

Exploring the Application of the Aesthetics of Harmony and Balance in the Dongzi Culture Museum

Liu Wujiu^a, Wahiza Abdul Wahid^{b,*}, Noor Azly Mohamed Ali^c

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

^a503234971@qq.com, ^bwahiz433@uitm.edu.my, ^cnoora568@uitm.edu.my

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Aesthetics of Harmony and Balance, Museum, Exhibition Design

Abstract: In the current era, museums serve as crucial hubs for disseminating cultural confidence among the general public. It is both necessary and urgent to delve into the application of the aesthetics of harmony and balance within the context of museum exhibition spaces as an entry point to traditional classical culture. The researcher begins with an analysis and elucidation of the aesthetics of harmony and balance, examining their manifestation and aesthetic value from the perspectives of ancient classical culture, classical gardens, and scholarly thought. This serves as a foundation for the application of exhibition techniques. Using qualitative research methods, the researcher conducts case studies on the exhibition spaces of Suzhou museums. The Confucian concept of harmony and balance is used as an entry point for the design of these museum spaces, integrating design concepts of exhibition spaces, and providing a design proposal for the Dongzi Cultural Museum. This study represents an exploratory attempt to apply the design philosophy of harmony and balance in practical design scenarios. The results involve incorporating the aesthetic principles of harmony and balance into the exhibition design scheme of the Dongzi Cultural Museum.

1. Introduction

Under the strategic guidance of national and central cultural confidence, the researcher seeks to identify the core of Confucian aesthetic thought, and apply it to exhibition design. From conceptualization to the integration of exhibition space and content, the research aims to infuse the essence of these aesthetics, exploring the intersection of Chinese culture and exhibition design. The aesthetics of harmony and balance is a pivotal concept in Confucian culture, rooted in the doctrine of the mean. Its implications are characterized by a balance of firmness and gentleness, a warm and elegant harmony of aesthetic elements, embodying the early dialectical thinking of the ancients. It emphasizes the harmonious unity of subjective and objective, man and nature, emotion and reason, and various aesthetic ideas, providing a delightful and clear aesthetic pleasure. “Dongzi,” an important figure in Confucian thought, exemplified the philosophy of the doctrine of the mean throughout his life. Consequently, the design and layout of the Dongzi Cultural Museum should be based on this philosophy. Therefore, in the design of the Dongzi Cultural Museum, “the doctrine of

the mean” serves as the thematic design philosophy, employing its aesthetic principle, the aesthetics of harmony and balance, as the expressive method.

In summary, the goal of this research is to explore the integration of Chinese culture and exhibition design. The objective is to provide an exhibition design scheme for the Dongzi Cultural Museum. This study aims to elucidate the relationship between exhibition content and design, indicating future trends and deeper research paths in exhibition design.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, with China’s rising status on the global stage, the application of Chinese art in museums has encountered unprecedented development opportunities. This phenomenon not only showcases the rich diversity of Chinese art but also mirrors the pursuit of enhancing cultural confidence and international influence. In global art dialogues, contemporary Chinese artists have not only exhibited modern interpretations of traditional aesthetics but also expressed profound reflections on current social and cultural changes [1]. The trend of displaying Chinese art in international museums highlights its cultural value and reflects the interaction and influence between Chinese art and the global art market.

The term “harmony and balance” originates from the Confucian classic “The Doctrine of the Mean”: “When the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy have not yet arisen, it is called the state of equilibrium; when these feelings arise and are all in due measure, it is called the state of harmony”. This can be interpreted as: when emotions have not yet emerged, it is equilibrium; when emotions are expressed appropriately, it is harmony. Scholars have various interpretations of harmony and balance, but they generally converge on the ideas of inclusiveness, appropriateness, and impartiality. This concept deeply influences Chinese culture, permeating various fields. Ancient Chinese thought holds that all things in the universe can be divided into the dual forces of yin and yang: yang represents firmness, while yin represents gentleness. The ideal state in ancient Chinese art is the harmonious combination of these forces. This balance of firmness and gentleness epitomizes the ideal state of harmony and balance.

