

Cross-cultural Study of Aesthetic Concepts and Philosophical Depth—Taking Makeup as an Example of Eastern and Western Aesthetics

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Abstract: The innovative design of Chinese makeup is a reflection of the country's own cultural diversity. At the same time, because makeup must exist on the human body, makeup design has been combined with Chinese ethnic characteristics, embodying the unique facial features and Eastern aesthetics of the yellow race. This article reviewed the development history China's Aesthetic concepts and using makeups as comparison analysis for Eastern and Western aesthetics. Understanding the context and history of diversity and inclusion of innovative makeup design and art development is strengthening the reflection of aesthetic and culture communication.

1. The Origin and Evolution of Chinese Aesthetic Concepts

During the Yin and Shang dynasties, people regarded tall stature as beauty, and King Zhou of Shang was recognized as a handsome man. Women were also admired for their "slender figures". During the Warring States period, the northern regions still considered tall stature as beauty, while the southern regions began to appreciate slender waists, because "King Qi likes purple clothes, and King Chu likes slender waists"[1]. Women with slender waists were called "Chu waist", which showed the significant influence of aesthetic concepts during that period. During this time, makeup gradually emerged in ancient China, emphasizing simplicity and elegance.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, people valued light body weight as beauty and practiced dancing for weight loss. The Han dynasty was the first to appreciate the beauty of women with delicate and gentle appearances. Empress Qi of Han was favored for her graceful demeanor while Empress Zhao Feiyan could dance on the palm of a hand [2]. Makeup also underwent color changes during this time.

During the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, makeup became popular, and everyone, regardless of gender, used it, along with weight loss and a desire for beauty. At that time, the most beautiful person was a man, even though male makeup did not last long. This sparked women's aspirations for a sickly white and thin beauty.

The Tang dynasty favored a "plump" beauty, which was a healthy and robust body, rejecting the previous pursuit of thinness. They proposed that a reasonable and symmetrical body shape and a healthy, rosy complexion were beautiful. Therefore, the makeup used during the Tang dynasty was

very colorful and highlighted many facial features. The Tang dynasty was an open and inclusive era, where both men and women excelled in sports and cultural learning, leading to a positive aesthetic.

The Song dynasty seemed to return to the past, appreciating smallness as beauty, with small feet, small mouth, and small body shape. During the Ming dynasty, in addition to thin eyebrows, various makeup styles emerged, showing a diversity of beauty. Finally, from the works of the Qing dynasty, terms such as "eyebrows like a crescent moon", "eyes like autumn water", "face like a full moon", "cherry small mouth", "shoulders like a chiseled stone", and "waist like a willow" demonstrate the appreciation of delicacy as beauty during that time.

Zhuangzi had an important influence on ancient Chinese aesthetics, shaping traditional Chinese aesthetic consciousness and artistic spirit. This influence can be seen in the shaping of the aesthetic subject's consciousness, as well as in the expression of the content and form of the aesthetic object. Zhuangzi's natural-based aesthetic ideas have silently affected people's aesthetic value orientation, unconsciously manifested in people's artistic creation and aesthetic experience, and still have a significant impact today.

In terms of the value orientation of artistic aesthetics, Zhuangzi regarded whether it conforms to the principles of heaven and earth as the fundamental principle, emphasizing the natural beauty of everything and the pursuit of a natural, peaceful and effortless beauty[3]. In Zhuangzi's view, beautiful art is the product of the unity of heaven and man. This aesthetic concept runs through ancient Chinese artistic practice and becomes an important value pursuit. Especially in dealing with the relationship between man and nature, different from the Western anthropocentric aesthetic viewpoint, ancient Chinese aesthetic appreciation regarded humans as a part of nature and embodied them in nature.

The use of natural elements to express people's appreciation and understanding of art is widespread across all artistic domains, and even represents a distinctive national characteristic. This reflects the naturalistic aesthetic orientation. As the German philosopher Kant said[4], "Art should appear as nature, be in form in harmony with the intrinsic logic of Zhuangzi's natural aesthetics and the influence of ancient aesthetic consciousness, that is to say, art should comply with rational laws. At the same time, art is also free and should not be bound by any traditional rules, so it should be as natural as nature, without any trace of artificiality."

In terms of the implementation of aesthetic appreciation, Zhuangzi advocated the concepts of virtual, calm, and returning to simplicity, which shaped the creative mentality and aesthetic realm of ancient Chinese art to some extent[5]. In Zhuangzi's view, virtual calm is not the goal, but the goal is to return to simplicity. "Simplicity" became an important concept in ancient Chinese aesthetics and the aesthetic pursuit of artistic creation. Zhuangzi emphasized "the Tao follows nature" and "the spirit and material play together,[6]" which embodies the pursuit of beauty that is both free and purposeful. The trajectory of the "purposeful" development of ancient Chinese artistic aesthetics is manifested in artistic practice by not losing the law in individuality and pursuing the truth and beauty in self-realization.

