

# Differences in Aesthetic Characteristics of Landscape Photography between China and the West

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**ABSTRACT.** *Landscape photography is the art of landscape as the object of expression. This kind of art decorates the landscape with new dimensions. Landscape photographers use the eyes behind the lens to observe and capture, to experience, discover, and reproduce the beautiful scenery with their hearts. This is a process full of artistic creativity. China's photography technology and art are both learning from Western pioneers. Therefore, the commonality of Chinese and Western landscape photography art is self-evident, but the differences also exist objectively. This difference stems from the differences between Chinese and Western traditional cultures, ideas, philosophy, and aesthetic ideas, which are reflected in many aspects such as creative skills, purposes, and emphases. Chinese and Western photographers adhering to their respective traditional culture, philosophy and aesthetic concept, fixed the landscape being photographed as a carrier to embody themselves and integrate their emotions, making the landscape photography artistic creation richer and more vitality.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Landscape photography, Harmonious beauty, Photography expression*

## 1. Introduction

French scientist and author Louis Figuiet said: "The lens is a tool, like a pencil or paintbrush and photography is artistic creation, like painting or carving."<sup>[1]</sup>The word "photography" can be interpreted as "painting with light". Light is an element of photography, and there is no photography without light. Landscape photography, as an art category, is the soul of the artist who personalizes the photography through the lens, just like emotional poets express their feelings. China's photography technology and art are learning from Western pioneers. The commonality between Chinese and Western landscape photography art is self-evident, and the differences are also very clear. The author thinks the differences mainly from Chinese and Western traditional culture, ideas, philosophy, and aesthetic ideas. We should dialectically view the differences between each other and learn from each other. Exchange between Chinese and Western landscape photography art is of great significance to the development of young and energetic photography.

“Beauty is harmony” is a common concept of Chinese and Western classical aesthetics. However, both Chinese and Western countries have unique social and historical development trajectories and cultural heritage creations, and they have different interpretations of “harmony”. The Chinese photographer conveys “psychological harmony” through the lens, hoping to form an image of the ideal realm between people and landscape. Western photographers focus on the “formal harmony” of the objective world in landscape photography. This harmonious aesthetic in China tends to be “psychological” aspect, and the western harmonious aesthetic tends to “formal” aspect.

## **2. The Inner Harmony Beauty of Chinese Landscape Photography Art**

Just as the saying goes “words are like people” and “text is like people”, traditional Chinese culture believes that the value of art is inseparable from the character of people. Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, believes that virtue is an inherent wealth that everyone can get. Art works are tools for “education people”, so artists represent justice, virtue, purity and detachment. Taoist thought advocates “For I am abstracted from the world, the world from nature, nature from the way, and the way from what is beneath abstraction.” and emphasizes the harmony between man and nature, that is, “the integration of nature and human.” Zhuangzi thought the state where the human mind and the landscape resonate is harmonious, that is, be in the nature and realize “Heaven and Earth co-exists with me, whilst everything being part of myself.”. When everything being part of oneself, one can calmly be in the landscape.

The concepts of virtue, beauty creation, and the harmony between man and nature in China’s traditional culture for thousands of years have given fertile soil to the creation and development of Chinese landscape photography art and nourished creators. When shooting the high mountains and rivers, figures, flowers and birds, gardens and buildings, photographers have a quiet and far-reaching spirituality that knows, communicates with, and follows the universe. Chinese-American photographer Li Yuan has a great influence on Chinese landscape photography. He likes to follow the changes in light, and use highlights, side lights, and backlighting to draw different lines in the landscape photography, creating a subtle and charming painting effect. In the landscape works taken in California, he cleverly used light and color to increase the dramatic visual effect of the picture and reproduce the landscape abstractly. The ridge illuminated by the setting sun fluctuated under the light, as if breathing, as if it were an oncoming wave. In addition, the combination of dark brown, yellowish brown, brownish yellow and bright yellow colors makes the picture structure very dynamic. A few grazing cattle grazing in the lower right corner of the foreground added the tranquility that the twilight was about to disappear. The depth of the picture, the relief-like volume and the dynamic light are all perfectly presented in photography. Li Yuan said: “My purpose is to explore the enlightenment and communication that the natural real environment can bring to people through photography, not to create an unreal world under the subjective consciousness. I regard color as inevitable factors in landscape photography that

describes nature, but I do not seek to artificially increase the color that does not exist in nature."<sup>[2]</sup>Pursuing the truth in color and the harmonious beauty inherent in the work is the creative principle of photographers.

The creative practice of Chinese landscape photographers echoes the traditional Chinese philosophy and spirit. James Cahill believes that the source of Chinese artists' creation is to put emotions in what they see and hear about nature. Li Yuan recalled his creative practice and said: "For thirty years, every time I walked to the mountains, lakes and seas with my camera, my life seemed to be more fulfilling. Slowly, I began to realize my feelings for nature, which has an inevitable connection with the cultural traditions that I have suffered since I was a child.

It is precisely because the Chinese cultural traditions pay attention to "For I am abstracted from the world, the world from nature, nature from the way, and the way from what is beneath abstraction" I fully realize that nature is a teacher and a friend, then I feel the distance between nature and human seems to be closer and closer."<sup>[3]</sup>Among the works taken in New Jersey, the yellow fallen leaves are frozen on the floating ice, and the cracks of thin ice on the stream surface naturally form a streamlined line, which contrasts with the colors and dynamic forms of the fallen leaves. Li Yuan uses the lens to show his delicate feelings for nature, expressing his deep trust and infinite reverie of the most ordinary scene in nature.