Dongzi, as a prominent Confucian figure following Confucius and Mencius, advocated for “rejecting all other schools and exclusively respecting Confucianism,” making Confucian thought the mainstream ideology for future generations. His life exemplified the behavior championed by Confucian thought. In terms of virtue, it is called the Doctrine of the Mean. The “Analects of Confucius” states: “Gentle yet dignified, authoritative yet not harsh, respectful yet at ease.” This describes the moral completeness of the Doctrine of the Mean. In terms of temperament, it is called harmony and balance, which is the highest aesthetic standard. The “Analects of Confucius” praises the poem “Guan Ju” for being “joyful but not indulgent, sorrowful but not excessive,” epitomizing the aesthetic state of harmony and balance [2]. Therefore, using the Doctrine of the Mean as the design theme, with the aesthetic thought of harmony and balance as the expressive method, is highly appropriate for the exhibition design of the Dongzi Cultural Museum.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology to deeply explore the integration of Chinese art with museum exhibitions, with the aim of proposing an exhibition design for the Dongzi Culture Museum. The Suzhou Museum were selected as the subjects of this study due to their unique and representative integration of Chinese art and museum exhibition. Data collection was implemented through multiple methods, including but not limited to document analysis, and archival research. Additionally, public reports, internal documents, meeting records, and media releases were included in the analysis to provide a comprehensive background and historical context for the cases. This

multi-source data collection approach helps to enhance the reliability and richness of the research data. Through the case study method, this research provides a unique perspective on the deep integration of Chinese art and museum exhibitions. It reveals key factors and processes influencing this integration, offering significant guidance for the exhibition design of the Dongzi Culture Museum.

4. Case Study of Suzhou Museum

In 2006, the new Suzhou Museum was inaugurated, occupying approximately 10,000 square meters. The exhibition spaces and public areas of the Suzhou Museum are seamlessly integrated, evoking the essence of Suzhou gardens throughout the entire museum. Suzhou Museum is a quintessential example of integrating traditional aesthetics with modern design. This museum features rock formations and a shimmering pond, encapsulating the essence of Suzhou's natural beauty. As show as Figure 1, the entire museum is designed around this central pond, with exhibition halls arranged to encircle it. Visitors have the option to either explore the courtyard and enjoy the scenery or follow the corridor to view the artifacts. The garden features within the Suzhou Museum are scaled-down versions of actual Suzhou gardens. The Taihu rocks and rockeries are simplified into smaller formations, while bamboo shadows and pine trees are visible only through the floral windows or other framing elements. This “small yet grand” approach aims to evoke the essence of Suzhou gardens.

