



# The Rebirth of Chinese Aesthetics' Aura

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**Abstract.** With the advent of the capitalist aesthetic era, aesthetics is facing a turn, and how China should seize the opportunity to realize the reconstruction of Chinese indigenous aesthetics at this moment. From the perspective of aesthetic anthropology, the article uses the Chinese context to reconstruct the term aura in an attempt to analyze the multiple possibilities for the development of Chinese aesthetics. In the changing times, Chinese aesthetics should first establish cultural confidence, and the kernel of Chinese artistic beliefs is perfected and sufficient to be called the landing point of Chinese aesthetics when facing the future. Using cross-disciplinary research, this essay attempts to peer into the future of Chinese aesthetics using multiple disciplinary perspectives.

**Keywords:** Chinese content; Aura; Aesthetics; Anthropology; Interdisciplinary studies

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

With the advent of the era of cultural economy, aesthetic capitalism has let aesthetics take on increasing importance in contemporary [1]. The game of aesthetic capitalism goes beyond the scope of pure sensory enjoyment, and the battle of aesthetics has become the core of economic warfare in the industrial civilization society.

In modern times, the isolation of the Qing Dynasty left a profound impact on Chinese aesthetics, the penetration of western-centered art still exists, and Chinese aesthetics is strongly squeezed by western art history. It can be concluded that Chinese aesthetic modernity is still an unfinished project.

Hence, it is urgent to establish Chinese aesthetics which is different from western aesthetics and based on Chinese culture and Chinese aesthetic experience.

This paper aims to discuss the reconstruction of Chinese aesthetics by deconstructing the meaning of aura from the perspective of aesthetic anthropology, in order to help solve realistic problems.

The main body of this paper will be divided into two parts. The first part will start from the evolution history of world aesthetics and sort out the aesthetic turn from the industrial period to the post-industrial period.

In the second part, this paper will redefine aura in the Chinese context, and cut into

Chinese history from the perspective of artistic anthropology, explore the characteristics and core of Chinese art, and lay the aesthetic foundation by looking for aura in Chinese art.

## 1.2 Definition

This paper will base on Marx's aesthetic theory [2], define aesthetic consciousness as a social ideology determined by a certain social existence and economic foundation. Material production has the ability to restrict the development of aesthetics and art.

Benjamin first proposed the concept of aura in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [3], which can be explained as the breath and halo surrounding the artwork.

This paper will use Marxist fetishism to understand the aura: the artwork itself has two values, one is worship value, and the other is display value. The "authentic" artwork is always closely associated with the former value, and it is precisely because of this worship value that a mystical experience is created: Aura. Aura is a concept of aesthetic value, an aesthetic perception experience summarized from the perspective of people's relationship to works of art.

## 1.3 Significance

This paper mainly studies the development of Chinese aesthetics. On the basis of learning from previous studies, it deepens the research on the turning of contemporary Chinese aesthetics. Secondly, the "Aura" is an important concept used in this paper, which to a certain extent makes up for the lack of current research on this issue in the Chinese context. Nonetheless, in terms of realistic, the destruction of aura in the can also provide inspiration for artistic creation.

## 2 Literature review

In the discipline construction of humanities and social sciences, researchers always pay attention to the integration of interdisciplinary. After the emergence of aesthetic psychology in the 20th century, with the patterning of interdisciplinary aesthetic forms, people began to explore new forms of aesthetics. Aesthetic anthropology emerged under the upsurge of new interdisciplinary aesthetic form in the late 20th century and became more prominent under the impetus of postmodern cultural relativism and postcolonialism. Aesthetic anthropology is based on the intersection of two modern disciplines, aesthetics and anthropology, trying to solve the problems that traditional aesthetics and anthropology have not touched or cannot solve alone.

In the 1980s, especially after the 1990s, a large number of Western anthropological works were translated into China, the domestic anthropological disciplines were gradually improved, and new possibilities for aesthetic research emerged, so that aesthetic anthropology could be proposed as a clear interdisciplinary theoretical construction. In more than ten years of research, aesthetic anthropology has gradually brewed into a

climate and made more remarkable achievements, especially the formation of an aesthetic anthropology research group led by the Chinese Department of Guangxi Normal University.

Aesthetic anthropology in China is different from that in the West, as an interdisciplinary study of aesthetic anthropology is mainly carried out by anthropologists in the West, while the study of aesthetic anthropology in China is first carried out by researchers in aesthetics.

