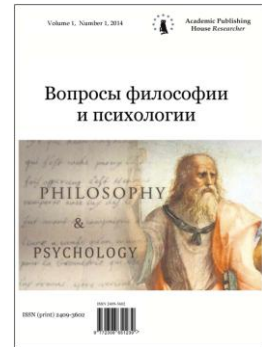


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UDC 1

Beauty and Science: Art and Aesthetics Between the Orient and West

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Abstract

General aesthetics is the science of the aesthetic in general, and its domain comprises aesthetic phenomena both in art and nature according to the monistic principle. However, from the viewpoint of its history, aesthetics has not always been defined as the science of only beauty. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, following the intellectual trends amid the rapid progress of the natural sciences, the need to treat art as a general science was advocated on the grounds that art could be clearly understood as consisting of concrete and empirical facts rather than as an abstract and ambiguous concept of beauty. The controversy continues to this day. Therefore, this article compares the classic definitions of beauty and art in the Orient and the West and examines the aesthetic meanings of beauty and art. And point out that art is also a medium for communicating aesthetic value, which has a social function. And during the phase of its enjoyment, art is an activity involving the contemplator's inner re-creation that allows for social participation through the subjective emotional self-expression of its aesthetic value.

Keywords: aesthetics; art; Orient; West; literature.

Introduction

General aesthetics is the science of the aesthetic in general, and its domain comprises aesthetic phenomena both in art and nature under the monistic principle.

According to the literal meaning of the Oriental term 美学 (aesthetics), which is composed of the characters 美 (beauty) and 学 (science), the fundamental task of aesthetics may be defined, as a matter of course, the study of beauty. However, from the viewpoint of this word's history, aesthetics has not always been defined as the science of only beauty.

In the West, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who coined the word aesthetics, from the Greek word αισθητικός (αισθηαί), discussed questions about beauty in his *Aesthetica*. Because beauty might be brought into existence by sense-perception, which is a lower faculty of apprehension, he raised questions about sense-perception and addressed them primarily as belonging to *the science of sensuous knowledge* according to the original meaning of the Greek word αισθητικός (αισθηαί).

Immanuel Kant, in his book *Critique of Judgment*, recognized the concept of taste as a faculty of aesthetic judgment associated with feelings of pleasure and displeasure. By analyzing and criticizing the characteristics of the judgment of taste through its four aspects (quality, quantity, relation, modality), he discussed the problems of aesthetics primarily as a *Critique of Judgment*.

Meanwhile, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling treated the problems of art in his *Philosophy of Art*. Further, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel treated with the problems of art as a type of historical problem rather than as problems of beauty in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

However, Friedrich Theodor von Vischer and Theodor Lipps insisted, in their *Aesthetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen* and *Asthetik*, that aesthetics was the science of beauty. According to Tomonobu A. Imamichi, aesthetics is Caloniologia, the λδγοϛ of καλοϛ.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, following the intellectual trends amid the rapid progress of the natural sciences, the protagonists of *allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, such as Max Dessoir and Emil Utitz, believed in the necessity of a clear separation between aesthetics and the science of art. They advocated the necessity of a general science of art discipline on grounds that art could be more clearly understood as comprising a set of concrete and empirical facts rather than as an abstract and ambiguous concept of beauty itself.

The question remains as to whether the domain of aesthetic inquiries is beauty or art, or if beauty and art should be studied at the outset as a precondition in aesthetics. It is important to explore the meaning of beauty and art separately before discussing the subject of aesthetics.

The literal concept of beauty

According to *shuo wen jie zi zhu*^{*}, the character for 美 (beauty), is defined as 甘 (sweetness), and sweetness can at times defined as beauty. Sweetness is one of the five sensations, along with sourness, bitterness, spiciness and saltiness. Any quality that is pleasing to these senses is said to be good, sweet and beautiful. The structure for the character beauty comprises the characters 羊 (sheep) and 大 (large), meaning that a large sheep, being fat, tastes good. Sheep is served on the 膳 (dinner table); the character for table is a compound of 月 (meat)[†] and 善 (goodness). Thus, the character for beauty acquires its significance; when combined with the character for sheep, it symbolizes a good omen. It is worth nothing of that beauty, goodness, justice and virtuousness share the same meaning in Ancient China.[‡]

In this context, the character for beauty has two meanings: first, it has a gustatory meaning correlated to sweetness, which thereby means 好 (good) in a broad sense; second, it has an ethical meaning related to 善 (goodness).