Chinese landscape photography seeks to express the harmony between external scenery and internal feelings. Lang Jingshan regarded the artist's good conduct as one of the important conditions for achieving masterpieces. The harmony between the inner spirit and the outer image is the oriental traditional philosophy and aesthetics, which has influenced Chinese landscape photographers to focus on pursuing their own experiences and emotions in a dynamic external landscape.

### **3. The Harmonious Beauty of the Western Landscape Photography Art**

Victor Hugo believes that art has two origins: one is philosophy, which produces European art and another is imagination, which produces Oriental art. If artistic creation is to realize the pursuit of the ideal beauty of mankind, then discovering beauty and expressing beauty do not distinguish between regions and go through history. Pythagoras founded the first school of philosophy and history in ancient Greece. He believes that "harmony of numbers" is the principle of everything, that is, the origin of all things is not water, air or fire and other material elements, but the source of the number "one". The "harmony of numbers" is the highest principle of all proportions and orders, and it is the representative of the harmony of all things in the universe. He thought this harmony is the only way to know and understand life balance and world order. Ancient Western philosophers believed that the most beautiful of all three-dimensional figures was spherical, and the most beautiful of all flat figures was circular, and also believed that the most beautiful ratio of the length and width of the rectangle was the golden ratio.

Obviously the thoughts of ancient Greek philosophers and artists constitute the principles of Western art creation: the study and expression of beauty are "number"

and “harmony”. “Number” is wisdom and cause and “harmony” is beauty and result, that is “beauty is harmony, harmony is beauty.” This kind of “harmonious” beauty continues to this day, derived from a special number and application into an ideal form structure. For Plato, the concept of “form” is “harmony” of “proportion” and “symmetry”. Plato believes that the beauty and symmetry in the form depicted by compasses and rulers can express a harmonious world. Pythagoras believed that beauty is the harmony of numbers, based on which, Aristotle created a formal logic system. He regarded this theory as a combination of the aesthetic ideal of “formal harmony” and the practice of artistic creation and expand it into the harmony of the inner form of all concrete things. Obviously, “harmony” in the aesthetic ideal of Western philosophy means that the aesthetic material form is acquired by the senses, and its main characteristic of expressing beauty is form, including “size”, “structure”, “number” and so on. Each harmonious system has a high degree of organization and order, so the rational composition and form of the composition have become the expression of “harmony” in Western landscape photography.



Fig.1 Michael Kenner, “The Perspective of the Tree, Russia”

Michael Kenner is a famous black and white landscape photographer in Britain. He is good at controlling the perspective relationship and black-and-white tone relationship of the picture, using pure photographic language to carefully organize the picture, so that the scenery has a harmonious and beautiful form. In the heavy snow, there are irregular piles of wood, birds flying in the vast sky, and flocks of sheep on the endless ground, boats anchored at the seaside under the sunset, and the dense fog under the sky, with two bridges standing in parallel... Kenner rigorously expresses each element under his lens, striving to find a harmony between what he sees and feels. His landscape photographs all choose small-sized square compositions, and the black and white landscapes above this square focus on a landscape, making people pay attention and immerse themselves in the landscape itself.

Kenner's work uses the power of composition to play against the natural landscape: either the sky occupies a large area, which makes people feel depressed, or the sky is ethereal, which contrasts sharply with other objects and highlights the theme of expression. In order to capture the unified visual effect of the sky and water, photographers often insist on shooting for hours, and let the scenery unrestrictedly and fully show the inner feelings through long exposure. In the photographic work "The Perspective of Trees, Russia" (Figure 1), Kenna uses a rigorous angled perspective to arrange the trees in winter from large to small, high to low, and the gradient of perspective makes the picture show the beauty of regular. The highest black tree at the front of the picture is located right in the middle of the picture. Its straight trunk divides the picture into two symmetrical parts, and forms a diverse contrast with the neat and orderly standing trees. In order to show change in a symmetrical picture, Kenner intentionally extended the branch of a large tree from the lens to the upper right corner of the picture, and various forms of composition added vitality to the ordered space of the picture.

Kenna has absolute rationality and perfect control over the picture. The exquisite tone and delicate layers not only highlight the harmonious beauty of nature's form, but also make the pure beauty of nature more vivid before the eyes of artists and viewers. The use of abstract lines, geometric figures, and black, white and gray tones make Kenna's landscape photography works quiet and accessible, magnetically attracting the aesthetic appeal of the viewer.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, Chinese landscape photography pursues the harmony beauty between human and nature, while Western landscape photography pursues the beauty of harmony that is rich in form and mathematical logic. This difference in pursuit stems from the differences between Chinese and Western cultural traditions and their philosophical and aesthetic concepts. To the photographer, the camera is like the painter's pen. The photographer uses the ever-changing light and shadow to express the rhythm of the subject, so that the landscape photography works reproduce a magical and beautiful world. Chinese and Western photographers adhering to their respective traditional culture, philosophy and aesthetic concept, fixed the landscape being photographed as a carrier to embody themselves and integrate their emotions, making the landscape photography artistic creation richer and more vitality.

#### **References**

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