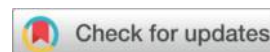


The comparison and integration path of eastern and Western

drama performance aesthetics



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Abstract: This paper explores the comparative and integrative pathways between Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics. By analyzing Eastern theater's characteristic of "unity of heaven and humanity" rooted in philosophy—marked by its impressionistic, stylized, and comprehensive features—and contrasting it with Western theater's realism, character-driven approach, and conflict-oriented nature grounded in the "subject-object dichotomy" philosophy, the study conducts a three-dimensional comparison across aesthetic foundations, artistic expression principles, and performance logic. It reveals both differences and complementarities in their understanding of "reality," modes of expression, and actor-character-audience relationships. Furthermore, through examining four dimensions—formal techniques, aesthetic ethos, creative philosophies, and educational systems—the paper proposes pathways for cultural integration, offering theoretical and practical references for cross-cultural theatrical innovation.

Key words: Eastern and Western drama; performance aesthetics; comparison; integration

foreword

In the context of globalization, the exchange between Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics has been growing increasingly. The Eastern characteristics of freehand expression and stylized conventions, contrasted with the Western emphasis on realism and dramatic tension, stem from distinct philosophical and cultural foundations that present both inherent differences and opportunities for mutual learning. This paper first analyzes the core features of these two traditions, then

conducts multidimensional comparisons, and ultimately explores pathways for their integration to support innovative theatrical creation.

I. Core characteristics of eastern and Western dramatic performance aesthetics

(1) The core characteristics of Oriental drama performance aesthetics

Eastern theatrical performance aesthetics possess distinct core characteristics rooted in the holistic philosophy of "harmony between heaven and humanity." This philosophy emphasizes that theatrical expression should not exist in isolation but form a harmonious unity with nature, society, and the spiritual realm. Under the influence of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies, this mindset has nurtured a profound "expressive" spirit that prioritizes conveying artistic conception and spiritual essence over literal replication. In terms of artistic principles, Eastern theater integrates expressiveness, stylization, and synthesis. Expressiveness values "spiritual resemblance" over "physical likeness," often using concise symbolic movements to suggest specific scenarios while conveying infinite meaning through limited forms. Stylistic conventions manifest as standardized performance patterns — such as regulated postures, distinctive vocal styles, and symbolic facial makeup—building a unique artistic language through symbolic expression. Synthesis organically combines various artistic elements like singing, dancing, poetry, music, and techniques into a cohesive aesthetic presentation. From a performance logic perspective, Eastern theater exhibits an "actor-centered" subjectivity. Performers must both embody their characters emotionally and transcend them through technical mastery. This artistry relies heavily on "tacit understanding" with the audience, where shared recognition of stylized expressions forms the foundation for dramatic meaning generation. Through this mutual understanding, performers and audiences collaboratively construct artistic experiences.

(2) The core characteristics of western drama performance aesthetics

Western theatrical aesthetics possesses distinctive core characteristics rooted in a rationalist tradition centered on the "subject-object dichotomy". This philosophy

emphasizes the imitation and cognition of the real world, striving for authentic representation. Deeply influenced by ancient Greek mimesis and modern scientific spirit, it has developed a distinct "realistic" logic. In terms of artistic principles, Western theater primarily manifests through realism, character-driven narratives, and conflict-driven storytelling. Realism focuses on "physical resemblance" and "contextual authenticity", pursuing meticulous details through elements like the "fourth wall" and colloquial language. Characterization centers on psychological logic, exemplified by Stanislavski's "acting method". Conflict-driven storytelling emphasizes plot progression through dramatic tension and resolution. From a performance perspective, Western theater features object-representational characteristics centered on characters, requiring actors to engage in immersive role immersion and personalized character development. Regarding audience interaction, two states exist: "alienation" or "empathy". Brecht's "defamiliarization" technique aims to create alienation effects, while Stanislavski's pursuit of "emotional resonance" seeks to evoke audience empathy[1].

The comparative analysis of eastern and Western dramatic performance aesthetics

(1) The opposition and complementarity of aesthetic foundations

In the comparative study of Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics, their fundamental principles exhibit striking contrasts yet complementary characteristics. Eastern theatrical aesthetics center on intuitive perception and holistic contemplation, emphasizing comprehensive artistic awareness and emotional engagement with the world. Rather than obsessing over fragmented details, it seeks macro-level harmony between performance, nature, society, and spiritual realms. Western theatrical aesthetics, conversely, emphasize rational analysis and focused detail, employing logical deduction and meticulous exploration of specific elements to reconstruct reality through deconstruction. This inherent tension stems from differing understandings of "authenticity": Eastern theater pursues spiritual authenticity—conveying intrinsic essence, emotions, and artistic conception that transcend physical forms—while

Western theater prioritizes objective realism, striving for precise replication of external appearances, contextual details, and logical structures to create stage scenarios mirroring real-life dynamics. Although these approaches differ in their methods of authentic representation, their opposition is not absolute but rather complementary. The Eastern holistic perspective provides macroscopic vision for Western analytical focus, while Western rationality offers logical grounding for Eastern intuitive understanding, collectively enriching humanity's exploration and expression of theatrical authenticity[2].