In the following discussion, we will explore the classical meaning of beauty from the standpoint of comparative aesthetics.

1 The taste of beauty

The meaning of beauty with regard to the gustatory sense is also found in the Western world as well.

Words such as *taste*, and *Geschmack*, originally had a gustatory sense, but they have come to mean experiencing and judging pleasure in a broad sense and experiencing and judging beauty in a

^{*} 段玉裁, 说文解字注, (The Glosses on Etymology of Ancient Chinese Characters), 上海古籍出版社, 1981.

[†] 月=肉(moon=meat)

[‡] 段玉裁, 说文解字注, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 148.

“甘也。甘部曰。美也。甘者，五味之一。而五味之美皆曰甘。引伸之凡好皆谓之美。从羊大。羊大则肥美。无鄙切。十五部。羊在六畜主给膳也。周礼。膳用六牲。始养之曰六畜。将用之曰六牲。马牛羊豕犬鸡也。膳之言善也。羊者，祥也。故美从羊。此说从羊之意美与善同意。美？义美皆同意”

narrower sense. Currently, aesthetics uses these terms to denote the enjoyment of an aesthetic object and the judgment its value.

For Aurelius Augustinus, the beauty of any material object derives from a congruence of parts with a certain sweetness (*suavitas*) of color.* In his case, the meaning of the word *suavitas*, which originally referred to one of the gustatory senses, shifted to denote the characteristics of an ideal visual color.

Currently, we frequently use expressions such as “sweet look” or “sweet melody” to describe visual or audible objects. Thus, the meaning of beauty in the gustatory sense as expressed in *shuo wen jie zi zhu* also has existed in the Western world, and it still exists today.

Concepts such as taste, *Geschmack* and *gout*, which had originally been related to the palate, became a subject of discussion in the seventeenth century. At this point in the history of aesthetics, people began to emphasize the aesthetic meaning and significance of these words together with the meaning and significance of new words such as wit, genius, imagination, fancy, feeling, etc.†

Kant defined the concept of *Geschmack* as the faculty of estimating beauty on an a priori basis.‡ Since that point, the concept of taste has become one of the most important concepts in aesthetic inquires and been regarded as the enjoyment of aesthetic objects and the judgment of their value.

However, in Chinese, the word 味道 (taste), which can be said to correspond to Kant’s definition of *Geschmack* in an aesthetic sense, is a cognate word of and originally meant both dietary and aesthetic taste.

At this point, if we admit that the modern concept of the words taste, *Geschmack* and *gout* corresponds to that of taste , and if we define aesthetics judgment as *Geschmacksurteil* according to Kant, the science of aesthetics may be defined using the Chinese meaning as the science of taste.

2 The spirit of beauty

The relationship between beauty and goodness was defined early in the *Analects* of Confucius.

“The Master said of the Shaou that it was perfectly beautiful and also perfectly good. He said of the Woo that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good.” §

Shaou was the type of music made by King Shun, and it was perfect in melody and sentiment. Woo was the music of King Wu, also perfect in melody, but possessing a martial air, indicative of its originator. In the *Analects*, which offers a comparative evaluation of the music of Shaou and Woo, the concept of beauty was related to goodness in an ethical sense.

Confucius, who considered the beautiful in close connection with ethics and politics, recognized the beautiful and food as elements of beauty and art, and regarded the coincidence of supreme beauty and supreme goodness as an ideal condition.

The meaning of beauty in politics and ethics may be found in the following *Analects*.

“Tsze-chang asked Confucius saying, ‘In what way should a person in authority act, in order that he may conduct government properly?’ The Master replied, ‘Let him honor the five excellent, and banish away the four bad things; then may be conducted government properly.’ Tsze-chang said, ‘What art meant by the five excellent things?’ The Master said, ‘When the person in authority is beneficent without great expenditure; when he lays tasks on the people without their repining; when he pursues what he desires without being covetous; when he maintains a dignified ease without being proud; when he is majestic without being fierce.’”**

* Augustinus, *City of God*, 世界图书出版公司 , 2011.

† Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic*, trans, Douglas Ainslie, London, Macmillan, 1922, Pt. 2, Ch.3

‡ Immanue Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, BOOK1, Cosimo Classics, 2007.

