

# Aesthetic Anthropology Research Based on National Aesthetic Experience\*

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**Abstract**—National aesthetic experience is an important dimension of aesthetic anthropology research. Aesthetic anthropology should focus on the combination of theoretical criticism and empirical research on national aesthetic experience in research methods. The experience is placed in the specific national aesthetic practice and aesthetic context to explore its inner meaning. In the goal orientation, attention should be paid to the historical and realistic research of the national aesthetic experience.

**Keywords**—national aesthetic experience; aesthetic anthropology; theoretical criticism; empirical research; aesthetic practice; aesthetic context

## I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Wang Jie, an expert in aesthetic anthropology, pointed out: "The aesthetic experience is not a clear and conscious social phenomenon. It has a strong subjectivity and affection, and is directly related to the undetermined desire of chaos. The most fundamental determination of the value of aesthetic experience lays in the constraints of reality, including the position of the subject, the complex contradiction of the actual relationship, and the deep memory of history and ethnic groups. In fact, the same aesthetic object can produce different aesthetic fields and different projections of desire, which means different aesthetic experiences." [1] Aesthetic anthropology should not only pay attention to the combination of theoretical criticism and empirical research of national aesthetic experience, but also put the national aesthetic experience into the specific national aesthetic practice and aesthetic context to explore its inner meaning, as well as focusing on the historical and realistic nature of the study of national aesthetic experience.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS: COMBINATION OF THEORETICAL CRITICISM AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

"It is undeniable that anthropology is a discipline that the West has gradually developed in the process of pursuing its colonization power and collecting non-Western cultures

associated with the West. At the beginning of its creation, it undoubtedly has a strong Western centralist ideology." [2] In the perspective of Western classical anthropology, there are two paths of research practice. One is to examine, study, and interpret non-Western culture as a pure "thing", and the second is to use non-Western culture as a reference for the imaginary "other" and self-image confirmation. These two research practices are not the rich and unique aesthetic reality of the Western society and the fresh daily aesthetic experience. There are inevitably various misunderstandings and aesthetic biases. Modern anthropologists Firth and Levi-Strauss have repeatedly criticized this. Firth believes that anthropology is essentially "the illegitimate son of colonialism", and it is the Western colonialist expansion tool and the self-centralism image to confirm the cultural colonial behavior. Levi-Strauss also pointed out that the early anthropology was the "daughter" of the Western colonial violent era, and "the other" in the research field were undoubtedly the cultural representation of the colonial peddling of Western colonial culture. It can be seen that anthropological research was originally produced as a "translation" of the transformation of "other culture" into Western cultures, no matter whether it is anthropological issues or the expression of terms is full of Western fixed thinking bias.

For a long time, anthropology's aesthetic experience of non-Western peoples is only the aesthetic experience in the eyes of Western anthropologists or the aesthetic experience in the field of Western anthropology. "As early as the 1920s, Blake strongly advocated that scholars should consider local aesthetics when engaging in field work on non-Western cultures. However, until today, in the field of anthropology, this aesthetic theme is still generally considered to be a neglected topic. As Forrest proposed, 'although anthropology's interest in aesthetics is long-standing, the attempts to advance such research are extremely rare'. He believes that although the world of daily life 'is full of aesthetic experience... anthropology only captures the surface of the most interesting field of human behavior'. Forrest added that precisely because 'the aesthetic field is so vast and omnipresent', aesthetics 'should be a major concern for anthropology'. Nevertheless, relatively speaking, anthropology and the branch of disciplines that focus on the relevant art history of non-Western art still ignore the study

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of aesthetics." [3] Therefore, in the modern context, the establishment of aesthetic anthropology or anthropological aesthetics undoubtedly has important value and significance for deepening the study of national aesthetic experience. The aesthetic anthropological intervention and the study of the national aesthetic experience, which combines theoretical criticism and empirical research, will bring about changes in the anthropology and aesthetics itself and the researcher's thinking and rationality, and will even affect the way Western society understands the aesthetic experience of non-Western nations.

