

# The Influence of Eastern Aesthetics on Artistic Creation: The Thought of 'Harmony between Man and Nature' and Intercultural Dialogue

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**Abstract:** This study explores the profound influence of the traditional Eastern philosophical concept of 'Harmony Between Man and Nature' on artistic creation, spanning classical Chinese art forms to contemporary cross-cultural practices. Through case studies of traditional Chinese landscape painting and garden art, the research highlights key aesthetic expressions, such as scattered perspective, blank-leaving techniques, and the interplay of virtuality-reality and static-dynamic elements, which embody the harmonious integration of human and natural realms. The study examines the modern reinterpretation of this philosophy in ecological art. Demonstrating its relevance in addressing global environmental crises and fostering intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** Oriental Aesthetics, Landscape Painting, Garden Art, Intercultural Communication, Harmony between Man and Nature.

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of the globalization of modern society, art creation is no longer limited to the social culture of a certain region but turns to the exploration of cross-cultural dialogue and philosophical reflection. As the spiritual core of Eastern civilization, East Asian philosophy has not only influenced the aesthetics of traditional art but also provided a new perspective for contemporary art. Making people think about the relationship between man and nature, self and society. Eastern philosophy has a profound influence in the East Asian cultural circle which involves all aspects of social life. It not only influenced people's thoughts but also deeply influenced artistic creation. The expression of Oriental art has always been closely related to philosophical thought. This combination is not a simple borrowing of concepts, but a complete system covering worldview, artistic methods and aesthetic standards through three levels: ethical norms, natural laws and inner cultivation. With the idea of 'harmony between man and nature' as the core, this study explores how the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Taoism's natural law and Zen's ethereal conception are transformed into the expression of ideas, art forms and aesthetic experience in artistic creation. And this traditional aesthetics have not disappeared in contemporary times. But have been newly interpreted in contemporary art and cross-cultural exchanges.

## 2. Basic Concepts and Development of East Asian Philosophy

### (1) Confucianism

Philosophy shows people's understanding of social life from the perspective of world outlook and life outlook. From the perspective of the world view, Eastern classical philosophy believes that the world is an infinite time and space that contains everything and is in the process of constant change and development. This idea states that people should not only participate in the changes in the world and the universe but also push them forward. It also emphasizes the

need to constantly improve themselves. This 'self-reinforcing' concept holds that everything is constantly creating and improving itself. Emphasizing participation and contribution to the world through continuous self-improvement. It focuses both on the development of the external world and on personal growth. This understanding of the world further extends to the outlook on life and resulting in the Confucian value of 'Have ample virtues and carry all things, establish oneself and to achieve others'. 'Have ample virtues and carry all things' means carrying and nourishing all things by accumulating virtues. And 'establish oneself and to achieve others' means helping others through self-improvement and achieving common growth. This idea embodies the importance of continuous human participation and growth in the world and the universe. Confucianism respects civilizing and secular values. Therefore 'education' is emphasized as a very important concept when appreciating artworks.

### (2) Taoist thought

Taoism and Confucianism have formed different value systems. Represented by Laozi and Zhuangzi, Taoism advocates 'Dao Follows Naturally' and 'govern by doing nothing that goes against nature'. They believe that Tao is supreme, and that nature itself is perfect enough and does not need human intervention. Therefore, people should conform to nature and achieve a peaceful and comfortable life through integration with nature. Taoism believes that everything in the universe has its own laws and emphasizes that human beings should follow the laws of nature and pursue a free and natural lifestyle. In artistic creation, Taoism encourages the expression of the nature's true beauty and emphasizes the process of artistic creation that follows nature. For example, Chinese landscape painting is deeply influenced by Taoist thought. And the artist conveys the breath and rhythm of nature between mountains and rivers through free brushstrokes and the use of ink. Confucianism and Taoism also jointly influenced Buddhism and shaped the concepts of compassion and helping the world that characteristics of East Asian culture.