The definition of taste here is taste as the faculty of estimating the beautiful.

§ James Legge, D.D., *The Confucian Analects*, London: N. TRUBNER & CO., 60, Paternoster Row, 1869, P. 250 , 子谓《韶》：‘尽美矣，又尽善也。’谓《武》：‘尽美矣，未尽善也。’

** James Legge, D.D., *op.cit.* (note 7), P.128

In the so-called 五美说 (five beauty theory) of the Analects, the concept of beauty is closely linked to a practical meaning in the sense of good government.

The meaning of beauty with regard to goodness may also be found in the Western world.

As we may find in Xenophon's Memorabilia, καλοκαγάθια, the unified concept of beauty and goodness, was a broadly understood concept in ancient Greece.

According to Socrates, beauty and goodness are not two different things; whatever is beautiful is also good, that is, useful. Further, anything is good and beautiful if it serves its purpose well, but bad and ugly if it does not.* For Socrates, beauty and goodness were identical, and beauty was usefulness if the object served its purpose.

In Plato's work, we may also find the concept of καλοκαγάθια.† For Plato, the ζῆα of goodness held the supreme position in the world of ζῆα and represented the supreme value and the supreme goal. He thought that the ζῆα of goodness manifested itself only to the contemplative mind as a shining ideal beauty. For Plato, καλον was the proper object of the ἔρωσ of the ζῆα of goodness, which was ultimately reduced to goodness. In this sense, the concept of καλοκαγάθια referred to the moral perfection that implied beauty in goodness.

As mentioned above, there was generally no clear distinction between beauty and goodness in the ancient worlds of the Orient or of the West.

Such was the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas in the mediaeval age. For him, the beauty and goodness of an object were fundamentally identical, for they were based upon the same aspect---form. Consequently, goodness was praised as beauty.

3 The aesthetic meaning of beauty

In modern times, such words such as 美, beauty, beauté, schön have conventionally had meanings closely connected with such concepts as pretty, charming, capital, handsome, lovely, excellent, comely, fair, good-looking, nice, fine, etc. These words are appropriate for expressing the quality of objects that evoke sensuous or spiritual pleasures.

In conventional speech, when we say "it's beautiful," we speak of values such as truth, goodness, holiness, usefulness, etc. This phrase expresses the quality of the object, and from this quality, we may directly experience some harmonious and pure pleasure, as opposed to the sense of imperfection, ugliness, or evilness.

However, the meaning of beauty as a subject of aesthetic inquiry, is different from the conventional meaning and usage of beauty. In this case, beauty possesses separate values comprising truth, goodness, holiness, usefulness, etc. The beautiful in aesthetic inquiries is in a word, "the aesthetic."

Because the wide range of all objects of aesthetic inquiries cannot be covered by the conventional concept of beauty alone, the concept of beauty in aesthetics must be defined as "the aesthetic," a broad concept that comprises a great number of "aesthetic categories" or "forms of the aesthetic" manifested widely in nature, life, history, society, culture, art, etc.

"The aesthetic" here represents a concept that comprises not only minor aesthetic categories such as the romantic, the classical, the pretty, the lyrical, the dramatic, the picturesque, the pathetic, among others, but also fundamental forms of the aesthetic value such as the sublime, the tragic, the comic, and the ugly. "The aesthetic" also embodies the conventional concept of the beautiful and the graceful.

In other words, the meaning of beauty in aesthetic inquiry comprises not only the beauty in its narrowest sense -- which evokes positive and harmonious pleasure in the object -- but also beauty in a broader sense, i.e., the characteristics that evoke negative and disharmonious feelings.

“子张曰：“何谓五美？”子曰：“君子惠而不费，劳而不怨，欲而不贪，泰而不骄，威而不猛。”子张曰：“何谓惠而不费？”子曰：“因民之所利而利之，斯不亦惠而不费乎？择可劳而劳之，又谁怨？欲仁而得仁，又焉贪？君子无众寡，无大小，无敢慢，斯不亦泰而不骄乎？君子正其衣冠，尊其瞻视，俨然人望而畏之，斯不亦威而不猛乎？”

* Xenophon, Memorabilia. Book 3

† Plato, Politics, 284 b.

The term “the aesthetic” as the subject of aesthetic inquires can be considered to be the most appropriate when used in its etymological sense because it indicates values that can be realized in the experience of aesthetic objects.