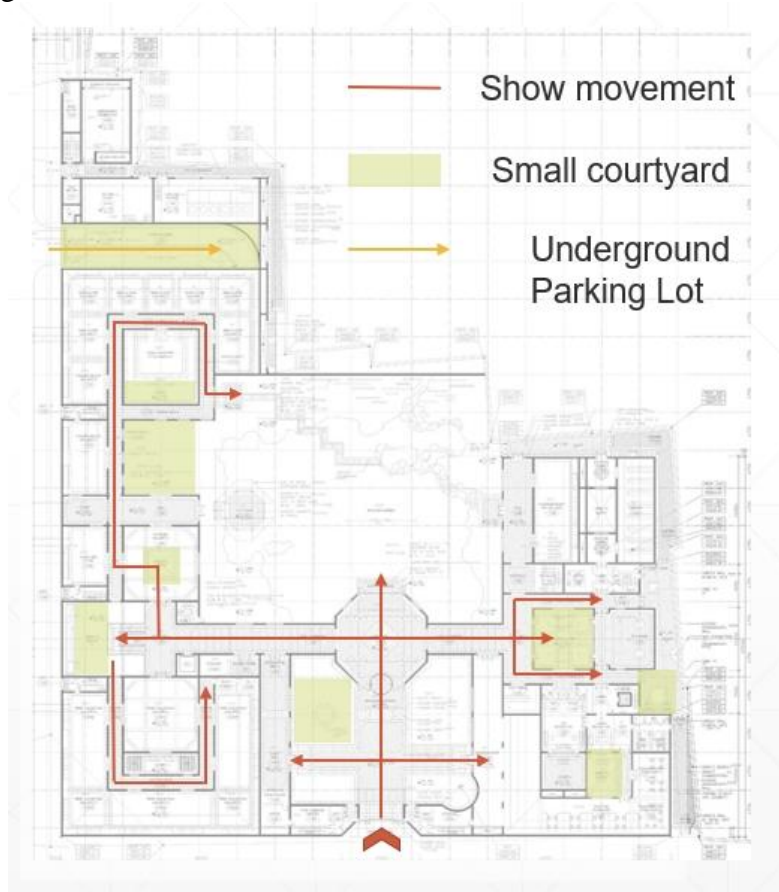


Figure 1. Sezhou Museum.

The largest feature is the central pond, reflecting architect I. M. Pei's interpretation of Suzhou gardens. The water feature, as the largest man-made element, is ingeniously designed from both modern and classical perspectives [3]. Firstly, the water feature's flatness, level with the ground,

ensures it does not obstruct views or dominate the space. This subtle integration prevents it from overshadowing other elements. Secondly, water holds a significant place in classical gardens. In Ming dynasty garden designer Ji Cheng's "The Craft of Gardens", he states: "An empty pavilion under the shade of phoenix trees, a clear pond reflecting the moon." This highlights the importance of water in creating serene and contemplative spaces. The central pond in the Suzhou Museum serves as a highlight of the museum's public space, embodying these poetic ideals.

This design not only fulfills the functions of a modern museum but also captures the essence of a classical garden. The exhibition and public spaces complement each other, with every aspect—landscaping techniques, the scale of garden features, and the relationship between primary and secondary spaces—executed with precision. The balance achieved in this design is a perfect example of "harmony and balance" in museum design, making the Suzhou Museum a model for integrating traditional Chinese aesthetics with contemporary exhibition design.

5. Findings

This study's case analysis reveals several key themes and patterns crucial for understanding the complexities of integrating Chinese culture into museum exhibition design for the Dongzi Culture Museum. The aesthetics of harmony and balance is a core element of ancient philosophical thought, embodying principles such as "joy without excess, sorrow without injury," "the interplay of yin and yang," and "appropriate and fitting."

The entrance door, measuring 4 meters in both width and height, is neither imposing nor diminutive. To enhance the spatial perception, two angled partition walls are placed behind the entrance at 30-degree angles, narrowing the visitor's line of sight and increasing the perceived volume of the entrance. These angled walls also create an inviting gesture for visitors to enter. Adjacent to these partitions are two exhibition walls set at 35-degree angles, each featuring a hexagonal leak window. These windows offer glimpses into another exhibition hall, with plants serving as semi-transparent dividers to add depth.

The second exhibition hall uses the theme of "moon" to reflect the period of Dong Zhongshu's life during his ten-year exile, characterized by both serene freedom and solitary isolation. The moon is a recurring motif in traditional Chinese culture, symbolizing various emotions and states of mind. At the end of the hall, a recreated scene illustrates Dong Zhongshu's leisurely lifestyle during his exile. Despite his setbacks, he did not succumb to despair but rather embraced the rare tranquility. This immersive setup includes a bamboo grove under soft moonlight, gentle rain shimmering in the air, a light breeze, and the subtle scent of wine. This creates a vivid atmosphere that enables visitors to personally experience the leisure and natural elegance, understanding Dong Zhongshu's life and the "sorrow without injury" essence of harmony and balance.

