

Comparative Study on Rural Environmental Aesthetics between China and Foreign Countries

Maojin Zhao ^{1,2}

¹School of Humanities, Tongji University, Shanghai, 215000, China

²College of Landscape Engineering, Suzhou Polytechnic Institute of Agriculture, Suzhou, 215000, China

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Abstract: Beautiful environment is the goal that people are pursuing nowadays, and the countryside is a complex of interaction between human and rural environmental aesthetics and environment. Compared with cities, the countryside is more closely related to natural environment and rural environmental aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics, with interdisciplinary vision, extends the boundary of aesthetics from pure art to the environment of natural and urban and rural environment aesthetics, and constantly promotes the reconstruction and reform of aesthetic discipline. For western environmental aestheticians, the aesthetic value of environment and the aesthetic mode of rural environment are important themes of environmental aesthetics. This paper discusses Chinese and foreign rural environmental aesthetics from different aspects. Chinese rural environmental aesthetics not only emphasizes that people's rural environmental aesthetics is in the environment, but also emphasizes the social rural environmental aesthetics of environmental aesthetic experience and its communication with daily experience. Foreign rural environmental aesthetics not only pays attention to the aesthetic factors that are beneficial to human perception, such as harmony, order and law of the environment, but also pays attention to the aesthetic factors of disharmony, change and imbalance in the ecosystem, thus making it initially separated from environmental aesthetics.

1. Introduction

Driven by the blind pursuit of high productivity, other rural values are obscured, biodiversity is disappearing, landscape richness is weakening, soil is depleted, and the environment is gradually deteriorating. Therefore, we should not only examine the land income from the perspective of economics, nor the rural settlements from the perspective of sociology, but should perceive the countryside from the perspective of aesthetics and explore its unique aesthetic value.

In the last 30 years of the 20th century, the interest in environmental aesthetics began to appear among western scholars. Many factors contribute to this interest: a new understanding of the beautiful things in nature, and a constant expectation of various activities that integrate people into nature, such as hiking, camping, boating, visiting state and national parks, etc. Environmental research is an interdisciplinary subject, and it has recognized the importance of ecological research [1]. Ecological perspective provides enlightening insights to people and helps us to understand the significance of various environmental changes. These changes can not be understood as unique individual events, but as many patterns and related processes [2]. It is necessary for us to carry out comprehensive research on foreign rural environmental aesthetics, understand the development of foreign rural environmental aesthetics, and learn from its valuable achievements in order to accelerate and improve the construction of rural environmental aesthetics in China.

2. Environmental aesthetics in China

Interest and concern for the environment is not limited to western scholars. Since the mid-20th century, global environmental (and political) problems have become increasingly apparent, and Chinese scholars have become interested in environmental aesthetics. They found the ecological vision particularly attractive, and used it to develop a unique method to study environmental

aesthetics. They adopt a scientific ecological model, that is, a systematic context composed of interrelated and interactive components to study environmental problems, and call it “ecological aesthetics”. Ancient Chinese aesthetics is an ecological life aesthetics based on the philosophical background of “harmony between man and nature” [3]. Because caring for the environment has become a universal consciousness, one interesting thing is to regard the development of Chinese environmental aesthetics as a variant, that is, to understand the aesthetic value of the environment, which is a variant of rational exploration. I believe that the West and China share common interests, but there are also fundamental differences in cognitive context. Let's examine what these differences are.

These differences are first reflected in how we understand the aesthetic appreciation of the environment. Western aesthetics focuses on the aesthetic object [4]. In the aesthetic appreciation of art, this seems obvious: we focus on painting, music, poetry, scenery and so on. However, there is no doubt that landscape is not suitable for this model, because landscape is not a discontinuous object. More precisely, the continuous scenery guides us to interact with it, which means that the blending mode of environmental appreciation is more appropriate. This position urges us to approach China's environmental appreciation mode: in this mode, the dualistic opposition between subject and object is rejected and replaced by an affinity relationship between man and the world.

This makes us realize that western aesthetics and eastern aesthetics have great differences in understanding environment. Thinking about the environment in this way will transform the environment into an object: this environment, as well as the environment, will become something that is separated from us and far away from us. However, for Chinese aesthetics, there is no opposition or separation: “aesthetics” means an “appreciation activity”, rather than appreciating an object as “beauty”.

Therefore, we can see that environmental aesthetics has a reciprocal development in China: it is obviously different from similar works in the West, and it clearly expresses the philosophical context in which this aesthetic exploration takes place. I will explain below that these two positions can complement each other and can be improved through mutual understanding.