Ink painting is a symbol of the Oriental school of painting, among which the influence of Zhuangzi's aesthetic thought is indispensable. The style of ink painting is also clearly reflected in the Oriental makeup.

2. A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Makeup

As a form of expression of visual art, makeup can change people's natural appearance, construct specific style characteristics, convey certain information in non-verbal forms, and create a more attractive and perfect self-image. In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the literatus Xu Zhen made a concise summary of the appearance of classical Chinese beauties in his book "A Collection

of Beauties.[7]" He used the method of comparing objects to describe the shapes of various parts of a woman's body, but when it came to describing the eyes, he abandoned the comparison of shape and used the phrase "autumn waves" to convey the expression of the eyes. Compared to the rich and varied facial and eyebrow makeup, Chinese women's makeup is rarely applied to the eyes. In Cao Xueqin's "Dream of the Red Chamber,[8]" for example, Lin Daiyu's eyes are described as "two curved eyebrows, like smoke, and a pair of eyes that seem happy but not happy, containing a sentimental look." Another character, Wang Xifeng, is described as having "a pair of Danfeng triangular eyes and two curved willow leaf eyebrows." Whether in ancient Chinese literature or artwork, Chinese beauties often have a pair of charming Danfeng eyes. When examining the customs of ancient Chinese women's simple and elegant eye makeup, one can see a strong connection with the characteristics of the Chinese race.

Chinese people belong to the typical Mongoloid race. They are often born with single eyelids. Those who have put on makeup know that emphasizing the horizontal length of the single eyelid through makeup is much easier than highlighting the vertical protrusion of big eyes. The horizontal extension of the eyes is more conducive to conveying the charm of the eyes and the flow of eye waves. Therefore, the eyes of classical Chinese women are often long rather than big, relying on the flow of eye waves to express emotions. The delicate and slender eye makeup of Chinese women, together with the smooth and flat face shape, form an elegant and reserved beauty of oriental women. In addition, the eye makeup of classical women emphasizes conveying emotions through the eyes, which is consistent with the Chinese traditional art's emphasis on conveying meaning through form. The idea of having form and spirit together in one is rooted in the same source.

Unlike Chinese women who pursue the "divine beauty" of eyes, Western women emphasize the "aesthetic beauty" of eyes. From several surviving ancient Egyptian wall paintings and sculptures, we can see the emphasis and attention ancient Egyptian women gave to their eyes. They began to use a deep blue-green powder made from grinding black carbon or graphite and mixing it with oil to apply to the upper and lower eyelids. They even drew a thick black line at the end of the eye to create a charming upward curve, attracting the viewer's attention to the eyes of the wearer. The heavy eye makeup not only emphasized the contour of the eyes but also enhanced the deep and mysterious feeling of the eyes. This heavy eye makeup was absorbed and learned by the ancient Greeks and Romans and has been passed down to the present day. The distinct eye makeup highlights the distinctive features of Western people's well-defined contours and three-dimensional facial features. The emphasis and importance that Western women place on eye makeup is fully demonstrated in a survey of makeup preferences for Eastern and Western women. The survey results show that if only one part of the face can be made up, 87% of Western women still prefer eye makeup, while 77% of Eastern women prefer lip makeup. The Western tradition of heavy eye makeup reflects the pursuit and emphasis of "aesthetic beauty," which is related to the idea of makeup styling that emphasizes the shape of the human body, which is based on the principles of mathematical relationships such as the golden ratio [9] in traditional Western art. Comparing the eye makeup of Eastern and Western women, we can see that the focus of Eastern women's eye makeup is on hiding imperfections in the portrayal, while the focus of Western women's eye makeup is on highlighting skillful techniques in shaping the eyes. This difference is due to the vastly different aesthetic philosophies of Eastern and Western cultures.

In the following thousands of years, the art of makeup continued to evolve and develop, satisfying the aesthetic imagination of people from different eras. In modern society, the emphasis on appearance has only increased, and makeup has become indispensable. There is even a saying that "a woman going out without makeup is like going out naked." Hans Belting believed that the face is more like a stage, and people wear different masks to reflect society's expectations[10]. If people use makeup to make their skin shine, then masks have always existed in the private sphere, and makeup

can create an artificial sense of beauty. Different makeup styles imply different aesthetic orientations in society.

