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**Comparative Analysis on Philosophical Aesthetic Traditions
of Western and Chinese Culture**

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Abstract

Research on reinventing contemporary Chinese aesthetics is a problem that cannot be ignored in the field of Chinese contemporary art, which is undergoing globalisation and modernisation. The rapid growth of human material civilisation requires the exploration of more profound connotations of aesthetics. This research aimed to analyse the essence of the aesthetic differences and commonalities between the West and China to find a better way to construct Chinese contemporary aesthetics, thereby finding the development direction of Chinese contemporary arts. The main findings of this study address key issues relevant to academicians, designers, emerging identities, and professionals engaged in the contemporary art field.

Keywords: philosophy; aesthetic; traditions; characteristics

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1.0 Introduction

With the development of globalisation, cross-cultural communication is increasing in influence. Contemporary Chinese art is associated with globalisation. Although Chinese contemporary art has developed rapidly in recent years, it is worth acknowledging that cultural exchange between China and the West remains imbalanced (Zheng, 2019). At the same time, the development of contemporary art has greatly challenged traditional aesthetic concepts, categories, and theories, thereby triggering a series of problems, such as homogenisation and a lack of profound cultural connotation and of contemporary Chinese aesthetics (Zhao, 2022). Zhao (2022) also revealed another aesthetic issue: the development of contemporary art and the issue of art participation. Contemporary art no longer aims to create aesthetic objects, such as paintings and sculptures. Still, it has become a broad action that engages in relationship-building with nature, society, and the whole. Xu's (2022) research also demonstrated that art participation is an important concept. Both Zhao and Xu's research found that studying the artistic philosophy and aesthetic construction of contemporary art is a significant endeavour.

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2.0 Background

2.1 Chinese Cultural Aspects

China is one of the four ancient civilisations in the world, and Chinese culture has a 5000-year-long history. With the development of globalisation, cross-cultural communication is increasing. Contemporary Chinese art is associated with globalisation. Although Chinese contemporary art has developed rapidly in recent years, it is worth acknowledging that cultural exchange between China and the West remains imbalanced (Zheng, 2019). According to Carter (2017), the success of Western art in China has been largely constrained by the strong artistic practices entrenched in Chinese culture and the often turbulent social and political conditions in China throughout much of the twentieth century. Despite growing awareness of Western art throughout the Twentieth century and beyond, Chinese artists did not succumb to Western hegemony (Zhang, 2023). They still have a firm desire to develop contemporary Chinese art that preserves the foundations of Chinese culture and art traditions.

The questions concerning both Chinese art and aesthetics today are complex, and this question is not easy to answer for Chinese scholars either. "Corresponding to developments in Chinese art, there is indeed a rich tradition of Chinese aesthetics, which reflects the appreciation of nature as well as the arts of poetry, and other forms of the arts and everyday life" (Carter, 2017). Moreover, this tradition remains at the core of Chinese art and culture to this day. Eastern aesthetics, particularly Chinese cultural aesthetics, have had an important role in influencing Chinese and Western design (Bai & Nam, 2022). China has a long history of Chinese treatises on aesthetics that link to fundamental cultural philosophical views, including Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism (Yang, 2022). "The aesthetic is a discourse of modernity par excellence, for it articulates the intrinsic contradictions of modernity in the most concrete and 'sensuous' terms" (Zheng, 2019). Therefore, to better understand the status of Chinese contemporary art, it is necessary to analyse the connections between East and West in terms of both fundamental ideology and aesthetic traditions.

2.2 Western Culture Aspect

The progress of human civilisation is inseparable from the collision and integration of different cultures. Since the beginning of cultural contact between China and the West, China has entered Western discourse as the "cultural other" and continues to play a role in constructing modernity in Western society, showing completely different looks in different eras (Yang, 2022). From the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD, the West began to purchase Chinese silk, but its acceptance of Chinese art theory was at a blank stage; from the 7th to the 14th centuries AD, Western reception of Chinese art remained fragmented; from the 16th to the 18th century, the West imported large-scale Chinese handicrafts including porcelain, lacquerware, wallpaper, etc., and published a large number of monographs on China, including Chinese art; it was not until the 20th century that Chinese art and its theories were recognised by the West, and Chinese artworks were regarded as "fine art". In other words, until the 20th century, Chinese art ushered in new developments due to the Western acceptance of Chinese art and art theory (Bai, 2022).