Van Damme said: "The theme of aesthetics is closely related to empirical research, and this constitutes a complex and subtle topic, both from an epistemological and methodological point of view." [4] For the aesthetic experience research, the unique academic quality of aesthetic anthropology determines that its research on aesthetic experience no longer pursues the abstract "beauty essence" as traditional philosophical research, and no longer goes like traditional anthropology that people will do their utmost to inspect and list the various national issues of "barbaric national experience". Instead, it is guided by aesthetic theory and relies on concrete and fresh national aesthetic experience to comprehensively examine and study the generation, construction, characterization and modernization of aesthetic experience. That is to say, the study of aesthetic experience in the field of aesthetic anthropology should not only focus on the universal study of human aesthetic experience, but also pay attention to the study of the particularity of different national aesthetic experiences, as well as combining the general academic theory of aesthetic experience with the formation conditions, construction mechanism and representational form of specific national aesthetic experience, thus avoiding the hollowness of aesthetic experience theory research and the dispersion of different national aesthetic experiences. In the field of aesthetic anthropology, the aesthetic experience does not originate from the innate "mentality", "mind" and "emotion", nor does it stem from the "aesthetic judgment" in aesthetic self-discipline. Aesthetic experience is generated in human specific social practice and aesthetic practice activities. Aesthetic experience is not an abstract and unpredictable "idea", nor is it a trivial daily life and artifact. Aesthetic experience is a comprehensive product of the aesthetic, aesthetic, aesthetic and aesthetic ideals that human beings have accumulated in the process of understanding the world and transforming the world. The aesthetic experience is concise in the specific art form and is characterized by different cultural and artistic forms. The aesthetic experience is generated in the specific aesthetic subject and aesthetic context. Different ethnic nationalities and ethnic groups have different aesthetic experiences. Different aesthetic experiences may also be formed in the same ethnic nationality and ethnic group in different aesthetic context. The same aesthetic experience may accumulate in different art forms, and an art form may condense different aesthetic experiences. For example, in the minorities of southwestern China, because there is no national language, the aesthetic experience of the history of national development is generally condensed in the culture and art of costumes, songs,

etc. In addition to documenting the aesthetic experience of the development of the nation, costumes and song art may also condense the aesthetic experience of the ancestor worship, totem worship, and ecological aesthetics of the nation. On the one hand, aesthetic anthropology will summarize and reflect on the holistic, universal and difference of national aesthetic experience from the height of theoretical criticism, and understand the characteristics of human aesthetic experience from the perspective of human development as a whole; on the other hand, aesthetic anthropology must seek out specific cultural phenomena through in-depth field investigations to confirm the characteristics of aesthetic experience, especially through in-depth investigation and research on some non-mainstream and marginal minority aesthetic cultures, to explore the common poetic aesthetic experience and poetic wisdom of human society, and demonstrate the group, particularity and difference of national aesthetic experience by comparing the cultural representations of the aesthetic experiences of different nationalities and ethnic groups.

### III. INTERPRETING DIMENSIONS: EXPLORING THE INNER IMPLICATIONS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN AESTHETIC PRACTICE AND AESTHETIC CONTEXT

Marx pointed out that the history of human development as a whole is essentially the history of human labor practice. The development process of human history is the practical process of human beings understanding the world and transforming the world. Therefore, the mystery of exploring the history of human development and human self-generation cannot be searched from Hegel's absolute spirit, nor can it be pursued from Feuerbach's abstract world. Human beings can only find the key to understanding all social history in their own practice. The generation of the aesthetic experience of human society is also generated by human beings in the process of understanding the world and transforming the world. Hermeneutic aesthetician Gadamer pointed out that artistic experience is a manifestation of the question of truth. "The art of the Pantheon is not a timeless present that presents itself to purely aesthetic consciousness, but a collective achievement of the realization of its own human spirit. Therefore, aesthetic experience is also a way of self-understanding." [5] The accepting esthetician Jaus also pointed out that aesthetic experience is not the beauty of metaphysics, but an aesthetic practice that human beings get in the process of aesthetic communication with the world. Through aesthetic experience, human beings can not only understand art, but also understand themselves [6]. Aesthetics is one of the most basic human life practices. "The most fundamental nature of aesthetic experience is its practicality, which is an inseparable connection between it and life practice." [7] An important dimension of aesthetic anthropology research is to pull the study of national aesthetic experience of human society from the simple aesthetic speculation back to reality, and to explore and grasp the rich and complicated aesthetic experience of human beings starting from the specific aesthetic practice of human society, as well as trying to explore the internal relationship between the "material foundation" and the "superstructure"

