

Report on The International Conference of “Somaesthetics and Chinese Culture”



December 14th to 16th 2018, East China Normal University (ECNU) Shanghai China, the International Conference of “Somaesthetics and Chinese Culture” was successfully co-held by the Somaesthetics Research Center at ECNU, The Department of Chinese Language and Literature at ECNU and Center for Body, Mind, and Culture at Florida Atlantic University. Over sixty scholars from the US, France, and China gathered together and had an in-depth discussion on the theory and practice of somaesthetics.



Group Photo



The opening ceremony was held on December 15th at the Zhongshan North Road Campus of ECNU. At the ceremony, the director of ECNU’s Chinese Language and Literature Department,

Professor Zhu Guohua delivered a welcome speech on behalf of the center's director Professor Wang Feng, in which he introduced the background of how Center came to be established. The Proposer and Founder of Somaesthetics, who is also the Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar Chair in the Humanities and Director of The Center for Body, Mind, and Culture at Florida Atlantic University, Richard Shusterman said during his welcome speech that interdisciplinary research on somaesthetics is incredibly important and that the establishment of Somaesthetics Research Center at East China Normal University can carry forward the development of somaesthetics in China. Professor Tang Yonghua from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at ECNU hosted the opening ceremony.



Professor Zhu Guohua

During the morning session, Professor Shusterman made a speech on the retrospect and prospect of somaesthetics research. He said somaesthetics should not be limited to the realm of philosophy studies, on the contrary, it should enter the realms of art, human life and technology. He also thinks that Chinese culture has rich somaesthetic resources, and he expected a lot from research on somathetics coming from contemporary China.



Professor Richard Shusterman



Professor Kenneth W. Holloway who is also Levenson Chair and Associate Director of The Center for Body, Mind, and Culture at Florida Atlantic University elaborated on this using Mencius and Xunzi as examples. He stated that previous scholarship had been hampered by ignoring somaesthetics when working on Chinese philosophy. In his conclusion, he also stated that the connection between somaesthetics and Chinese culture represents an exciting avenue for future research.



Professor Kenneth W. Holloway



Professor Marceau Chenault from The College of Physical Education and Health at ECNU introduced five forms of physical exercise which are spontaneous and which emerged during the 20th century. These include those that are inspired by Chinese Qi-Gong and Japanese Katsungen Undo. He demonstrated this through improvisational dancing with his partner Irene Sposetti form Being Motion. The goal is to develop a new model of creative physical education which emphasizes the body.



Improvisational Dance

Professor Zhu Guohua discussed how nude bodily representations became accepted in contemporary China. The “naked model” incident which involved Liu Haisu and Yu Dafu’s Anthology *Sinking* (沉淪 *Chenlun* 1921) were at the time seen as conquering traditional Chinese culture. However, it does not in fact represent a qualitative change in Chinese cultural episteme. When modern values encounter new challenges, bodily representations were again deemed unacceptable.

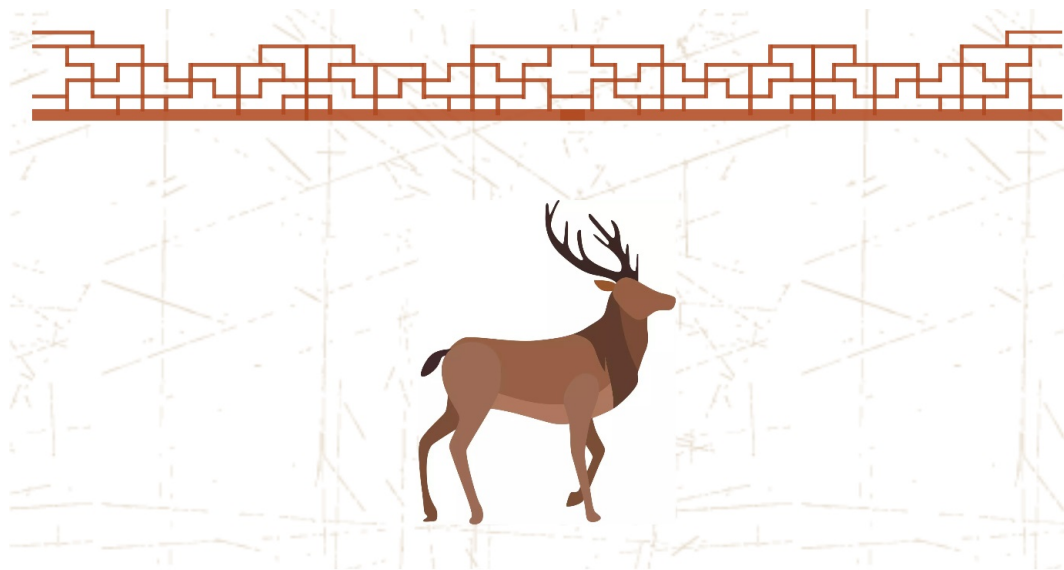
Professor Cheng Xiangzhan from the Research Center of Aesthetics at Shandong University delivered a paper centering on the somaesthetical dimension of Kant’s aesthetics and its ecoaesthetics. He argued that somaesthetics is the best mediator to reverse the non-ecological characteristic of Kant’s aesthetics for the purpose of reconstructing it eco-aesthetically.

Professor Wang Xiaohua from the College of Art and Humanities of Shenzhen University started his paper from the decline of dualism in Western art history. He pointed out that since the 20th century, due to the impact of phenomenology, pragmatism and cognitive science, somaesthetics ultimately came to be recognized as an individual discipline; this progress should continue, and the age of somaesthetics has only started.

The afternoon sessions were held in three separate conference rooms. Scholars had fascinating and in-depth discussions on topics related to the “Somaesthetics of Traditional Chinese Culture”, “Somaesthetics in Western Culture”, and “Research on the Interaction between Chinese and Western aesthetical theory and practice”.

The Closing Ceremony was presided over by Professor Wang Jiajun. Professor Wang Xiaohua stated during his closing speech that the conference had included over fifty excellent papers, which covered a wide range of topics related to somaesthetics. The success of this conference is of huge importance in terms of gathering together experts in somaesthetics from China and overseas to further the development of somaesthetics.

The Somaesthetics Research Center at East China Normal University was established in October, 2017. It is an important milestone in the collaboration between East China Normal University and Florida Atlantic University in the United States, where the founder of somaesthetics Professor Richard Shusterman teaches and researches. The center is also co-founded by the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, the College of Physical Education and Health, the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Art, the College of Design etc. at East China Normal University. It is affiliated with the Department of Chinese Language and Literature. Somaesthetics is a new academic development in the realm of international aesthetics. To date, it has entered into the realms of literature, physical education, media, art, social culture and exercises etc. This is significant since it initially was limited to philosophical conceptualization. After the establishment of Somaesthetics Research Center at East China Normal University, the success of “Somaesthetics and Chinese Culture” international academic conference at East China Normal University is another key move to further the development of Chinese somaesthetics research.



Copywriter: Chen Dan

Typesetting: Wang Siying