In 2022, Bai and Nam pointed out that, due to cultural differences, audiences in Western countries have misunderstandings when understanding Chinese art. At the same time, due to the influence of "Eurocentrism," Western audiences instinctively regard Chinese art as marginal rather than viewing it from a diverse perspective. More importantly, the current global public opinion system is dominated by the Western world, including the value-evaluation standards for artistic works and the cognitive perspective for interpreting them. However, in the book, Zhao Yiheng, on the form of meaning, Zhao (2022) stated that the theme of Western modernity in the 20th century is modernity; the West first promoted and deepened modernity, then reflected and criticised modernity, and finally tried to replace it with postmodernity. However, at every step, some Western people reference Chinese culture. Zhao's research further proved that modernism is a product and phenomenon of multiculturalism and that the influence of the East cannot be ignored.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Study on Chinese Art Became Contemporary

Studies have shown that Chinese contemporary art has been influenced by Western art since China began modernising, particularly through the reform and opening-up policy (Jin, 2022; Yang, 2022; Zheng, 2019). During that period, Chinese people encountered a variety of Western art forms for the first time. After the cultural shortage, Chinese artists tried to find 'new blood' in Western modern art. Therefore, an art movement characterised by modernism across the country was triggered by the "85 New Wave" (Jin, 2022). "85 New Wave" is one of the most important art movements in Chinese art history. It created a new historical era and took the first step in Chinese contemporary art.

3.2 Study on the Development of Chinese Contemporary Aesthetics

Since the 1980s, artists such as Lv Shengzhong, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, and Gu Wenda have contributed to the emergence of Chinese contemporary aesthetics. However, globalisation has led to cultural homogenisation, challenging traditional aesthetic values (Zheng, 2019; Wu, 2022; Yang, 2022). Scholars argue that this results from a lack of internal logic and the uncritical pursuit of modernity (Carter, 2017; Jin, 2022). In response, researchers advocate reconstructing aesthetics through indigenous culture and academic discourse (Yan, 2023; Shi, 2021; Zhang, 2023). Others emphasise East-West comparisons to identify philosophical roots and cultural differences (Zhou & Zhang, 2014; Xi, 2015; Yang, 2020; Huang, 2020; Yan, 2022). Recent work drawing on Said and Bhabha applies the concepts of "third space" and hybridity to promote intercultural dialogue (Wang, 2020; Li, 2023). Guo (2023) proposes integrating Western "systematic aesthetics" with indigenous "aesthetic culture." Despite these efforts, there remains a lack of research on practical strategies,

global positioning, and comparative frameworks. Localisation efforts—both in methodological exploration and aesthetic orientation—are underdiscussed, which may hinder the future development of Chinese contemporary art.

4.0 Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods, including comparative research and literature reviews on the history of Chinese and Western philosophical aesthetics and their relationship to producing artworks. The research on Chinese philosophical aesthetics focuses on Laozi's aesthetics. Moreover, the research draws on Western aesthetics from the Western classics' theory. Based on this research, the researcher will examine how philosophies impact aesthetics. Then, the researcher will analyse the aesthetic differences and commonalities between the West and China. The Laozi and ancient Greeks' philosophies allow the researcher to understand the fundamental differences and commonalities between Chinese and Western ways of philosophical thinking.

The comparative method is the primary method used in the research phase of identifying the characteristics of aesthetic traditions. The comparative method contains contradictory and dialectical factors (Yang & Fang, 2022). It can be used to analyse the characteristics of different aspects, parts, and levels within the same object, and it can also be used to grasp the same aspects, parts, and levels between different objects (Yang & Fang, 2022). This is "see differences in similarities, see similarities in differences". The purpose of comparative research is to summarise the similarities and differences between objects and to identify the laws among them. However, for this research, the comparison of "see differences in similarities, see similarities in differences" is not just a superficial comparison of the superficial phenomena of things, but an in-depth comparative study of their essential characteristics. Therefore, the standard comparison method is unsuitable for this study, and the comparative approach must be based on the following methodological principles.

4.1 Logical Principle

The logical principle must meet three requirements. First, it requires comparing different objects under the same relationship or conditions, emphasising the comparability of the objects. For example, this research analyses aesthetics from a fundamental perspective, so it is necessary to consider whether the aesthetic trajectories of East and West are in the same era or under the same conditions. Second, it requires a stable and accurate comparison standard. For example, the highest achievements of contemporary Chinese aesthetics can serve as a standard for judging the two sides of the comparison, enabling the researcher to distinguish the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Third, it requires that the conclusion of the comparison be deductive, that is, the conclusion drawn from the comparison is assumed to be a general rule or general principle, and it can be extended to a broader range of related aesthetic phenomena to verify its reliability. For example, this study has proven that Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy have much in common. In the 1930s, Mies Van Der Rohe said 'Less is More'. Mies is the lead practitioner among the 20th-century architects, who stated with extreme clarity and simplicity. 'Less' and 'more' in Western Minimal Art are the same as the 'You' and 'Wu' in Taoist philosophy. 'You' means concrete objects, and 'Wu' could refer to boundless, limitless. 'Wu' allows more imagination. Eastern and Western arts reached the same goal from different perspectives. However, if there are cases found in the facts that are contrary to the above proof, it means that the conclusion does not have the universality of logical deduction.