Makeup aesthetics have their own unique characteristics in different cultures, and there are significant differences between Eastern and Western presentations. Taking the Disney movie "Mulan" as an example, Liu Yifei's makeup in the movie's promotional photos sparked a heated debate in China. From the comments on social media, Chinese netizens generally gave negative reviews to the makeup of the Disney version of Mulan, while in the Western mainstream media, this makeup image was highly praised.

In terms of appearance, Liu Yifei has a relatively round face and full lips. In Disney's image creation, Liu Yifei's cheekbones and facial structure are more prominent, with heavier shadows, thicker eyebrows with a blunter feel, and a wheat-colored skin tone, reflecting the Mulan makeup under the Western aesthetic perspective. In contrast, a series of "Mulan"-themed magazine photos of Liu Yifei taken by well-known Chinese photographer Liu Zongyuan present a Mulan makeup style that conforms to the Eastern aesthetic characteristics: the base makeup is more white, transparent, and clean, the eyebrow shape is straight, and there is no emphasis on the shadows on the cheeks and the prominence of the cheekbones. The overall makeup is clean and flawless, exuding a sense of harmony between softness and toughness of an Eastern female warrior.

From the perspective of makeup, in the East, there is a pursuit for natural-looking skin with a glowing sensation. In the West, the emphasis is on a deeper skin tone that exudes a healthy, wheat-like appearance, with a preference for matte finishes that accentuate facial contours using highlights and shadows to emphasize the three-dimensional features of the face. In terms of eyebrow makeup, Eastern women tend to follow their natural brow shape, while Western women tend to have fuller, upward-sloping eyebrows that make a more dramatic visual impact. These differences are also related to the facial structures of women from the East and West. Eastern women often choose pink-toned eyeshadows, with a natural upward curl for their eyeliner and natural-looking eyelashes, while Western women prefer dark eyeshadows, thick eyeliner, and often use false lashes. In terms of lip makeup, Eastern women tend to use coral or pink-toned lip colors to create a soft, sweet and petite look, while Western women prefer nude lip colors that emphasize a fuller, more mature look.

3. Tracing the Differences in Aesthetics between the East and West

From the perspective of art appreciation, Westerners use the eyes of geometry, triangles, color, and perspective to view nature, pursuing its subtle and concrete construction. Chinese people, on the other hand, view nature as a rhythmical space composed of Yin and Yang, emptiness and solidity, and feel its super-concrete rhythm. If we use the painting and art theories of the East and West to observe the makeup of them, we will find that the three-dimensional and delicate European and American makeup has the same underlying principles as the representative oil paintings of the West, while the light Asian makeup contains some characteristics of the Eastern school of painting represented by ink paintings.

The portrayal of oil paintings is based on a rigorous scientific theory of painting, with sketch theory and painting perspective as the foundation of oil painting creation. In order to portray the most realistic and three-dimensional image of the characters, oil paintings often use focal perspective, paying attention to the growth direction of the human body's bones and the contrast between the light and dark sides of the body. European and American makeup is similar to this. Westerners have more prominent bones, higher cheekbones, and more prominent brow bones. When Western women put on makeup, they follow the growth direction of their cheekbones and create shadows, drawing more tall and intense eyebrows, and creating makeup that fits more closely and conforms to the front first-person perspective of the facial bone structure.

In contrast, the expression of ink painting is more implicit, and the ink itself cannot shape the texture through repeated strokes. Therefore, ink painting has always continued the shaping method dominated by lines and weak color. The limitations of the tools themselves have also led to different understandings. The painting method of line-shaped modeling has made ink painting form a unique painting theory and form - abandoning brightness and darkness, structure and color, and choosing techniques such as scattered perspective and smudging to express artistic conception. The painting is not only the expression of the physical structure but also more about conveying the painter's emotions. Similarly, Eastern makeup also tends to convey a sense of balance conveyed by scattered perspective in its shaping, and the entire makeup usually does not have an extremely eye-catching expression in a particular part but rather tends to achieve overall harmony through the coordination of various parts. In terms of the use of color, Eastern makeup has more seemingly casual details, such as the shimmering powder on the eyelids, the drawing of the lower eyelid, and the natural downward drooping of the eyeliner at the end of the eye. These details are not only decorations for facial structure but also attempts to convey one's gentle and lovely inner temperament, which is an aesthetic that has been passed down and evolved in China.