### (3) Buddhist Zen's Thought

After Buddhism was introduced into China from India, it gradually merged with Confucianism and Taoism to form Buddhist sects with Chinese characteristics. Among which Zen is the most representative. The core idea of Zen Buddhism is 'emptiness', and they advocate the awakening and purification of the mind through meditation and meditation. In the field of art, Zen thought has deeply influenced the aesthetic concept of China and East Asia, especially in the pursuit of 'simple' and 'empty' artistic conception. For example, Liang Kai's 'jianbi (abbreviated brush)' and Muxi's ink painting in Song Dynasty express profound Zen meaning through concise lines and 'Blank-leaving' techniques. Art forms such as poetry and gardens also use minimalism. For example, the landscape poems of Wang Wei and the design of 'Blank-leaving' in Suzhou gardens all reflect the aesthetics of Zen. Zen art not only pursues the simplicity of form but also evokes the viewer's intuition through the creative technique of 'less is more'. Although this approach has some similarities with the Western minimalist art of the 20th century. But its cultural background and philosophical basis are different.

Despite the differences in the schools of thought, they all share a common basic element which is the 'Harmony between man and nature'. The pursuit of 'Harmony between man and nature' is the core theme of East Asian traditional philosophy and the basic spirit of traditional culture. The idea of 'Harmony between man and nature' first appeared in the Northern Song Dynasty, but the source can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. After a long period of development, it became the core concept of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The uniqueness of the East Asian philosophical system also lies in that it takes 'Harmony between man and nature' as the center and constructs a complete world outlook that runs through ethics, nature and mind through the complementarity and integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have different interpretations of 'Harmony between man and nature' and have established their own unique philosophical systems based on this thought. These ideas had a profound influence on China's political, economic, cultural and social development. Also played a guiding role in the evolution of Chinese art.

The Confucian thought of 'Harmony between man and nature' mainly emphasizes the harmony between man and man and between man and society. Confucianism believes that heaven is the source of moral principles, and the human mind has moral laws. On a small scale, it emphasizes relationships between people. On a large scale, the relationship between countries and nationalities is extended. So Confucianism emphasizes 'benevolence, righteousness and propriety' as core values. The Taoist thought of 'Harmony between man and nature' emphasizes the harmony between man and nature. Taoism believes that heaven is nature, and man is a part of nature. Laozi advocated 'Dao Follows Naturally', and Zhuangzi also emphasized that 'All things and I are one'. According to Taoism, the ideal state is to return to nature and achieve the spiritual state of 'all things and I are one'. The Buddhist idea of 'Harmony between man and nature' focuses on the harmony between the individual and the self, and the pursuit of inner peace. Zen Buddhism emphasizes that "the mind is the Buddha" and believes that liberation can be achieved by getting rid of worldly desires and understanding nature.

Although there are differences in the specific concepts of

these three schools, they all believe that 'Harmony between man and nature' is the highest standard and ideal state for dealing with the relationship between human beings and nature. In artistic creation, this kind of thought forms a dynamic balance and together shaping the spiritual core of Oriental aesthetics.

### 3. Oriental Aesthetic Expressions in Traditional Chinese Landscape Painting

Since ancient times, the art of calligraphy and painting has been a product of the spirit of the times. It not only reflects people's thoughts, perceptions and aesthetic concepts, but also reflects social and national values. Therefore, the formation and development of painting was largely influenced by the philosophical thinking of the society at that time. As the core idea of traditional Chinese philosophy, 'Harmony between man and nature' has not only shaped the worldview and value system of Chinese people, but also profoundly influenced the development of Chinese art. As one of the important categories of Chinese painting, landscape painting depicts natural landscapes and shows the painter's understanding and expression of the relationship between man and nature. The most intuitive expression of the idea of 'Harmony between man and nature' in landscape painting is the creation of mood. Chinese landscape painting is not only the imitation of natural scenery, but also a reflection of the painter's feelings and spiritual realm. That is, it combines the painter's thoughts and feelings with the natural landscape to create a unique artistic mood. As Zong Baihua said, painters should not only observe nature, but also realize nature with their mind, so as to construct an aesthetic realm beyond reality in their paintings.

