

East Meets West Via the Arts

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Beauty has a transcendent aspect and whether we experience beauty through nature, or art, or through human relationships, we can be uplifted by beauty and attain a deeper relationship with our Heavenly Parent and with each other as brothers and sisters. In this sense the aesthetic beauty of art in general, and music in particular, can be considered religious.

Regarding the true spirit of artistic creativity, we read in *Cheon Seong Gyeong*, Book 10, Ch. 3:

The ultimate goal of artists, and those who work with the arts, is to reach the world of God's heart ... God's ideal of creation for the created world arose from that heart. The starting point of art is the desire to represent that heart.

Accordingly, in the world of art there are no national boundaries. The purpose of art is not to serve as a tool of an ideology or an agenda. Its fundamental principles are harmony and unity. Divisiveness and conflict are fruits of fallen nature. Therefore the world of art demonstrates universal characteristics in all directions, bringing the East to understand the West and the West to accept the East.



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Rev. Sun Myung Moon often said that “music and religion go hand in hand.” The word “religion” stems from the Latin *ligare*, which means “to bind.” Religion, then, is a process or method by which we can “re-bind” to God. Implicit in this explanation is the idea that at one point God and humankind were not separated and religion became a way to “re-bind” Heavenly Parent with the children who were separated due to the human fall.

Scripture also reminds us that all creation “groans in travail” awaiting the revealing of the children of God and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23). Attaining the Three Blessings and going the way of restoration is the means by which we can “re-bind” with Heavenly Parent and bring the creative process out of Lucifer’s domain and back to its rightful and godly position and purpose.

Because Lucifer usurped creativity’s true purpose in Eden by way of false love, many artists have been similarly seduced by false attitudes regarding their creative gifts, and this has resulted in immorality, self-aggrandizement and selfishness in the artistic sphere for thousands of years. Rev. Moon often mentioned these pitfalls in various meetings with artists.

According to the beauty, truth and goodness paradigm described in the Divine Principle, it is important to assess art in three ways: aesthetically (beauty), intellectually (truth), and axiologically (goodness). Axiology is the study of values: specifically morality and ethics. Too often in contemporary society there is a tendency to overlook the axiological aspect of art.

In her memoir, *True Mother*, Mrs. Hak Ja Han, mentions that art and culture are more powerful than politics in their ability to bring about societal change. Her view resonates with the views of the ancient philosophers of China, Greece, Israel, and early Christianity in Europe. Art can have “moral power” and artists need to understand that what they create and put before the public has consequences. Music historian Richard Taruskin makes the point that “music is a powerful form of persuasion,” and that “serious art possesses an ethical force and exacts ethical responsibilities.” In this context, the role of the artist in the creation of a culture of peace is no small matter. Artists do not create in a social vacuum; therefore, they ought to take into account how their art affects the communities in which they live and work.

It is fairly well known that the philosophers of ancient Greece understood the “moral power” of the arts as it pertained to creating an ethical society. Damon of Athens, son of Damonides, was one of the first Greek philosophers to study the effects of music on our psyche—psychoacoustics in modern terminology—as well as the social and political consequences of music. Plato cites Damon’s concerns about the influence of music in *The Republic*:

The care of the governors should be directed to preserve music and gymnastics from innovation; alter the songs of a country, Damon says, and you will soon end by altering laws. The change

appears innocent at first, and begins in play, but evil soon becomes serious, working secretly upon the characteristics of individuals, then upon the social and commercial relations, and lastly upon the institutions of the state; and there is ruin and confusion everywhere.

Socrates expressed concern about how music could have the effect of “rendering people susceptible to beliefs and actions that are morally bad.” In *Poetics*, Aristotle observes:

Rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, and all of the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character, which hardly fall short of the actual affectations, as we know from our own experiences, for in listening to such strains our souls undergo change.

Moreover, Aristotle proffered that music “awakes the remote counsel, brings closer the stray thought, and strengthens the tired mind. Music, therefore, causes the return of that which was lost; it makes us pay attention to that which was neglected, and that which is turbid becomes clear.” In the context of “that which was lost,” as Unificationists we understand that the loss of the true purpose of human creativity requires a “re-binding” to the original ideal of creation and the harmonization of emotion, intellect and will. Consequently, our artistic endeavors ought to take into account the “goodness” aspect of creativity in our attempts to influence and edify others with regard to the tenets of Unification and Godism.

In our contemporary culture we can see how unfettering art from moral and ethical connotations has led to various artistic expressions that a few short decades ago would have been considered objectionable, but are now considered acceptable. The loosening of moral standards has had the effect of normalizing decadence and lowest-common denominator values in the pursuit of commercial success. Most popular music has been “objectified” by the recording industry and is viewed primarily as a commodity to be marketed and sold for profit. In many instances the intrinsic spirituality of music has been diminished or removed altogether. As a result, our popular culture has become increasingly coarse, far less enlightened and lacking redeeming values. Objectifying art in this manner is not unlike pornography that objectifies sexuality, thereby removing its divine purpose and reducing it to being a purely physical dimension in order to sell it for profit.