Art in the Orient and the West

1 The concept of art in the Orient

According to shuo wen jie zi zhu, the meanings of the character for 艺术 (art) are as follows.*

In the Orient, the ancients used 藝, or 蓺, which meant 树 (to plant) or 种 (seed) instead of the modern character 艺. During the T'ang dynasty, the character 蓺 meant to plant, and in the case of the 六艺 (six arts) ,” they used 艺 (art) . The six arts were 1. 礼 (Ceremonies) , 2. 乐 (Music) , 3. 射 (Archery) , 4. 御 (Charioteering) , 5. 书 (Writing or the study of writtern works) , 6. 数 (Figures or arithmetic) . We find neither 蓺 nor 艺 (藝) in shuo wen jie zi zhu. However, the character 藝 was also used to indicate the six arts in the Chou dynasty, because studying the six arts was compared to farmers planting in the paddies.

Having clarified that the character 艺 represented planting in the paddies, we can first say that it meant a certain “technique” that was useful, just as the art of planting or farming was useful for the farm. Second, the character is defined as the “cultivation of human character” according to the six arts, which comprised the highest broadest education and aimed at providing their cultivators fruitful harvests in the forms of earthly rewards which were compared to the 五穀 (five grains) .

However, the ancient Chinese character 術 originally meant the way or custom of a particular country and has come to mean method or technique. The character is composed of 行 and 朮; the former means “to go”, and the latter express the pronunciation of this character.

In this context, the word 艺术 implies the full cultivation of human character that is achieved by attaining 仁 (virtue) . Secondly, it means technique or practical ways and methods to attain virtue.

In the Orient, the most important aspect of the arts -- poetry, music, calligraphy and painting, etc. --was in their cultivation of the mind toward virtue rather than in artistic skill itself as described in the Analects.

“The Master said, ‘If a man be without virtue what has he to do with music?’”[†]

For the ancients, the meaning of art lay not in a nimble-fingered technique or skill but in its ability to cultivate human character, to expand human welfare, and to allow its practitioners to experience delight in life-- l’art pour la vie. According to the Analects,

“Odes serve to stimulate the mind. They may be used for purpose of self-contemplation. They teach the art of sociability. They show how to regulate feeling. From them one learns the more immediate duty of serving one’s father, and the remoter duty of serving one’s prince. From them one becomes largely acquainted with the names of birds, beasts and plants.”^{*‡}

This quotation implies the benefits that can be derived from poetry and, in a wide sense, the instructive utility of the literary art.

The instructive utility of art may be found more precisely in the following Analects.

* 段玉段撰，说文解字注，*op.cit.* (note 1), pp. 114, 78.

† James Legge, D.D. *op.cit.* (note 7) p.245 “子曰：人而不仁如礼何人而不仁如乐何？”

* James Legge, D.D. *op.cit.* (note 7) p.375,

“诗可以兴，可以观，可以群，可以怨。迩之事父，远之事君，多识于鸟兽草木之名。”

“The Master said, ‘Though a man may be able to recite the three hundred odes, yet if, when entrusted with a governmental charge, he know not how to act, or if, when sent to any quarter on a mission, he cannot make his replies unassisted, despite his learning, of what practical use are they?’”^{*} This remark can be understood as emphasizing the efficacy of poetry as well as the cultivation or completion of the human character, further placing the practical meaning before the learning.

2 The concept of art in the West

The meaning of art as practical technique or skill may also be found in the West.

The words *ars*, *art*, *Kunst*, which correspond to 艺术 in Chinese, do not necessarily define the modern concept of the word art in the etymological sense. In general, *ars*, *art* and *Kunst* mean a technique or a craft that produces objects by processing and forming specific materials and further, attaining specific purposes efficiently in one’s daily life --in short, a skilled craft.

According to A.G. Collingwood, the aesthetic sense of the word art is very recent in origin. *Ars* in the classical Latin meant something quite different: a craft or any specialized skill, such as carpentry, smithing or surgery. The Greeks and Romans had no conception of what we call art as being different from craft; what we call art was regarded merely as a group of crafts, such as the craft of poetry (ποίησις), *ars poetica*, which they conceived, no doubt with misgivings, as being similar in principle to carpentry and the other skilled crafts. *Ars* in medieval Latin—such as art in the early modern English, which borrowed both the word and its sense— meant any special form of book learning, such as grammar, logic, magic or astrology and was still in use at the time of Shakespeare.” lie there, my art” says Prospero, taking off his magic gown. However the Renaissance, first in Italy and then elsewhere, re-established the former meaning; and the Renaissance artists, like those of the ancient world, actually considered themselves as craftsmen.