Different from Western painting which uses focal perspective to express the real sense of space, Chinese landscape painting adopts scattered perspective composition which makes the picture show freer and diversified spatial relations. This kind of composition reflects the Chinese philosophy of 'Harmony between man and nature'. It is not limited to the reproduction of a single perspective, but through the way of "moving steps and changing scenery", the viewer can experience the flow and vitality of the natural landscape in the picture. Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty put forward the idea that "there is painting in poetry and poetry in painting". Emphasizing that landscape paintings should carry poetic and philosophical thinking. His work 'Wangchuan Villa' shows mountains surrounded by streams, the picture is quiet and distant, reflecting the philosophical thought of Zen Buddhism 'Silence and Do Nothing'. The artist expresses his emotions through landscapes and combining natural scenes with life's insights to create a tranquil and transcendent mood. At the same time, 'Wangchuan Villa' is constructed in the way of scattered perspective, so that the mountains, streams, houses and other elements echo each other to form a harmonious and unified picture. This composition method not only reflects the artist's meticulous observation of nature but also shows the harmonious relationship between man and nature which is in line with the concept of 'Harmony between man and nature'.

Chinese paintings emphasize the concept of "the real and the imaginary", so landscape paintings often use the technique of leaving white space, in order to express the philosophical meaning of 'the meaning is outside the words'. By showing the vastness and depth of the landscape, the artist guides the

viewer into a spiritual world where the real and the imaginary are blended, the nature and man are united. The 'Blank-leaving' of Chinese painting enables the viewer to imagine in the blank space and achieve spiritual communication with the painter. So the painting expression technique of the blank space also reflects the idea of 'Harmony between man and nature'. In this idea, man is not the master of nature, but a part of nature. For example, Fu Baoshi used a large area of white space in 'This and is so rich in beauty' to show the magnificent scenery of the clouds which highlights the majesty of the mountains and rivers. Also makes the picture more dynamic and imaginative space. The white space as the part not directly depicted in the picture, leaves space for the audience to imagine and supplement and guides them to go beyond the specific depiction and enter the feeling of the soul. To realize the harmonious unity of man and nature. The 'Blank-leaving' makes the picture not only the artist's creative achievement, but also a part of the viewer's mind projection. Therefore, "the unity of heaven and man" is a philosophical concept and the core concept of Chinese landscape painting art creation. It makes landscape painting a symbol of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and builds a unique Oriental aesthetic system in art.

#### **4. Oriental Aesthetic Expression in Chinese Garden Art**

Garden art as an important part of traditional Chinese art. It is deeply influenced by the idea of the 'Harmony between man and nature'. The creation of garden art usually takes landscape as the main element, and through the techniques of architecture, landscape and spatial layout. It integrates man and nature, emphasizing the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. Under the influence of 'Dao Follows Naturally' thought, the traditional Chinese garden imitates nature and making the artificial landscape seem natural. To achieve the effect of 'although made by man, just like from nature'. The structure of the garden space emphasizes the dynamic tour experience which is different from the geometric planning of western symmetrical gardens. But adopts the way of winding paths and changing scenery. So that visitors can constantly experience new scenery in the process of walking. The design concept embodies the idea of 'Harmony between man and nature' so that the viewer can feel the infinite artistic conception of heaven and earth in the limited garden space. For example, the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Lingering Garden in Suzhou gardens through carefully arranged garden roads, pools, rockery. So that visitors in the process of moving scenery, access to the experience of integration with nature.

'The combination of static and dynamic' and 'The combination of virtuality and reality' is a common aesthetic expression technique in Chinese artistic creation. In the garden art, the dynamic elements such as flowing water, wind moving leaves and flying birds are combined with courtyards, rockeries and quiet paths. The garden space is full of dynamic and static changes to create a rhythmic space experience. People can feel the vitality of nature during the tour and form resonance with it. This concept originates from the Taoist idea of "doing nothing but ruling" and the Confucian wisdom of "the middle ground" which emphasizes the balance between dynamic change and static harmony in all natural things. For example, in the Summer Palace in Beijing, the open water of Kunming Lake provides a flowing visual experience. While

the ancient trees, promenades and Buddha pavilions on the shore of the lake constitute a stable visual focus, making people feel the mutual integration of flow and stability when visiting. 'The combination of static and dynamic' reflected in the physical landscape, also through the changes in light, sound and wind to enhance the sensory experience. For example, in the garden set up in the flow of stone grooves and the water flow sometimes rapid, sometimes gentle. With the bamboo forest, flowers and trees rustle makes people in the dynamic flow of the philosophical concept of 'Harmony between man and nature'. Taoism believes that 'heaven and earth are born with me, and all things are one with me'. The garden through the combination of static and dynamic makes visitors in the spatial transition to feel the relationship between man and nature symbiosis.