What might not be so well known, especially in the West, is that the Chinese philosophers of antiquity held views that were similar to those of the Greek philosophers with regard to the moral power of the arts and the role of artists in society. In the *Analects* of Confucius we find several insightful references to music and morality:

*If a person be without the virtues proper to goodness,
what has he to do with the rites of propriety?
If a person be without the virtues proper to goodness,
what has he to do with music?*

Also from the *Analects*:

There are three types of delights that improve you, and three types of delights that diminish you. To delight in li and music, to delight in speaking of others' good points, to delight in having many worthy friends—these improve you. To delight in arrogant pleasures, to delight in idle wanderings, to delight in banquet parties—these diminish you.

In Confucian terminology, *li* refers to propriety, ritual or rites. Propriety can have several meanings including modesty, politeness, respectability, and decency. These attributes were considered important in the development of one's character and in becoming a respectable person. Music in ancient China was viewed as an important aspect in the development of an individual's character and thus a means for establishing a moral and ethical society, as well as modes of good governance. For Confucius, taking egotism out of ritual “brought out its profound spiritual and moral potential,” thus making it possible for even the common man to become a *junzi* (gentleman or superior man) who had developed to his fullest capacity

Other ancient Chinese texts offer corroborative views regarding music: its usage, its ethical connotations and its origins. The ancient Chinese text, *The Memorial of Music*, states:

Therefore it is, that when music is generally taught, the duties of the five relations [as defined by Confucian thought] are thoroughly comprehended; the ears and eyes are quick and penetrating; the animal spirits and the emotional nature are in perfect calm; public manners and customs are reformed, and the whole empire enjoys profound tranquility.

For the Chinese of antiquity, the connection of music with the ordering principles of physical laws and metaphysical ideals was considered important due to the belief that the same laws and principles contained within music and sound production were present in the celestial order that governed the entire

universe. Those who possess even a cursory understanding of the Chinese philosophical tome the *I Ching* understand that the Taoist axiom of harmonizing the polarities of *yang* and *yin* is one of its central tenets. The fusion of Taoist principles and Confucian ethics would give rise to various rationales that guided the Chinese in matters of art and social governance.



The author with singer-songwriter Ahan Woo, with whom he has been collaborating on several projects over the past year in Korea

The issue of political and social governance with regard to music was of great concern to Lu Bu Wei (291-235 BC), a politician in the Qin region of China. He wrote extensively on the matter of music and its effects on society and governance. In his *Spring and Autumn Annals* he writes:

The will of people living in an area can be known by examining the customs that prevail there. And their virtues can be known by examining their will. Whether a state will become prosperous or face its downfall, whether its sovereign is sensible or unworthy, and whether a person is honorable or base, can all be known by the music they enjoy.

This perspective echoes that of Damon of Athens with regard to a society's moral and

ethical well-being and the music within its culture. Wei goes on to say:

Music is a product of the heart. When the heart is moved, the feelings can also be reflected by harmonious sounds. And when a harmonious tune is heard, the heart can also be touched by it. Hence, the customs of an area can be known by examining its tunes. ... When their virtues are well cultivated, they can compose music. If the tunes composed are harmonious, they will resonate pleasantly, and they can edify and direct the common people to pursue Tao.

Tao in Chinese philosophy means “path” or “the way” and is usually associated with the beliefs that can edify and guide a person toward living a virtuous life. Tao is considered to be the natural order of the universe and one must discern through intuition the proper “way” to live one’s life in order to realize the potential for individual wisdom. This intuitive knowledge of life cannot be grasped as a concept; it is gained through the actual living experience of one’s everyday being. This concept aligns with “Godism” as explained in Book 10 of *Cheon Seong Gyeong*. The “ism” in Godism means “way of living,” thus living in accordance with axiological tenets as defined by the Divine Principle and Unification Thought is “the way” to attain our true authentic self. For artists it becomes “the path” to discover their authentic muse—their artistic Tao.

Too often we discuss issues of governance, education, commerce, the arts, and journalism according to the ideological perspectives of “left” or “right,” when we ought to be more concerned with “higher” and “lower” virtues and values. As the ancient cultures of both the East and West instruct, there should be serious consideration given to the true purpose of art and culture in relation to creating a moral and ethical society. This begins with a belief that God exists and God’s ultimate purpose is love.

Art that is created in that spirit and with that intention—combined with highly developed technique and aesthetic sensibilities—can be art that moves the soul and opens one’s consciousness to a higher love. In that way, artistic achievement can facilitate greater harmony between the cultures of East and West in accordance with True Mother’s desire to create *Hyo Jeong* culture. With the recent creation of the International Artists Association of Culture and Peace (IAACP) as one of the pillars in the UPF sphere, the issue of artistic integrity will become an important aspect in the quest to establish a culture of peace.

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