

# *The Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Western Art on the Expression of Aesthetic Concept of "Characteristics"—Read Philosophy of Art*

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**Abstract:** Art works are usually presented in front of us as a combination of subjective and objective products. However, in different geographical locations, Chinese and Western ways of art expression are also different. The West always advocates realistic and imitative art, while Chinese art pursues the expression of freehand and artistic conception, while Chinese and Western countries show their artistic characteristics through different ways of expression. In his book *Philosophy of Art*, Taine put forward the aesthetic concept of "characteristic" as the standard to judge the value of art. There are both differences and similarities between Chinese and Western artistic expressions in the expression of "characteristic" aesthetic concepts of artistic works. This article will analyze the differences between Chinese and Western paintings, sculptures and aesthetic concepts, and analyze their similarities from the perspective of painting theory and non-imitative art. Comparative analysis from time to time also enables us to look at Chinese and Western art from a broader perspective and judge the value hierarchy of art with a wiser vision.

## 1. Introduction

As human society progresses, art, as a unique cultural phenomenon and aesthetic activity, has consistently been a part of human civilization, serving as a significant component of human spiritual life. In the vast expanse of art, both Chinese and Western art possess their own distinct characteristics, exhibiting both the brilliance of diverse approaches and the enlightening aspects of mutual inspiration. Both Chinese and Western art have their unique methods of expressing the "characteristic" aesthetic concept in various forms such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and more. By reading the book *"Philosophy of Art"*, we can gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western art concerning the aesthetic concept of "characteristics", thereby better appreciating the allure of both Chinese and Western art.

This article, through the lens of the book *"Philosophy of Art"*, will explore the differences and similarities in the expression of the "characteristic" aesthetic concept in Chinese and Western art. Firstly, we will provide an overview of the "characteristic" aesthetic concept in Chinese and Western art, then analyze the expression techniques and the cultural implications behind them in painting, sculpture, architecture, and more. Finally, we will discuss how Chinese and Western art

can mutually learn, integrate, and innovate in the context of globalization.

## **2. Analysis of the aesthetic concept of "characteristic" in Philosophy of Art**

Philosophy of Art, written by the 19th century art theorist Taine, is a classic work in the history of art. The book is based on three aspects: the definition of art, the generation and development of art, and the value evaluation of artworks. The book is not only detailed, clear and clear, but also full of enthusiasm, full of images, rich colors, and no general theoretical articles of dull problems. After reading the last part of the book, I felt quite a lot. Taine judged the value of artworks. The "characteristic" theory he pointed out is the standard for judging the value of artworks. In order to express the essence or main features of things, artists must exert their creativity, and should choose the real things and choose the main features of things to express. From the basic point of view that art expresses the main characteristics of things, Taine defines the yardstick to measure art. It is pointed out that artistic works should express the most important characteristics of things, the beneficial characteristics of things, and the concentration degree of the effect of the characteristics. Taine's characteristic theory has a strong materialistic tendency, which has a great influence on the later typical theory.

Although Taine's characteristic theory is derived under the background of Western culture, it can also be seen in Chinese art. Western art has always advocated realism and been pursuing realistic art. Imitation of reality can also be seen in Chinese art. Gu Kaizhi's theory of "writing God in Form" in Wei and Jin Dynasties emphasized the grasp of the physical characteristics of human figures. The two kinds of Chinese and Western art are conveyed for the reproduction of the truth. In addition, Chinese and Western art also has the reality of expression to reflect its "characteristic" aesthetic concept, and the reality of expression is reflected in art because the author is not only a pure imitation of the real world, but also adds subjective emotions to express art through his own observation and reprocessing. The most classic Western painting ends with Ingres of the academic school in the 19th century. A painting "Big Lady in the Palace" is the ultimate expression of the beauty of the female body, and it is also the peak of realism. Later, realism and Impressionism developed gradually broke the barrier of realism and turned to the analysis of the form language of painting. Impressionist painters use the principle of light and color shown in the sun to express the truth of nature. Then, post-Impressionist Van Gogh also uses subjective paintings to express his own emotions, including hopeful wheat fields and schizophrenic self-portraits. Such emotional expression is also a form of expression of "characteristic" aesthetics in artistic works.