(2) Differences in artistic expression principles

Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics exhibit significant differences in artistic expression principles, primarily manifested through three opposing dimensions. Regarding the distinction between impressionistic and realistic approaches: Eastern theater adheres to an impressionistic principle, favoring symbolic abstraction to convey meaning—using concise artistic symbols to hint at essential qualities and emotional cores rather than direct depiction of physical forms. Western theater follows a realistic approach, emphasizing concrete representation through meticulous details that faithfully reproduce objective appearances and specific contexts, striving for high realism. In terms of stylization versus naturalization: Eastern theater prioritizes formal conventions, establishing fixed performance patterns as artistic foundations while creatively applying them within standardized frameworks to deliver distinctive charm through disciplined execution. Western theater advocates naturalization, challenging established norms to present characters and scenarios through lifelike expressions, aiming to align performances with authentic human experiences without rigid formal constraints. Regarding comprehensiveness versus singularity: Eastern theater highlights integration, organically combining song, dance, poetry, music, and stagecraft into a cohesive aesthetic presentation where elements mutually reinforce each other to create holistic artistic conception. Western theater leans toward singular focus, emphasizing independent enhancement of individual components through deep exploration and prominence of each element's expressive power to drive narrative

progression. These differences stem from distinct Eastern and Western understandings of artistic essence and modes of expression, collectively forming the distinctive characteristics of their respective theatrical aesthetics[3].

(3) The division of performance logic

The performance logic of eastern and Western drama performance aesthetics is mainly reflected in the relationship between actors and characters, actors and audiences. This difference deeply reflects the difference in artistic concepts and aesthetic pursuits between them. The specific comparison is shown in Table 1 below:

The dimension of comparison	Eastern theater performance logic	Western dramatic performance logic
Actor and role relationship	Actors' subjectivity, "actors control the role"; actors are not completely swamped by the role. On the basis of in-depth understanding of the role, they creatively interpret the role with their own skills and accomplishment, not only embodying the role to convey emotions and circumstances, but also showing their own artistic expression beyond the role	The objectivity of the role, "the role drives the actor"; the actor needs to immerse himself in the role, think and act from the perspective of the role, strive to accurately reproduce the psychology and behavioral logic of the role, and put himself under the control of the role
Relationship with the audience	The interactive mode of "co-constructing meaning"; the completion of performance depends on the audience's common cognition of programmed expression, and the audience is not a passive receiver, but participates in the generation of dramatic meaning through their own understanding and perception	The reception mode of "passive acceptance narrative"; whether it is Brecht's "defamiliarization" alienation effect or Stanislavski's "emotional resonance", the advancement of narrative logic is dominated by stage performance, and the audience mainly receives information and generates feedback within the established framework

(Table 1: Comparison of Eastern and Western Dramatic Performance Logic)

Third, the exploration of the integration path of eastern and Western drama performance aesthetics

(1) The integration of techniques at the formal level

In the integration of Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics, the convergence of formal techniques serves as a crucial entry point. This manifests through the fusion of Eastern stylization with Western realistic approaches, as well as the complementary relationship between virtuality and concreteness. The stylized performance paradigms of Eastern theater—such as fixed postures and symbolic movements—do not conflict with Western realistic techniques that prioritize psychological authenticity. Instead, they can mutually learn from and organically integrate with each other. For instance, actors may employ stylized movements to precisely convey characters' psychological states, transforming these conventions beyond mere formal norms into effective vehicles for conveying inner truths. This approach preserves the artistic essence of Eastern theater while enhancing its psychological depth. Meanwhile, the virtual nature of Eastern theater—such as constructing scenes through suggestive techniques and hinting at contexts—can complement Western emphasis on concrete representation, like meticulous detail depiction and realistic scene reconstruction. A prime example is integrating realistic emotional expressions into abstractly rendered settings: virtual scenarios provide a backdrop for authentic emotions, while genuine feelings breathe life into virtual settings. Through this creative fusion of Eastern and Western theatrical techniques, audiences can experience both the ethereal charm of abstract artistry and the sincere power of realistic emotion, thereby expanding the expressive reach and emotional resonance of theatrical performances[4].