4.2 Historical Principles

The historical principles must meet two requirements. One is to explain all historical events and social consciousness, including political, philosophical, and aesthetic theories, based on the material production and living conditions of a particular historical period. For example, the commonality in both Chinese and Western aesthetic theories—harmony—needs to be examined and compared under the specific historical and cultural conditions of China and the West, using the principle of historical materialism. The second is to require a vision of historical development. Everything is developing and changing. Reality comes from history and will eventually become history. If the researcher examines aesthetic concepts, categories, and propositions from a historical perspective, they will find that these are not fixed models or connotations but are constantly changing. As it is enriched and updated, the researcher's analysis and understanding should also change accordingly.

4.3 Dialectical Principle

The dialectical principle emphasises the "unity of opposites". When applied to the comparative method, it is reflected in "seeking differences in the similarities, seeking similarities in the differences". It can even seek similarities in the extreme differences and differences in the extreme similarities. This is also the most valuable and meaningful reason for adopting the comparative method in this study. The researchers should use dialectical principles to address the problem of seeking differences amidst similarities and similarities amidst differences, and then simultaneously discover special and universal laws related to aesthetic facts.

4.4 Comprehensive Principle

The Comprehensive Principle means to draw extensive knowledge from philosophy and other specific sciences to assist in the comparative study of aesthetics. It is one-sided to use knowledge in a particular field to assist research. Especially in today's world, where multiple disciplines interpenetrate, comprehensive comparative research is particularly necessary. Therefore, the comparative research in this article not only extends to the study of aesthetics itself but also to philosophy, aesthetic tradition, and art practice.

5.0 Analysis and Findings

5.1 Comparative Analysis of Ancient Greek and Pre-Qin Aesthetics

A comparative study of the origins of Western (ancient Greek) and Chinese (pre-Qin) aesthetic cultures in the same period has significant practical significance for the study of Chinese and Western aesthetics.

Philosophical theory lays the foundation for the formation and development of aesthetic thought. Comparing ancient Greek and pre-Qin aesthetic thought, it is found that both have mature philosophical theoretical foundations. Ancient Greek philosophers were also scientists. They tried to free themselves from the shackles of religion and mythology, to use natural phenomena to understand the world, and to analyse the connections and laws between things in the changing natural world (Wu, 2021). Philosophers in the pre-Qin period deeply discussed issues such as the origin of the universe, the relationship between nature and humanity, and the laws of nature, which helped promote the development of Chinese philosophy. At the same time, both ancient Greek and pre-Qin aesthetics paid special attention to exploring beauty in an ethical context.

However, from a philosophical perspective, ancient Greek aesthetics is an aesthetic discussion at the ontological level (Wu, 2021). It pursues fundamental issues about beauty and is a process of pursuing the truth of beauty. On the contrary, pre-Qin aesthetics focused more on individual survival attitudes and ethical value orientations, and rarely connected aesthetics with rational activities for exploring the world and from the perspective of the essence of the aesthetic system, Ancient Greek aesthetics valued the harmonious beauty of the unity of inner spirit and surface form. In contrast, pre-Qin aesthetics advocated the beauty of the unity of nature and man. In other words, ancient Greece related beauty and truth to achieve unity based on rational and speculative thinking. However, pre-Qin focused on the relationship between beauty and goodness.

Ancient Greek aesthetics advocated seeking truth, so later Western civilisation pursued individual liberation and freedom. Pre-Qin aesthetics advocated social ethical utility, so later Chinese civilisation paid more attention to collectivism. This is the impact of ancient Greek and pre-Qin aesthetics on the ideological value of later generations.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Western Cosmology

Different cosmologies will have different impacts on art, and ancient Chinese aesthetics have constructed a unique cosmology. One of the most significant aspects of Chinese art is Taoism. Its representative figure, Laozi, established a philosophical system centred on the concept of Tao, which holds that "Tao follows nature" (Zhang, 2012). This system is derived from the understanding of the universe and contains rich aesthetic significance. The intuitive influence of this aesthetic on art is reflected in the white spaces in Chinese paintings. The painter adopts the modern technique of forming positive and negative spaces. The white space seems to have patterns, which allow more imagination.