3. Western environmental aesthetics

The rise and development of western environmental aesthetics, on the one hand, is due to the realistic need to deal with the environmental crisis, on the other hand, it is driven by the reform and reconstruction of aesthetics. 18th century aesthetics, especially Kant's aesthetics, has a great influence on the development of western aesthetics. Thanks to the great contribution of Kant's aesthetics, aesthetics can get rid of its dependency on religion and gain self-discipline. However, aesthetics has embarked on a narrow road. By dividing the subject's cognitive ability (intellectuality, judgment and rationality) and cognitive field (knowledge, emotion and meaning), Kant distinguishes aesthetics from cognitive and practical activities, and gives aesthetics its own territory. But this distinction is also a kind of separation. After the 19th century, nature continued to be neglected, and aesthetics mainly focused on art. From expressionist aesthetics, formalism aesthetics, symbolic aesthetics to analytical aesthetics, the interest in art gradually controls the whole aesthetic field, and aesthetics becomes “art philosophy”. In the mid-20th century, analytical aesthetics focusing on language and concepts dominated the British and American aesthetic circles, thus aesthetics fell into the trap of concepts [5].

In western traditional aesthetics, beauty is either explored from the noumenon and attached to metaphysical truth, such as the appearance of “idea” or “absolute spirit”; Or it can be attributed to some subjective reasons, such as “unity of intelligence and imagination” or “intuition”. Not only has the environment never entered the palace of aesthetics. The development of natural aesthetics is also extremely inadequate. Until the late 19th century, with the development of natural history and environmental science, the vision of environment and ecology began to permeate aesthetics.

Leopold discussed the relationship among ecology, ethics and aesthetics earlier. He put forward a kind of “earth ethics”, which requires us to extend the ethical concern from human beings to the whole earth community. We should take an aesthetic view of nature with love and respect, which is

consistent with the principle of “earth ethics”. In order to appreciate these natures, we must cultivate aesthetic sensitivity and pure aesthetic interest, which requires the help of natural science knowledge such as ecology, biology and natural history. This kind of knowledge will help us to appreciate nature correctly and deeply and discover the beauty hidden under the surface of nature.

4. Chinese and foreign rural environmental aesthetics

4.1. Chinese rural environmental aesthetics

4.1.1. Sense of homeland in Chinese rural environmental aesthetics

For environmental aesthetics, “home” is a real concept of life. Therefore, it can be understood here as the life and emotion of home. As for the sensibility of the environment, it emphasizes the attachment and belonging of people to the environment. For people, people's emotional strength is great, because it can surpass rationality to a certain extent and become the primary psychological factor to decide action. The beauty of the environment lies in its benefits, relatives and enjoyment. In this sense, living, especially living happily, is the highest function of environmental aesthetics. Only when you live in peace can you be happy.

Love plot is the emotional bond between people and region or environment [6]. This noun, to a certain extent, indicates the emotional connection between man and environment. In the view of Chinese rural environmental aesthetics, the so-called place can stop, containing stability and eternal intention. A place is a humanistic space and a quiet center for establishing a value system. Therefore, for the people who were born and grew up in this area, every plant in the countryside is permeated with their local feelings. Because, here is the hometown, is their ascription blessed land. Human beings will step on this solid earth after all.

4.1.2. A brand-new aesthetic concept

Different from the west, Chinese rural environmental aesthetics is a brand-new aesthetic concept. Here, ecology is not a means, but a starting point and an important philosophical foundation of aesthetics. For this reason, Chinese rural environmental aesthetics draws lessons from ecology, first of all, it is not ecological science but deep ecology, that is, ecological philosophy. The representative of this brand-new ecological world outlook is Heidegger's ontological philosophy of “this being and the world”. Because the living relationship of “this is with the world” “provides the possibility and premise of harmony between man and nature” [7].

At the same time, Chinese rural environmental aesthetics, as an ecological aesthetics, is inseparable from the participation of ecological knowledge, and it is the necessary guarantee to guide aesthetics towards ecology. With the further deepening of ecological aesthetics, the problem of ecological knowledge cannot be avoided. This is also the point that caused Burlington's strong doubts. In fact, if we understand the academic purport of Chinese rural environmental aesthetics, then this problem is not difficult to understand. Combined with the premise of “aesthetic blending”, we can know that the participation of ecological knowledge here does not lead to an environment independent of the subject, but a “living and living” state of harmonious blending between man and nature. It can be seen that the participation of ecological knowledge in ecological aesthetics advocated by Chinese rural environmental aesthetics is fundamentally different from Carlson's scientific cognitivism model.

4.1.3. Aesthetic activities aimed at appreciating the environment in rural life

China's rural environmental aesthetics not only opens us a beautiful agricultural landscape and shows the harmonious aesthetic relationship between man and nature, but also emphasizes people's aesthetic activities aimed at appreciating the environment in rural life, and realizes the aesthetic ideal beyond reality from this aesthetic activity. Therefore, the landscape is not only composed of objective and real scenery, but an organic whole composed of subjective and objective, human feelings and scenery.