In short, Taine's "characteristic" aesthetics has a profound expression in Chinese and Western art, and also has a profound impact on the later art theory and art criticism.

## **3. Comparison of "characteristic" aesthetics of Chinese and Western art**

After reading the aesthetic theory of "features" in Taine's "Philosophy of Art", I have a deeper understanding and reflection on Chinese and Western art. Chinese and Western art has never been short of conveying aesthetic concepts of "features" in artistic works, and there are differences and similarities between them in terms of representation and performance.

### **3.1 The difference between Chinese and Western art**

#### **3.1.1 Forms of expression of aesthetic characteristics of Chinese and Western painting**

Painting has always been one of the most classic and original forms of expression in art and has been preserved and developed. Chinese and Western paintings also have different ways of

expressing "characteristics" in paintings. The West emphasizes realism, representation and imitation. Chinese painting conveys "characteristics" through the expression of reality, more subjective thinking of the author, "characteristics" in painting is a clear expression of subjective imagery. Literati painting accounts for a high proportion of Chinese painting. Chinese literati pay attention to self-cultivation and spiritual communication, usually expressing their noble character and cultivation through painting, and usually reflecting the theme of art with the truth of expression. The Song Dynasty literati paintings often with plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum four gentlemen to reflect, Wen Tong liked to paint bamboo, Zheng Banqiao painting bamboo theory, from the eyes of the bamboo to the heart of the bamboo. The simple depiction in Su Shi's painting "Strange Stone Map of Dead wood" reflects the profound skill, and the performance of strange stone is like a snail, which should prove Su Shi's words, "If the painting only emphasizes the similar shape, then what is the difference with children learning to draw?" Another example is the Ming painter Xu Wei's life bleak, painting as life, a "ink grape picture" brush, flowing, integrated, this painting is the painter's emotion when painting the knot of the pen. The author is thinking about the hardships this grape has gone through to get here, which is also a portrayal of his life. Western painting usually expresses the characteristics of painting by reproducing the reality. As early as in the West, the paintings on the walls of Pompeii have broken the two-dimensional space, and there has been a three-dimensional space fresco expression. The three masters of the Renaissance, represented by Leonardo Da Vinci, was not only a scientist, inventor, etc., but also an artist. He carefully studied and dissected the human body so as to draw a picture closer to the real person. In the later period, the Baroque style, the Academy, etc., broke the tradition of realism and moved toward expression. Therefore, the way of expression of characteristics is different in China and the West. In China, it is demonstrated by the reality of representation, while in the West, it is demonstrated by the reality of representation.<sup>[1]</sup>

### 3.1.2 Manifestation of characteristics of Chinese and Western sculpture works

In terms of sculpture art, the West pays more attention to this artistic attainments. Sculpture is usually an art independent of architecture in the West, while Chinese sculpture and architecture are inseparable, often "shaping and building together". Western sculpture is usually detailed and representational. Western sculpture has always used stone as raw materials, and ancient Greek sculpture is the peak of Western sculpture art attainments. Each sculptural body seems to be endowed with life, with the characteristics of God and man, and each sculptural body has the emotions and characters of characters: joy, anger, kindness, greed and so on. For example, the 17th century Italian sculptor Bernini is a representative of the Baroque style. In his work "The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa", the expression of the nun is the most vivid. It can be seen that the whole face of the nun presents an "ecstasy" form, slightly painful, but as if to ascend to heaven, depicting the pain and joy in specific place. It is also this work that shows the super level of Bernini. In addition, sculpture in the classical period is also the peak of realistic and representational sculpture. Chinese sculpture is completely different from Western sculpture, Chinese sculpture in the rough, simple expression, but also like the general expression of literati freehand painting. Han Dynasty sculpture is the most typical representative. It is not a realistic expression like that in the West. It is mostly carved according to the most natural form of stone by means of round carving, relief carving and line carving. Stone carving is thick and deep, bold and bold, concise and deep, and contains the aesthetic feeling that less is more. As long as the stone carving tightly grasps the most obvious characteristics of the animal it wants to depict according to the original shape of the stone, it shows the most vivid performance object, and the images and dynamics such as lying horse and prancing horse are more vivid. China and the West use different ways of expression to reflect the feature aesthetics, and this difference makes us have a broader perspective to observe the feature expression of artworks.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 3.1.3 Comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetic concepts