Western beauty is objective, precise, and rational, and artists use the most essential form to express the emotions of the picture, conveying the spirit through form. Eastern culture appreciates a kind of ambiguous and flowing beauty, appreciating a holistic artistic conception, focusing on the "spirit" rather than the "form," and displaying a beauty that transcends objective reality and displays subjective emotions.

4. The Depth of Makeup - Aesthetic Discourse Power

"Discourse is power" is one of the strongest metaphors contributed to the world by French philosopher Michel Foucault [11] and is also one of the most powerful philosophical propositions. Nowadays, makeup, as a symbol that appears universally in the public eye, seems to be a manifestation of power. Behind it are multiple factors such as gender, social class, culture, and even civilization.

The art of makeup has always catered to the male gaze, from the past until now. Specifically, in Western women's makeup, the upturned eyeliner and full lips give off an outgoing and mature perception. The West often emphasizes "plumpness" as beauty, highlighting sensuality. Eastern makeup, on the other hand, is more restrained and modest, emphasizing "simplicity" as beauty. In early Tang Dynasty, it was popular for women to draw scars on their faces to "show weakness" and win male sympathy with a beauty of delicacy and weakness.

After the ancient Greek era, the West liberated sex from theology and advocated for a relaxed and enjoyable sexual concept and activity that brings physical and spiritual pleasure, believing that sex is as ordinary as games and sports. In contrast, ancient China did not encourage the exposure of sexual characteristics for a long time, showing avoidance of sex in language and form. Different social atmospheres have created different attitudes towards sex in the East and West - compared to the direct way in the West, China tends to use language symbols that are gentle, dignified, and elegant to express sexual content implicitly. In the Western cultural atmosphere, "sexy" is not a taboo pejorative term, and women are not criticized for boldly pursuing sensuality. In Eastern culture, the term "sexy" has not been recognized by the mainstream society for a long time, and women do not show their sexy side in public. In addition, traditional Eastern society believes that women should be gentle and obedient, and influenced by this, Eastern makeup does not emphasize maturity and glamour like the West.

Makeup is also a way of expressing social class. There are significant differences between Eastern and Western makeup in terms of base color. Most Western foundations tend to be in shades of brown

and deep yellow, while Eastern women prefer a whiter complexion. This aesthetic difference in makeup can be traced back to the development of society and changes in social customs and habits. In the early days, both Eastern and Western women preferred fair skin. In the East, wealthy young ladies did not need to engage in labor like common women, so fair skin symbolized their upper-class status free from labor. Similar to the East, upper-class women in the West also used fair skin to signify their status. However, as industrialization developed in Western society, workers' workplaces gradually moved indoors, and the upper class enjoyed more leisure time, exercising and sunbathing outdoors, and tanned skin gradually became the mainstream symbol of aesthetic culture. The aesthetic differences in the base color of Eastern and Western makeup gradually formed as a result. Makeup, as an aesthetic concept, not only reflects the cultural and aesthetic characteristics of a specific society but also embodies people's pursuit and imagination of higher personal identity and social class.

In today's fashion scene, American-style makeup, Korean-style makeup, Japanese-style makeup, and so on have all been popular at some point. But when it comes to "Chinese-style makeup," there seems to be no universal understanding, which is related to China's large-scale and diverse components. Cultural exchanges and mutual learning are certainly good expressions of globalization, but from Foucault's perspective on power, makeup can also be a form of discourse power. Therefore, we should also create our own makeup rather than blindly westernizing. Because China is not equivalent to the Central Plains, and Chinese people are not equivalent to the Han people, the complete China is a multi-dimensional system formed by the interaction and mutual dependence of several major sub-regions within China's territory. Today's China, scholars call it a world "hub." Because it contains too many cultural elements, it is difficult for us to describe "Chinese-style makeup" in a few words. It is precisely because of the difficulties that exploratory attempts in this area have special challenging significance.

The innovative design of Chinese makeup is a reflection of the country's own cultural diversity. At the same time, because makeup must exist on the human body, makeup design must be combined with Chinese ethnic characteristics, embodying the unique facial features and Eastern aesthetics of the yellow race. For example, yellow people mostly have single eyelids, which are difficult to enhance with light makeup. Therefore, Chinese-style eye makeup is more suitable for horizontally elongating the eye line, making the eye makeup weaker. Another example is that the bone structure of yellow people is relatively flat, and the temperament tends to be gentle, so it is unnecessary to use heavy makeup to cover up facial flaws and enhance facial structure. These features are significantly different from the aesthetic of Western makeup. Summarizing the history of makeup, choosing a diverse and inclusive innovative makeup design, and selecting traditional styles to perform modern fashion transformation based on current Chinese aesthetics can extract traditional Chinese makeup symbols.

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