Pastoral is both realistic and spiritual. Poets eagerly look forward to pursuing the ideal pure land

of soul, returning to nature, and realizing the aesthetic ideal of roaming freely between nature. Allen Carlson advocated that “things should be viewed as they are”, and he even explicitly put forward such a view: “Objectivity is very basic: it focuses on objects and their properties, and opposes subjectivity embodied in subjects and their properties. Obviously, Allen Carlson opposes Chinese rural environmental aesthetics, which is a symbolic and metaphorical way of environmental aesthetics. He pays more attention to the objectivity and scientificity of environmental appreciation, and advocates taking rational knowledge of natural environment as the basis of appreciation, instead of masking the true nature of objective environment with subjective emotion. This is also the biggest difference between China and the West in environmental aesthetic activities.

4.2. Western rural environmental aesthetics

4.2.1. Rural image and aesthetic experience

If a country has many good images and gives people a clear overall feeling, it is an orderly and imagable country, which not only means familiarity and safety, but also brings us a sense of belonging and even pride, which is the basis for us to establish emotional ties with the country and others.

Image can act as a kind of social role, constituting the symbol and basic material of group communication activity memory. People usually introduce the unique and meaningful places in their villages to the guests from far away, and the conversation about these places and their events is also an important part of residents' daily communication. Living in such an environment, “no matter what kind of economic and social problems are encountered, whether it is happiness, depression or feeling of belonging, it seems that it can reach a special depth [8]. Therefore, the degree of rural imagability is directly related to social cohesion and vitality. In fact, every image is a good place, which has a strong attraction to people.

In western rural environmental aesthetics, an imageable village must give people distinct and unique images in every detail, and at the same time, these individual images are organically organized to form a good overall image. These elements themselves can form vivid images, but they will not exist in isolation. They restrict and influence each other, and finally become a whole image. If a building has a unique form or a sharp contrast with the background, it can be easily distinguished. Both large and small scales may create uniqueness, and the key lies in the comparison with the surrounding environment. Lynch particularly pointed out that once an object has a history, a symbol or a certain meaning, its status as a marker will also be promoted. Therefore, those villages with a large number of historical and cultural monuments are lucky, and these places and images exude eternal and irreplaceable charm.

4.2.2. Balance between subjective and objective

Western environmental aesthetics hopes to balance the realistic relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, then dispel the opposing conflict between subjectivity and objectivity, and finally disintegrate the ruling system of anthropocentrism, so as to promote subjectivity and objectivity to achieve a harmonious and blending life state in environmental aesthetic experience. In this process, western environmental aesthetics emphasizes the importance of objective environmental function and advocates the great influence of objective environment on human living style. Subjective aesthetic participation and experience should still be based on objective environment, while delicate aesthetic experience should be based on rich scientific knowledge.

However, China's rural environmental aesthetics is more inclined to integrate subjective and objective. Whether it is a beautiful agricultural landscape or a pleasant rural life, it pays more attention to the free mood of people's emotional spirit in the environment. The pastoral scenery formed by the integration of natural environment and human existence is the aesthetic object presented by Chinese rural environmental aesthetics, which inevitably includes the harmonious aesthetic relationship between man and natural environment and the aesthetic experience transcended by existence, all of which are related to people's unimpeded aesthetic participation, and rural life is a beautiful life, so that life and natural environment finally get deeper communication

and exchange.

4.2.3. Traditional aesthetic model

Western environmental aesthetics is regarded as a branch of the philosophy of beauty, and its theoretical construction is based on the traditional artistic aesthetic model. The biggest difference between it and artistic aesthetics lies in the difference of objects and the difference of appreciation mode caused by the difference of objects. In view of the specific aesthetic object of environment, western environmental aestheticians have obtained corresponding enlightenment from ecology, in order to obtain the appreciation of environmental aesthetics and protect the environment better.

In this way, the so-called tourism leisure development has brought great damage to nature under this environmental aesthetic mode. Environmental aesthetics must rely on ecological knowledge. Only in this way can we understand and appreciate the environment and really protect it. Because, in landscape aesthetics, the pursuit of entertainment (emotion) is the primary factor, and this kind of entertainment is obtained from viewing this landscape without considering the ecological integrity of this landscape [9]. On the contrary, establishing aesthetics combined with ecological knowledge can change this situation, which is beneficial to environmental protection. Obviously, only with enough ecological knowledge can we get proper aesthetics. It can also be seen that the western environmental aesthetics pursues the aesthetics of the environment itself, and its extreme is the wilderness aesthetics.

5. Conclusions

To improve the future of rural environmental aesthetics, it is necessary to apply the concept of harmony understood by Chinese scholars to the relationship between western and eastern rural environmental aesthetics. Both orientations have produced important theoretical insights and provided directions for further exploration. This kind of harmony does not need to cover up the particularity of the two theoretical orientations, at the same time, it will also promote both. The main focus of the integration of the two traditions is to focus on the contextual characteristics of aesthetic experience and appreciation. This method will focus on the aesthetic appreciation of works of art and the environment, and it is when the environment is treated that the rural environmental aesthetics can show its harmony.

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