'The combination of virtuality and reality' is also a very important concept in Chinese aesthetics. In garden design through the contrast of spatial levels and clever layout, it makes the limited garden space present infinite artistic conception, also enhances the spiritual dynamic and hierarchical sense of the garden. This concept is influenced by the Taoist philosophy of 'existence and absence' which emphasizes the combination of openness and closure of space to achieve the harmonious unity of man and nature. The "real" in garden usually refers to specific landscape elements, such as pavilions, rockeries, water, plants, etc. The "virtual" is the empty inspiration created by space blank, light, shadow changes and long view borrowing. In Suzhou such as lingering garden and Humble Administrator's Garden commonly used virtuoso techniques are borrowing scenery, frame scenery, separate scenery and so on. For example, the use of window frames to bring the outside view into the interior which is a combination of virtual and real. The garden's 'ancient wood and Ke' flower window through the leaky window can faintly see the garden scenery. The emptiness and reality catch the imagination.

The use of water surface is also 'The combination of virtuality and reality'. such as reflection to form a virtual reality contrast. The "Small flying Rainbow" covered bridge of the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou. The covered bridge is real and the water under the bridge is virtual. The reflection is reflected with the covered bridge, forming a picture of virtual and real integration. The large area of water in the park is 'Blank-leaving', forming a dense contrast with the surrounding pavilions and pavilions and creating empty inspiration.

In addition, since Confucianism was the orthodox thought advocated by successive rulers, the imperial garden was also influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes 'rites and music'. So, the structure, architectural layout and landscape arrangement of the garden need to follow the 'rites'. Imperial gardens in ancient China usually adopted a strict symmetrical layout to reflect the feudal hierarchy and the supremacy of the monarchy. In these gardens, the main building is usually located in the center, symbolizing the supreme imperial power. For example, the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City in Beijing was built in accordance with the cosmic concept of 'heaven is round and earth is square'. It is a place for the emperor to deal with the government and a symbol of the "divine right of the king", reflecting the political ethics of Confucianism. And the selection of plants in the garden also reflects the values of Confucian culture. The ancient architecture at that time focused on the architectural order corresponding to the four

sides of heaven and earth. The classical gardens reflecting the 'Harmony between man and nature' in China were planted with various plants such as pine trees, bamboo, plum blossoms and orchids. The pine tree is strong and tough, the bamboo is elegant and straight, the plum blossom has a brave skeleton that welcomes the frost, and the orchid is lonely and elegant, symbolizing the personality of a gentleman, which is respected in traditional Chinese culture. Confucian garden is not only a space for appreciation but also a place for cultural and moral education.

## 5. The Aesthetic Thought of 'Harmony Between Man and Nature' in Contemporary Art and Cross-cultural Communication

The development of contemporary art has entered an era of globalization and cross-cultural communication. In this process, the idea of 'Harmony Between Man and Nature' has been reinterpreted and combined with various art forms such as Western ecological art, Zen aesthetics, and digital art to promote innovative artistic practices.