It was not until the seventeenth century that the problems and conceptions of aesthetics began to be disentangled from those of technique and the philosophy of craft. In the late eighteenth century, this separation of meaning went so far as to establish a distinction between the fine arts and the useful arts. Fine arts meant beautiful arts (*les beaux arts*, *le belle arti*, *die schön Kunst*) and not the delicate or highly skilled arts. In the nineteenth century, this phrase, abbreviated by leaving out the epithet and generalized by substituting the singular for the distributive plural, became “art.”[†]

In its current usage, the word art means, in general, an activity of aesthetic culture that has three aspects: aesthetic creation, a work of art, and aesthetic enjoyment. It is differentiated from scientific, moral, religious or economic activity in its nature, and is a type of crafts that holds the peculiar domain of value under the principle of aesthetic value.

3 The aesthetic meaning of art

Any discussions on art should not explain, interpret or define its concept from a unilateral viewpoint.

Morris Weitz suggests that aesthetic labels should not be attached to the entire body of art, but should rather be applied separately to the various constituents of the creative process: the aesthetic artifact, and the aesthetic experience. Art is too complex and too wide-ranging to possess a single definition. Each piece of the classical definition calls attention to some important aspect of art or recommends some criterion of aesthetic excellence, but there is no sharp demarcation or consistent essence from which a simple definition can be formulated.[‡] According to Weitz, there are two types of concepts. A concept is open if its conditions of application are amendable and corrigible, that is, if a situation or case can be imagined or secured that would call for some decision on our part to extend the use of the concept. A concept is closed if a new concept must be invented to address the new case and its new properties. If necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept can be stated, then the concept is closed. However closed concept only

^{*} James Legge, D.D. *op.cit.* (note 7) p.331,

“诵诗三百，授之以政，不达；使于四方，不能专对。虽多，亦奚以为？”

[†] R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp.5-7.

[‡] Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts*, Harvard University Press, 1950, p. 2.

occur in logic or mathematics, where concepts are constructed and completely defined; they cannot occur with empirically descriptive and normative concepts unless we arbitrarily close them by stipulating the ranges of their use. From this viewpoint, art itself is an open concept. New conditions (cases) have constantly arisen and will undoubtedly continue to arise. New art forms and new movements will emerge, which will demand decisions on the part of those interested, usually professional critics, as to whether the concept should be extended or not. Aestheticians may establish similarity conditions, but never necessary and sufficient ones for the correct application of the concept. With art, its conditions of application can never be exhaustively enumerated because new cases can always be envisaged or created by artists, or even nature, that would call for a decision on one's part to extend or to close the old concept and invent a new one. In this sense, the primary task of aesthetics is not to seek a theory but rather to elucidate the concept of art. Specifically, the primary task is to describe the conditions under which we correctly employ the concept.

Nevertheless, men have constantly attempted to inquire into the nature of art and have applied philosophical interest to define aesthetic or artistic phenomenon from the time of ancient Greece up to the present, and such efforts will not cease until a clear definition is formulated.

In reality, the concept of art is extremely complex and unilateral in its denotative and connotative senses. First, the concept has a denotative complexity, which comes from the generalization of various and different types of artistic phenomena such as music, literature, drama, cinema, and dance, including various types of sculpture arts. A single term, "the arts," comprises all of these.

At the same time, because a work of art originates from the creative activity of the artist, comes into being through his process of objectification, and is completed through its aesthetic enjoyment by the contemplator, we can say that it is a unilateral phenomenon that has three aspects: creation, the work of art, and enjoyment.

From this observation, art may be defined as "a cultural activity involving the emotional expression of a creative aesthetic value and charged with a social function".

Conclusion

Every type of art is, in its creative phase, an activity that serves the social function of communicating the emotionally experienced import of the artist's life to others through the concrete objectification of a new universal aesthetic value in the particular expression of each specific art form. However, as a work of art, it is also a medium for communicating aesthetic value, which has a social function. Finally, during the phase of its enjoyment, art is an activity involving the contemplator's inner re-creation that allows for social participation through the subjective emotional self-expression of its aesthetic value.

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