Chinese aesthetic concept mainly emphasizes the scene outside the scene and the thing outside the object, not only pays attention to the performance of the subject, but also does not forget the portrayal and construction of the surrounding environment, the performance of the so-called virtual reality. As Liu Xizai said in "Art concept": "White Bi account for the BI above the line, is known to be on the pole of the text, just the true color." Therefore, the Chinese architecture, next to the main house, there should be natural and lovely gardens; Chinese painting should be developed from golden landscape to ink landscape; Chinese poetry composition, to pay attention to the "gorgeous extreme, attributed to the plain." The characteristics of Chinese art are not only limited to the subject itself, but also reflect the subject aesthetic characteristics through the construction of the surrounding environment. For example, the expression of freehand and imaginary in painting: in the Northern Song Dynasty, the northern landscape painting school followed the tradition of "obtaining the source of the heart" on the basis of emphasizing "learning from nature", creating the meaning of the scene and integrating personal emotions. Southern painters developed the wave and ink landscape, and their creation tendency began to change from objective to subjective, making the concept of "meaning" the most important factor in the mountain surface. Ouyang Xiu said: "Depression indifferent, this difficult meaning, the painting of the road may not know also." Therefore, it is slow to fly away, and it is easy to see what is near, while idle and quiet, it is difficult to form interest far away." The literati painters regard depression and indifference, desolation and cold and simple as the highest boundary of landscape painting. In the late southern period, landscape painting paid attention to the creation of artistic conception and emotional development, and the painting method was concise. At the same time, the rising ink painting of flowers and horses also emphasized the expression of emotions and subjective emotions. The deepest connotation of aesthetic concept is philosophical connotation, while Western civilization is promoted by Greek civilization and Sibleian civilization, and the artistic expression of ancient Greek civilization has been incisive in the presentation of sculpture, while under the influence of Christian civilization, it is manifested as the cosmic view of celestial bodies, and also consists of the cosmic view of supergod and the small universe of human body. The depiction of the human body has thus become the best object of expression in the West, which has something in common with the human body sculpted by ancient Greek and the human body in the small universe of Hebrew civilization. The Western aesthetic concept is specific and intuitive feeling, and the technique is more important, which is different from the construction of the aesthetic conception in China.

## 3.2 The same expression of Chinese and Western art

### 3.2.1 Chinese and Western painting theory concept

Even though China and the West are in different geographical locations and cultural backgrounds, they have something in common in the superstructure of painting theory, that is, both Chinese and Western art have the pursuit of imitation of nature and have similarities in painting theory. The Chinese painter Gu Kaizhi's theory of "writing God in form" is the best proof. How to express a person's best expression or spirit spirit requires a fine grasp or control of the body. "Conveying the vivid portrayal is in the blockage" also emphasizes that to express the characteristics of a character, it is necessary to emphasize the depiction of the eyes and emphasize the imitation of the truth. In addition, Sheikh put forward the "six methods" in the book of Ancient Paintings, from the expression of the inner spirit of the object, the expression of the artist's emotion and evaluation of the object, to the use of the pen to depict the shape, structure and color of the object, as well as the composition and imitation of the work, in short, all aspects of creation and