In 1991, Lu Guishan published an article entitled "Ontology of Literature and Anthropology [4] ". Lu examines the relationship between literature and anthropology through a critique of the advocates of anthropological ontology of aesthetics. His line of thought is that of Plekhanov's aesthetic anthropological research, which emphasizes the mediating role of social psychology on literature and art, but lacks intellectual preparation for anthropology, especially cultural anthropology and philosophical anthropology. Shao Jian explores the combination of literature and anthropology through his interpretation of Marx's writings and publishes "Research On the Construction of Marxist Literary Aesthetics from the Perspective of Anthropological Ontology [5] ", "The Theory of Artistic Production and Practical Anthropology" [6] and other papers. He did not integrate cultural anthropology with literature and art, but rather philosophical anthropology with literature and art. Shao built on Marx's Paris Manuscripts, focusing on Marx's philosophical anthropology and rejecting cultural anthropology, which he regarded as "a highly empirical science, heavily influenced by 19th century positivist thinking.

The real integration of aesthetics and anthropology by focusing on the discipline of cultural anthropology has occurred since the mid-1990s. Many scholars have proposed the idea of interdisciplinary construction of aesthetics and anthropology and have conducted some practical studies. This is mainly represented by Zheng Yuan Shi's Marxist anthropological aesthetics or aesthetic anthropology research and Wang Jie and other scholars from Guangxi Normal University's aesthetic anthropology research.

This is represented by the Marxist "anthropological aesthetics or aesthetic anthropology" of Zheng Yuandi and the aesthetic anthropology of Guangxi Normal University scholars such as Wang Jie. Zheng recognizes the importance and urgency of combining aesthetics with the discipline of cultural anthropology with empirical characteristics. In his dialogue [7] with Jiang Kongyang on the aesthetics of Marxist anthropology, he recognizes the dilemma of aesthetic research and argues that "the previous research on the relationship between Marxist anthropology and aesthetics has been very difficult.

The relationship between Marxist anthropology and aesthetics has not been fully developed. In aesthetics research, there are more definitional studies and less interpretive studies, more theoretical deduction and weaker testimonial studies. This state of affairs gives aesthetics a certain rather insubstantial feeling." Throughout Zheng Yuan Shi's research, his aesthetic anthropology tries to integrate aesthetics and anthropology, but the way he researches focuses on aesthetic anthropological studies of aesthetics, which is aesthetics in terms of disciplinary classification. Professor Tang Longfa's monograph *Aesthetic Anthropology*, published by Guangxi Normal University Press

in February 1996, focuses basically on the aesthetic anthropological research of Zhang Yuneng in the district as well. They put forward the proposition of integrating aesthetics and cultural anthropology, and discuss it from the perspective of philosophical anthropology, showing the characteristics of Marxist aesthetic anthropological thought.

The aesthetic anthropology research group formed by scholars from Guangxi Normal University, represented by Wang Jie and others, has created another way in China. This is the aesthetic anthropological research focusing on national aesthetic culture, which is a kind of aesthetic research focusing on anthropology. Close to the current aesthetic anthropological research of foreign anthropologists, it reflects the gesture of cross-international integration of aesthetic anthropology and has unique value.

### **3 The turning in aesthetic development**

Chinese local aesthetics were damaged after the Sino-Japanese naval battle. During this period, Chinese aesthetics was completely dominated by the West. Taking the west as beauty, most evident in the Qing Dynasty, people named Western foreign objects "Yang"; for a long time, "yang" has been used as the standard of aesthetics, and the highest evaluation of an object is "sense of yang". Although contemporary artists no longer blindly follow the West as beauty, some legacy issues of colonialism and post-colonialism still exist. In some oriental style creations, artists are still unable to break free from the shackles of orientalism, so that they cannot distinguish the fundamental aesthetics of China and the oriental sentiment that pleases the hegemony of the West.

Therefore, China is lagging behind in the industrial civilization where human beings deal with things, and therefore in the discussion of human beings and things. But when human society began to enter the post-industrial era, from a sociological point of view, the rapid development of science and technology and the unprecedented expansion of the field of human knowledge profoundly influenced and even regulated human psychological tendencies and behavior patterns. The achievements of science caused everything to lose its sacredness, mystery and depth, to the point of "demystification", and consequently changed the status of art in social life and the cultural consciousness of man. Under the conditions of capitalist production, the dependence of the feudal era on human beings no longer exists. The flow of capital outweighed all previous achievements of mass uprisings against feudal lords, but on the other hand, the dependence of man on man was replaced by the dependence of man on things. In the 21st century, with the development of science and technology, alienation and commodity fetishism have not disappeared, but have become more serious. part of the machine. On the other hand, the worship of consumption and commodities is increasing day by day, and what people see is only the abundance of things and the rapidity of exchange. In a series of consumption boom, few people pay attention to the hidden social relations behind it: between producers, between producers and consumers, between employers and employees.

Art, which was originally free and transcendent, has been transformed into a product of the assembly line, and the "disinterested pleasure" of what Kant called "beauty" has been lost.

But this is not a bad thing for the search of Chinese aesthetics. Fetishism means that the aesthetic value of objects can be changed by capital and the market, so that the ideology of beauty is not deeply rooted in society, and therefore Chinese aesthetics can be rebuilt by building cultural confidence.