in the aesthetic experience, thus revealing the inner aesthetic system generated from artistic aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience is not only generated in specific aesthetic practice, but also in a specific aesthetic context. Prof. Van Damme, a well-known aesthetic anthropologist in the Netherlands, has conducted in-depth research on the social construction of aesthetic experience in his book "The Beauty in Context". He believes that different ethnic nationalities and ethnic groups have different aesthetic preferences. Different aesthetic preferences originate from different aesthetic experiences, and the construction of aesthetic experience is closely related to social cultural customs and specific aesthetic contexts. In Van Damme's view, the aesthetic experience is empirical, contextual and cross-cultural. It is a basic dimension of human existence. Aesthetic anthropological research is to study the multiple dimensions of how aesthetic experience is constructed. He pointed out: "Aesthetic anthropology ultimately means the study of the aesthetic dimension of human existence. Why do we humans react emotionally to certain sensory stimuli? What kind of stimulation can cause this reaction? Why is there such a reaction? Under what circumstances, for what reason, we tend to create amazing beauty objects, even ugly objects?" [8] Van Damme emphasized that the study of the dimensions of human aesthetic experience only has a realistic meaning based on the specific aesthetic "context". From the perspective of ethnography and national cultural history, he analyzes the diversity and differences of aesthetic experience in different cultural backgrounds, time and space fields, and in different ethnic groups and ethnic groups, to confirm the argument that "beauty is in context".

For the study of Chinese aesthetic anthropology, relying on the national aesthetic practice and aesthetic context in China, exploring the construction mechanism and inner meaning of Chinese national aesthetic experience is undoubtedly the foundation of Chinese aesthetic anthropology. Chinese aesthetic anthropology should be based on the in-depth study and theoretical interpretation of the Chinese national aesthetic experience. Especially in today's economic globalization, the poetic aesthetic experience and survival wisdom of Chinese ethnic minority groups are the inexhaustible cultural resources of Chinese aesthetic anthropology research. Professor Wang Jie believes that: "Aesthetic anthropology should be based on the aesthetic experience and cultural practice of the weak ethnic minorities and ethnic minorities in the era of economic globalization, based on the comparative study of different ethnic literature (art) production methods, through the specific study of the generation and communication of texts, exploring the aesthetic relationship of reality, to explore the realistic aesthetic relationship, explore the aesthetic needs of the aesthetics — cultural writing — the complex conversion relationship between the three texts, as well as explaining the positive and healthy aesthetic communication methods in the minority culture, thus providing a cultural resource and academic basis for learning beyond the modern art production mode and aesthetic communication mode based on instrumental rationality." [9] For a long time, people's cognition of Chinese ethnic minorities and cultures has come

from the "classic texts" under the mainstream ideological statute rather than the fieldwork of people themselves. The ethnic minorities are regarded as the image of "the other" on the edge. Some cultural and artistic titles of ethnic minorities are printed with the labels of "original" and "backward" by some "cultural elites". They lack the attention and excavation of the "local knowledge" and folk wisdom of ethnic minorities and the aesthetic experience in daily life. American scholar Earl Miner said: "We refuse to believe that one thing is as good as another without considering a particular era or culture." [10] The traditional inertia and prejudice of "cultural elitism" on the cultural and artistic cognition of ethnic minorities will inevitably lead to a "biased" understanding of the aesthetic experience of ethnic minorities, and even lead to wrong opinions. In the perspective of aesthetic anthropology, any kind of minority culture and art has its own value and meaning. Any kind of national aesthetic experience has a specific symbolic representation system and discourse expression mechanism. The study of the aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities in the perspective of aesthetic anthropology is to abandon the traditional inertial thinking of relying on the existing "classic texts" to interpret the aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities, and to select some Chinese characteristics and national characteristics through field investigations, as well as analyzing and interpreting the complexity of how the aesthetic experience of ethnic minorities in different cultural contexts is generated and constructed in these cultural cases, and the deep roots of how the ethnic minority groups reveal their own aesthetic experience in specific aesthetic practice. At the same time, aesthetic anthropology pays special attention to the study of the positive and human-developed minority aesthetic experiences that have not been discovered under the mainstream aesthetic ideology, and actively explores the possibility of its transition to modern society and mass life, thus crossing the Crafting Gorge that Marx mentioned about the "synchronization of the social progress and the destruction of human civilization".