circulation are summarized, which is the best evidence for imitating reality. The painting method of "knowing things" of the Song Dynasty style painting is the best representative of realism, especially the flower and bird photo represented by Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty. However, Western aesthetic theorists have always emphasized that the characteristics of artworks are expressed through imitation and reproduction of reality. For example, Pythagoras believed that number is the source of all things, that is, all things are harmonious numbers. The nature of all things is constituted according to certain quantitative relations or proportions of things. He also pointed out that beauty is harmony and proportion, and that all aesthetic ideas can be expressed in ancient Greek sculpture. Plato's "imitation theory" has milestone significance in Western art theory, and it is this view that has become the representative feature of Western art. He believes that literature and art are essentially imitations of ideas, and he believes that "ideas" are the ultimate root of the world, the existence of all things in nature is the result of imitations of ideas, and literature is the result of imitations of the natural world. Literature and art are like the shadow of the shadow, and the "reality" of the idea is separated by two layers. Later, Vasari's imitation of nature: Vasari's Biography of Famous People is regarded as the first work of Western art history. This work not only presents a spectacular picture of the art history of the Italian Renaissance for later generations, but also provides a rather systematic theory of visual art. In this art theory, imitation is a very important concept. Imitation of nature and imitation of masters can be said to be Vasari's two lines for "imitation." For Vasari, imitating nature does not mean copying nature but "choosing and processing nature according to policy and judgment"; Imitation master is by no means blind mechanical imitation, but according to their own specific qualities and conditions, selective imitation, and organic integration of different factors to form their own style. The concept of imitation can also be said to be a core concept of Western classical art theory. It can be seen that Chinese and Western painting theories have something in common. They both express the reality of art through imitation and reproduction of reality.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **3.2.2 The characteristic form expression of imitation art in Central and West Africa**

Architecture is often called the unity of utility and art. Architecture is not an art for imitation, but a subjective creation based on science. However, Chinese and Western art have something in common with the expression of architectural features. The Chinese and Western architecture in each era is the epitome of history, and the architecture is also endowed with a strong spirit of The Times. Confucian ritual architecture in Chinese architecture is the most classic representative of Confucian architecture. Confucian Temple architecture has a clear distribution pattern, usually composed of Chaobi, Lingxing Gate, panchi, Dacheng Gate, Dacheng Hall, library pavilion, etc., which is the integration of temples and learning. The color painting decoration in Confucian Temple is particularly exquisite, not only flowers and plants, but also humanities and various antique appliances. This is closely related to the pursuit of Confucian literati, which is the characteristic expression of Chinese architecture. The historical context of the western architecture of each era is also endowed with the spirit of The Times, and the ancient Greek architecture is the gel expression of the ancient Greek spirit, simple, generous and tall: Satenon Temple is the most prominent, it is back west to east, rectangular, standing on 3 layers of steps, the temple is made of white marble, the whole temple by chiseled grooves 46 marble columns up to 10.3 meters around, the flawless white marble to express respect for the goddess Athena, but also take the Doric style of 8 columns. This building is closely related to people's simple life and character. The Gothic architecture that emerged in the West in the 12th century is also a microcosm of that era, its overall style is tall, lean and pointed. With excellent architectural skills, it expresses the strong emotions of mystery, pathos and sublimity, which has a great influence on other art in later generations. Therefore, the expression of this non-imitative art of architecture in different geographical environments is shown

through The Times in which each building is located, with a strong spirit of The Times.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that there are both differences and ideas in the "characteristic" aesthetics in the evaluation of artistic value between China and the West. The differences of "characteristic" aesthetics are shown from paintings, sculptures and aesthetic concepts respectively, and the similarities of "characteristic" aesthetics are shown from the aspects of painting theory and architectural art. It is also the contrast between Chinese and Western artistic characteristics that enables us to explore the expression of artistic "characteristics" from a broader perspective. The most profound similarity between Chinese and Western art lies in that they are both influenced by a certain environment of artistic creation. Art is the product of superstructure, just as the viewpoint expressed in *Philosophy of Art*: both are the product of race, era and environment.

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