'Harmony between man and nature' emphasizes the need to follow the laws of nature and achieve harmony between man and nature which is consistent with the modern concept of environmental protection. With the intensification of the global ecological crisis, Ecological art has become an important trend of contemporary art. Ecological art emphasizes the harmonious coexistence between man and nature, aiming to arouse the public's attention to environmental protection. This concept is very similar to the 'Harmony between man and nature' which emphasizes the connection between nature and human society, as well as the responsibility and role of human beings in nature. Many artists have taken "the unity of heaven and man" as their core idea, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature. The public art project in Yungang Grottoes uses discarded industrial materials to blend with the natural landscape to create the Dongshan Bodhi Art Zone. This not only adds a new landscape to the scenic area, but also combines history with modernity, culture and art. Old objects that were once discarded have been turned into pieces of art. Environmental art and sustainable development design have become the modern embodiment of the idea of 'Harmony between man and nature'. Through the 'green reconstruction' of waste materials, Yungang Grottoes echoes the Taoist 'Dao Follows Naturally' and resonates with Western ecological art. Such practices call for ecological responsibility through art and transcend the differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

The vitality of the 'Harmony between man and nature' in modern art is reflected in its creative transformation of traditional wisdom and the openness of cross-cultural practice. This is not only the contemporary awakening of Oriental aesthetics, but also the pluralistic symbiosis of global art ecology.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examines the central role of the traditional Chinese philosophical idea of 'Harmony between man and nature' in classical Chinese art, as well as its inheritance, innovation and cross-cultural communication in modern art. By analyzing the expression of traditional art forms such as

landscape painting and garden art, this paper reveals how 'harmony between man and nature' reflects the harmonious relationship between man and nature through artistic creation, and how it combines with modern art forms to realize the cross-cultural exchange of traditional aesthetics under the background of globalization.

As the essence of Chinese philosophy, 'Harmony between man and nature' has had a profound influence on traditional art forms. In landscape painting, this thought not only conveys the visual aesthetics of natural landscapes but also embodies the inherent harmony between man and nature through such expressive techniques as scattered perspective and white space. Confucian ethics strengthens the educational function of art through "character is book"; Taoism "natural" endowed landscape painting with "lively" vitality; The "emptiness" of Zen creates an empty and profound Zen meaning by means of minimalism. Through the harmonious configuration of space layout and landscape elements, coupled with the design of 'The combination of static and dynamic' and 'The combination of virtuality and reality', the garden art concretised the concept of 'although made by man, just like from nature' and practiced the world view of "harmony between man and nature". The complementarity of Confucian ritual system and Taoist view of nature has shaped the space aesthetics with order and agility.

With the globalization and diversified development of modern art, the thought of "harmony between nature and man" shows cross-cultural vitality. In the field of contemporary art, especially ecological art, digital art and installation art, artists combine this philosophy with the ecological crisis and environmental protection issues of modern society to re-examine and express the interactive relationship between man and nature. The waste material recycling project of Yungang Grottoes not only echoes the Taoist concept of 'making the best use of everything' but also fits in with the modern concept of sustainable development. This kind of creative transformation not only continues the philosophical concept of Oriental aesthetics but also promotes the pluralistic symbiosis of global art ecology. As an Oriental philosophy, although there are cultural background differences in cross-cultural communication, its pursuit of nature, simplicity and inner harmony has become a bond of artistic dialogue between the East and the West, and constantly inspires new creative inspiration in the context of globalization. This cross-cultural artistic exchange not only enriches the diversity of global art, but also provides an important philosophical basis for the mutual integration and reference of Eastern and Western cultures.

The academic value of this study lies in the systematization of the multidimensional influence of Eastern philosophy on artistic creation, and the revelation of the role of 'Harmony between man and nature' in bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, and between the local and the global. However, this study also faces certain limitations. Although we have explored oriental aesthetics in classical Chinese art and modern eco-art, we have not yet analyzed the application of this philosophical idea in other art forms, such as film and dance, in sufficient depth. Therefore, future research can further expand this field, especially interdisciplinary research and exploration of emerging art forms, which will help to understand the philosophical significance of oriental aesthetics and its artistic manifestations in modern society in a more comprehensive way. In addition, the comparative study of Eastern philosophy and Western postmodern theory

can also provide a new path for the construction of a cross-cultural aesthetic theory system.

Overall, concepts such as 'Harmony between man and nature' are the spiritual foundation of Oriental art. As it is a dynamic philosophical resource that through continuous creative transformation, continues to provide human art with profound revelations about the relationship between nature, society and the self. This process is a continuation and inheritance of traditional culture and a positive response to the dialogue and exchange between different cultures in the context of globalization. Promotes interaction and understanding between cultures around the world.

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