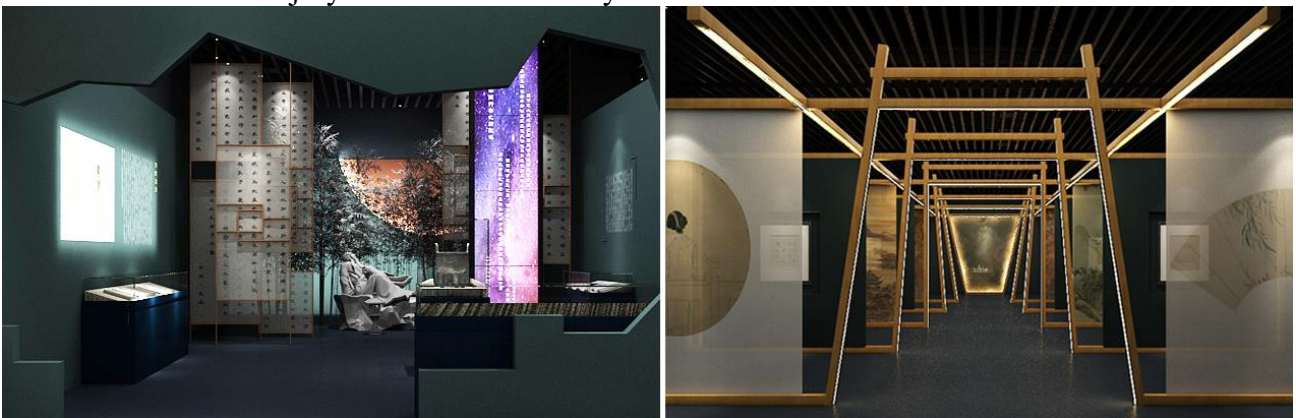


Figure 2. Dongzi Museum.

The final exhibition hall represents the last stage of Dong Zhongshu's life. Having gone through various life experiences and achieved his ambitions, he ultimately returned to simplicity, reaching a state of harmony and balance. As shown in Figure 2. In this hall, the concept of a passageway or corridor is prominently featured, symbolizing the long journey of life. At the end of the corridor, there is a semi-transparent screen that creates a blurry, indistinct view of what lies beyond. This design choice enhances the perspective, deepens the sense of space, and employs the "small to large" technique, creating a dreamlike space that aligns well with the exhibition's content. The sides of the corridor feature alternating semi-transparent partitions and display walls, creating an ethereal, dreamlike atmosphere. This design element evokes the feeling of reviewing one's life in a dream, while also providing a visual barrier that further expands the sense of space. The use of linear lighting adds a modern touch, expressing how Dong Zhongshu's thoughts transcend time and reach us today. As visitors proceed to the exit, they find themselves back at the starting point of the museum, forming a complete circle. This design symbolizes a return to simplicity and the harmonious integration of yin and yang, ultimately achieving the aesthetics of harmony and balance.

Reviewing the entire museum's exhibition space, it follows the timeline of Dong Zhongshu's life, with major achievements and events serving as key nodes to construct a complete narrative. The spatial design draws inspiration from classical Chinese gardens, employing techniques such as framed views, borrowed scenery, and separated views to create a sense of vastness in a limited space. As visitors proceed to the exit, they find themselves back at the entrance, symbolizing the harmonious integration of yin and yang. All of these elements are grounded in the concept of "the aesthetics of harmony and balance", which serves as both the starting point and the core design principle. This unifying aesthetic ensures that all parts of the museum complement each other, creating a cohesive and harmonious exhibition space. The design embodies the state of "the aesthetics of harmony and balance," making it an integral part of the visitor experience.

6. Conclusions

Currently, museums are evolving into multi-experiential contexts, combining traditional cultural experiences (such as learning and education) with other emotional and unusual experiences (entertainment, enjoyment, social interaction, etc.). The integration of Chinese art and exhibitions in museums has the potential to create added value, attract tourists, and increase visitors' curiosity. This study aids in utilizing Chinese art and technology to guide exhibition formats, enhancing visitor experience and satisfaction, and thereby reshaping museum exhibition and tour models. This implies reconfiguring and innovating exhibition content within the context of Chinese art, as well as integrating technological and organizational aspects.

The exploration and study of museum exhibition spaces have only recently begun. Both theory and practice have a long way to go to contribute to the promotion of national culture and the establishment of cultural confidence.

References

- [1] Guo, L., & Sun, H. (2023). *The application of traditional Chinese art in modern museums*. *Art Exploration*, 24(3), 112-128.
- [2] Zhou, J. (2023). *A Comparison of Aesthetic Thoughts of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi and Zhuangzi*. *Chinese Taoism* (2), 4.
- [3] Zhu, L. (2023). *The "Quaint" View of Afro-Time in Chinese Art*. *Journal of Peking University: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition*, 60(1), 14.