The future direction of Chinese aesthetics, on the other hand, can be answered by the three major questions of life raised by Liang Shuming. In his book "Eastern and Western Cultures and Philosophy [8] , Liang believes that culture is the way people live, and "life is the endless will and the constant satisfaction and dissatisfaction". Starting from the state of satisfaction of desires, he believes that life needs to solve three major problems in turn: man and things, man and man, and man and himself. The problem between man and things is solved first, then the problem between man and man, and finally the problem between man and mind and body.

In the past, people often belittled the value of these three problems on the grounds that they would exist simultaneously in varying degrees among all peoples. The reason for this, as Professor Chen Lai points out [9], is that this book, as a profound but complex work, is often not immediately understood in its complex structure; instead, people tend to simplify it by the habit of not seeking to understand it. Here Liang Shuming is looking at the past history and the future cultural destiny from the overall height of the development of human civilization. These three major problems of human beings, although more or less exist in all peoples, but in order to get a fundamental solution, we should recognize that they are logically and practically in the order of time and the degree of difference. If one goes beyond or delays the stage of its development, one will be punished by the laws of history. To a certain extent, he reveals the multi-level structure of human needs and the law of their historical progression. "The law of progression of needs is the law of activity by which people get their needs met, and therefore the law of development of lifestyles. In contrast to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Liang emphasizes the national specificity of needs and the historical nature of progression from a macro perspective. Although aesthetics does not follow such a linear history of development, we can still glimpse the way to open the door to the future: the age of man and man has passed, the age of man and things is coming, and China, has to stand in the age of man and heart, to meet the time.

#### **4 The reconstruction of Chinese aesthetics**

In Benjamin's texts, the aura disappeared in the age of mechanical reproduction (which can be understood as the age of man and things). Chinese aesthetics must find the aura that enables it to cross the age of man and things.

Aura is very similar to 'artistic conception' in Chinese classical aesthetics content, but compared to artistic conception, it has more mysterious and religious, so in the following stage, I will divide Aura into artistic conception and belief in Chinese content and discuss how to find Chinese aesthetics' aura.

Buddhism in the Sui and Tang dynasties gave rise to the concept of "artistic conception [10]". In a nutshell, artistic conception means that people use their minds to observe external objects, then fully expand the imagination and go beyond the external image in the field of ideology, thereby creating new meaning and realm.



**Fig. 1.** Early Spring is a landscape painting by the ancient Chinese painter Guo Xi, completed in the fifth year of the Northern Song Dynasty's Xining. Double pine is the major theme of the painting, and Guo Xi uses the lofty and clear character of pine trees to offer personal ideological meaning. The pine tree also signifies the strong and ethical gentleman of the land, and pine trees scattered around the image represent Goodman's global dispersion.

Guo Xi, as a landscape painter, encourages the integration of body and mind into the landscape, which is essentially the philosophy espoused by literati of all dynasties that man is an intrinsic part of nature.

It can be seen that the generation of artistic conception has always been an important element in Chinese painting. Thus, faith is what China lacks in regaining Aura. The lack of art education caused by history is critical to progress in a short period of time, and the development of Chinese art has been disrupted, inevitably leading to a lack of belief. The two problems that Chinese art is currently facing are: forming a value that considers only Western art to be contemporary art; and creating art from an orientalist perspective, even if it returns to the Chinese context and uses Chinese elements to create art.

A good example is the use of a large number of "slant-eye" models in the graduation creation of the Fashion Department of Tsinghua Academy of Fine Arts in 2021, which sparked heated debates on the internet. Whether a single-fold eyelid is a Western stereotype or a trend, Whether the design of oriental elements with western thoughts is a reconstructed oriental artistic conception or nondescript, these are just the reflections of the two problems at present. So what China actually lacks is confi-

dence in its own culture.

Therefore, what Chinese art actually needs is to return to tradition and let contemporary artists enter the folk to find resources. Although we return to tradition and the starting point of things, it is not a return to tradition, but a new start. Going back to where we have confidence, it is necessary to re-establish cultural pride. Anthropological intervention is also necessary, as China is the only ancient country that has been passed down to this day, and its history has been sprinkled on every household, every village, and every nation. Hence, Emerging interdisciplinary disciplines will be the path for the development of contemporary Chinese aesthetics.

## 5 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to redefine and predict the future development of aesthetics by using cross-study from the perspective of anthropology. In the process of reviewing the literature and reviewing the literature, it is found that there are few studies on this aspect.

This paper has the limitation that the definition and elaboration of terms has certain subjectivity, and the research on this part is not deep enough. The question raised by this study is that aesthetic anthropology here is simply understood as the study of aesthetics using anthropological methods, which is evidently imperfect, considerably more work will need to be done, and aura in Chinese content will be a fruitful area for further work, and I would relay these issues to a later stage.

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