(2) The mutual infiltration of aesthetic spirit

In the integration of Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics, the mutual penetration of aesthetic spirits constitutes a profound and crucial dimension. This is specifically manifested through the Eastern "Xieyi" (expressive art) transcending Western "realism," while the Western "conflict logic" enriches the Eastern "lyric tradition." The Eastern theatrical "Xieyi" spirit, characterized by its pursuit of spiritual truth and symbolic abstraction, offers Western "realistic" theater innovative approaches to overcome its inherent limitations. For instance, incorporating Xieyi techniques into

realistic drama can break the excessive reliance on verbatim replication of realistic scenes and details. By cultivating artistic conception and refining emotional expression, this approach expands the boundaries of realistic theater in depicting inner worlds and abstract themes, transforming realism from mere objective replication into a broader expressive space. Simultaneously, the Western emphasis on "conflict logic" —which drives narratives through the construction, development, and resolution of contradictions—infuses new vitality into Eastern theater's "lyric tradition." When appropriately introducing dramatic conflicts and intensifying character relationships, Eastern theater's lyrical expressions gain depth and emotional resonance through tension and emotional collisions. This dual aesthetic penetration does not replace one another but achieves mutual nourishment while preserving their essence, propelling theatrical aesthetics toward richer dimensions[5].

(3) Cross-border reconstruction of creative concepts

In the integration path of Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics, the cross-boundary reconstruction of creative concepts serves as a crucial link for deep convergence, primarily manifested in two aspects: First, reconstructing narrative and performance logic centered on "universal human themes" — such as love, life and death, redemption — these transcultural universal subjects naturally bridge Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics. Creators can interpret these shared themes through Eastern aesthetic expressions like freehand brushwork and stylized forms, connecting Eastern artistic language with universal human emotional experiences. This approach preserves Eastern aesthetic characteristics while resonating with audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, breaking the limitations of singular cultural frameworks to form more universal artistic expressions. Second, breaking the fixed "actor-role-audience" relationship and establishing new interactive models. The tacit understanding between actors and audiences in Eastern theater based on ritualized cognition is not irreconcilable with Brecht's "alienation effect" and Stanislavski's "emotional resonance" in Western theater. By integrating these effects, audiences can both

emotionally connect with characters and deeply understand their inner worlds, while maintaining rational thinking through alienation techniques. This creates a dynamic, multi-dimensional interactive relationship among actors, roles, and audiences. The new interaction model transcends traditional one-way communication or fixed responses, enabling all three parties to co-create theatrical meaning through mutual engagement, thereby driving theatrical creative concepts toward greater inclusivity and innovation[6]

(4) Cross-cultural integration of education system

In the integration path of Eastern and Western theatrical performance aesthetics, cross-cultural integration of educational systems serves as a crucial foundation for long-term and profound convergence. This is primarily manifested in two dimensions: First, incorporating dual methodologies from both traditions into training programs. The Western Stanislavski system emphasizes immersive role immersion training to achieve authentic emotional delivery, while Eastern opera's stylized training focuses on refining standardized yet expressive physical movements and vocal techniques. Combining these approaches enables performers to master nuanced psychological interpretation while developing refined external expression skills, achieving balance between inner emotions and external forms that transcends limitations of single-training systems. Second, cultivating "cross-cultural perceptiveness" by guiding learners to deeply understand the cultural contexts behind different theatrical aesthetics. Features like "expressive artistry" and "stylization" in Eastern aesthetics are closely tied to Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophies as well as collective aesthetic habits, whereas Western aesthetics' "realism" and "conflict logic" are rooted in rationalist traditions and individual consciousness. Only through understanding these cultural origins can performers avoid superficial imitation of foreign aesthetics and truly absorb and transform their essence. Cultivating this cross-cultural perceptiveness allows practitioners and creators to view Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics with greater inclusivity and depth, providing sustained talent support and ideological foundations for deeper integration.

epilogue

In summary, Eastern and Western theatrical aesthetics, rooted in distinct

philosophical traditions, exhibit differences in expressive approaches—ranging from impressionistic to realistic, and between stylized conventions and natural spontaneity. Yet they share fundamental artistic aspirations. Comparative analysis reveals complementary potential between the two traditions. By exploring pathways for integration at formal, spiritual, conceptual, and educational levels, we can achieve "harmony in diversity" through mutual learning. This approach preserves core values while expanding creative boundaries, offering practical significance for the diversified development of theater.

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This work was supported by :

Henan Xing Cultural Engineering Research Project "Research on the Artistic Innovation and Development of Contemporary Directors of Henan Opera" (project number: 2024XWH063)