Western cosmology mainly focuses on the ancient Greeks' ontology of the universe. Its mainstream philosophy holds that the universe embodies harmony, quantity, and order, and that the order of mathematics and geometry is the essence of the universe. Ancient Greek philosophers believed that "number" was the source of all things (Zhang, 2012). Aristotle also pointed out that beauty is order, symmetry, and definiteness.

Therefore, when Western artists imitate the external appearance of things, they emphasise expressing the essence and laws of existence through proportion and symmetry, and aim to achieve a thorough understanding of the ontology of beauty, such as the golden ratio. Since the Renaissance, the Reformation, the anti-feudal movement, and the three industrial revolutions, the West has gradually formed a way of thinking characterised by science, logic, and rationality. This kind of value also affects the aesthetics of Western culture, gradually shaping an artistic aesthetic thinking distinct from that of Eastern culture.

5.3 Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Western Ways of Thinking

The way of thinking varies from person to person, and differences in thinking due to cultural background are even more apparent (Sun & Wang, 2003). The essential spirit of Chinese culture is "the unity of nature and man". The idea of "the unity of nature and man" can be traced back to the pre-Qin period in China. Based on the idea of "unity of nature and man", Chinese artists integrate the objective things they see with the subjective things they feel and think when creating. This creative method is what Qi Baishi said: "The beauty of painting lies between similarity and dissimilarity". However, in the West, the "subject-object dichotomy" is the basic mode of thought for artists. "Subject-object dichotomy" could refer to the relationship between human beings and nature. The West regards human beings as the subject of knowledge and views nature as a purely objective world. This kind of thinking makes the Western cultural tradition highly rational and analytical. This is the reason why Western paintings can be exact reproductions of the world.

5.4 Comparative analysis of Laozi's aesthetics and Hegel's aesthetics

Laozi's aesthetic thoughts are the basis for the development of Chinese aesthetics. Hegel's "Aesthetics" played an irreplaceable role in the development of modern Western aesthetics. Comparative analysis of the commonalities and differences between Laozi's aesthetics and Hegel's aesthetics is of great significance in pursuing the essence of aesthetics (Pan et al, 2015). As an important part of traditional Chinese aesthetics, Taoist aesthetics, grounded in Laozi's aesthetics, has significant theoretical significance for the historical development of Chinese aesthetics. Xu Fuguan believes that "Laozi's philosophical thought with 'Tao' as the core contains the true highest artistic spirit of China". Laozi's aesthetic thoughts are inseparable from his philosophical thoughts. Laozi's understanding of beauty emphasises "Yi" (Lu, 2018). The beauty of artistic conception reflects the aesthetic sensibility of the Chinese people and constitutes the highest artistic standard of ancient Chinese culture. Laozi's aesthetic thought of "the Dao models itself on naturalness" complements the social aesthetic theory of "the beauty of harmony" advocated by Chinese Confucianism. Confucianism and Taoism

jointly promoted the development of traditional Chinese aesthetics. At the same time, they also had a significant impact on the aesthetic standards, value orientation, and way of thinking of ancient Chinese aesthetic thought.

Hegel's theory is based on the work of Plato, Aristotle, and others (Pan et al., 2015). Hegel's theory also inherited and innovated German classical aesthetics and classical philosophy. Hegel claimed that beauty is the 'sensuous appearing of the idea', highlighting the unity of sensibility and rationality, subjectivity and objectivity. This also demonstrates the thinking mode of Westerners pursuing a scientific spirit and aesthetic taste. Both Laozi and Hegel are philosophers who promoted the development of aesthetics. Comparative analysis of the commonalities and differences between Laozi's aesthetics and Hegel's aesthetics is of great significance for pursuing the essence of beauty and promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West.

6.0 Conclusions

Although aesthetics has become an independent discipline for a shorter period than philosophy, the aesthetic consciousness has already existed since the beginning of philosophy. Due to the geographical environment and cultural background, Western and Eastern philosophical aesthetics have different expressions, such as cosmology, values, and ways of thinking. However, they also have some commonalities. For example, Taoism pursues harmony between humanity and nature through "Tao", and Pythagoras achieves harmony through the harmony of numbers. Although Chinese and Western aesthetics develop at different paces, the aesthetic ideas contained in ancient philosophy have certain commonalities. Therefore, identifying the characteristics of Chinese and Western cultural aesthetic traditions is of great significance to reshaping contemporary aesthetics and creating artistic works.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This paper compares Western and Chinese philosophical aesthetics, revealing how ancient cosmologies inform today's discourse. It supports the development of culturally rooted Chinese aesthetics and encourages East–West dialogue in global art and design.

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