the cultural art of this generation, for our generation has its way of life and its ideological contexts. Why then do we continue to walk the beaten path and not pave one that is bright and true?

Times are changing, and urgently so. Let the new souls and a drive for progress claim a world in the future!
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Times are changing, and urgently so. Let the new souls and a drive for progress claim a world in the future!
Undoubtedly, the purpose of this exhibition of Chinese cultural artefacts organised by the Nanyang Confucian Association (南洋孔教会) is to display some of the motherland’s art and historical artefacts so that all races will have an opportunity to view and study them, to promote the true meaning of our inherent culture, and to indicate what a future art movement should strive for.

Owing to the short time given in preparing for the exhibition, it is inevitable that the content has not been adequately put together. Based only on the sources of the exhibits, collectors who love art and scholars who are fond of antiques have been involved, all of whom contributed in their personal capacities. Even if the scale of this exhibition is not fastidious, it is still truly hard to come by and should not be compared with a national exhibition organised by the government and paid for with public funds. However, when has the government in Nanyang ever attempted anything like that?

Our countrymen have been heading south for more than 1,500 years since the Han Dynasty. Although most of their activities were commercial, political and military in nature, their presence led indirectly to the spread of Chinese culture. This contribution is not insignificant. Even today pottery continues to be excavated on isolated islands; the fact that our currency is still used in Bali proves that such a poor and remote place is also influenced by our culture. It is a pity that the indigenous people in the south lack cultural activity, which is why they have no apparent response to art. In fact, cultural interaction requires the parties involved to have attained a certain standard of cultural activity. There should be mutual encouragement that makes for gradual evolution, for if efforts are one-sided with the recipient unable to reciprocate, they will be futile.

Furthermore, the members who have been scattering the seeds of culture have done so without any concerted effort or organisation. Therefore, their endeavours have been weak and their effects, small. However, in today’s world, where there is organisation, not only is it difficult to compete with others, there is also no hope for survival. When will the cultural movement here develop a unique character? In light of this, it is not difficult at all for us to appreciate the significance of this exhibition.

Tan Tsze Chor and his Collection of Rare Calligraphy and Paintings

Before the war of resistance against the Japanese, our government [Nationalist China] had shipped to London some of the best collected artworks of the Palace Museum [Beijing]. A historic art exhibition on a magnificent scale was held and the valuable exhibits caused a stir. Many scholars and experts the world over congregated in London to view the exhibits meticulously and study them at length. After gaining an understanding, they returned to where they came from, satisfied. They spread their new knowledge to every stratum of European society, such that among their people arose a spirit that was more receptive and friendly towards Chinese culture. These people now understood that when their ancestors were still hunting in the wild, an Oriental tribe far away had already possessed a superior culture. They also came to understand that this culture was full of sincerity, generosity, compassion and kindness. They further learnt that Chinese culture not only held a commanding position in the East, but also influenced the entire world. Hence, arrogance was destroyed and discrimination was removed, replaced by sheer admiration as people lifted their heads and looked to the East, longing for a glimpse of incandescent brilliance.

Regrettably, since that exhibition, the government has not had the means to continue.

Nanyang has always been considered a cultural desert and a large part of this may be traced to faults caused by man. For example, the rulers’ exploitation of the economy and the local inhabitants’ gradual laziness were causes that impeded passionate aspirations towards more noble activities. So too for the culture that could have been reaped! As for the overseas Chinese, they left home and sailed across oceans for a livelihood. Many of them became labourers or undertook commercial activities. As long as there was income, they had peace of mind and nothing else mattered. At best, they established a few primary and secondary schools to educate their children. This was already the highest expression of their efforts in this area. As for culture, it could take a back seat!

With each race scattered about and coming into contact with one another within a progressive and diverse society, culture is used as the medium to communicate thoughts and emotions. Not only does this prevent unnecessary conflict, when there is culture as