#### IV. GOAL: FOCUSING ON THE HISTORICAL AND REALISTIC NATURE OF NATIONAL AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The national aesthetic experience is not only the accumulation of national culture and tradition, but also the representation of national aesthetic consciousness, aesthetic demand and aesthetic communication. However, the manifestation of aesthetic experience cannot be showed through itself. It can only be manifested through certain aesthetic deformations. The so-called aesthetic transformation..., the aesthetic experience is both historical and realistic. The creation of any kind of artistic form accumulates the content of traditional aesthetic experience. At the same time, human aesthetic communication of any kind of art will be integrated into the current aesthetic experience. People acknowledge and understand the traditional aesthetic experience through art, and also express their own aesthetic needs and aesthetic ideals through the aesthetic exchange of art. Jauss pointed out that in different "art fields", aesthetic experience shows different aesthetic forms. In the process of artistic creation, aesthetic experience



is expressed as the aesthetic characteristics of "creation"; in the aesthetic acceptance process of art, the aesthetic experience mainly manifests itself in the aesthetic characteristics of "beauty"; in the process of aesthetic communication of art, the aesthetic experience is expressed as the aesthetic function of "purification". For the generation of art, the completion of artistic creation means the completion of the aesthetic experience of the history carried by art and the completion of the aesthetic experience to represent the completion of the art form; but the completion of artistic creation does not mean the completion of the aesthetic experience, nor is it the end of the aesthetic experience exchanges. The art of leaving art acceptance and aesthetic communication is just a "text" rather than a fresh "artwork". Art connects the inner relationship between history and reality through the aesthetic experience and cultural connotation. The study of aesthetic anthropology on the aesthetic distortion of national aesthetic experience is not only to study how aesthetic experience is transformed into various art forms, but also to study how the social relationship between the national aesthetic practice and aesthetic experience under the cover of reality is manifested and characterized through the aesthetic deformation of art.

Jauss said: "The aesthetic experience does not seem to be 'organically' developed in its own field, but to continuously expand and maintain its own meaning field by intervening in the experience of reality." [11] The generation of national aesthetic experience is a dynamic process of continuous integration of history and reality, and it is also a process of continuous construction. The aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities is a local aesthetic experience full of poetry and wisdom, and an important part of the experience of constructing China's modern aesthetic experience. In today's economic globalization, Western cultural imperialism and cultural hegemony continue to permeate every corner of the world. This kind of cultural ideology not only seriously obscures the ecological and individualized characteristics of the "local" culture of various ethnic groups and ethnic groups in various regions, but also obscures the unique spiritual value of the regional aesthetic experience of the modern people, which seriously hinders the healthy and sustainable development of human civilization. In the context of contemporary globalization, the aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities has formed a strong impact, criticism and deconstruction on the universal experience under the advocacy of Western aesthetic discourse hegemony. The aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities is not only a representation of the awakening consciousness of the Chinese minority's own identity, but also a realistic expression of the "Chinese experience" consciousness. The aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities is a collective representation of the aesthetic experience of ethnic minorities in various regions of China, with characteristics of fresh activity, richness, complexity and diversity. The study of the aesthetic experience of Chinese ethnic minorities in the perspective of aesthetic anthropology is not only concerned with the characteristics, formation mechanism and internal aesthetic meaning of the aesthetic experience of ethnic minorities, but more importantly, it is necessary to pay attention to how to

condense the aesthetic experience of ethnic minorities that are positive and in line with human development into an aesthetic experience with Chinese characteristics in today's economic globalization, making it a useful supplement to China's modern national culture construction.

## V. CONCLUSION

In a certain sense, the cultural system of the Chinese nation is based on the aesthetic experience of the Chinese nation. The cultural system of Western society is based on the aesthetic experience of the West. Different aesthetic experiences represent different cultural systems and highlight the aesthetic needs and value pursuits of different regions and nations. The exchanges between different cultures and the exchange of aesthetic experiences should be based on dialogue, exchange, sharing and reference on the basis of equality. Aesthetic anthropology advocates examining the national aesthetic experience of all ethnic groups in various regions with a developmental, global view and perspective. Jim Merriman, a professor of anthropology at Wilkes University, pointed out: "The study of indigenous and tribal peoples is not just about pursuing academic novelty, but a necessary act. Through research, we can more clearly understand who we are, as human, and who exactly we are... At the same time, through research, we learn the knowledge of people who are superior to us... These people not only tell us about the past of ourselves, they also provided us with how we can successfully adapt to the future." [12] In the perspective of aesthetic anthropology, respect, acknowledgement, understanding and reference to "the other" is an indispensable prerequisite for opening a new dimension of self-recognition. To examine the development process and realistic situation of the aesthetic experience of contemporary Chinese ethnic minorities from the perspective of historical development, not only can people surpass the inferiority of "weak discourse", but also transcend the arrogance of "strong discourse", thus making people more rational and intelligent when treating "the other" and knowing themselves.

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