Briefly Describe the Historical Evolution of Western Aesthetic Thought — Take Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* as a Reference

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Abstract

Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* provides a valuable framework for understanding the historical evolution of Western aesthetic thought. It illustrates how various philosophers, artists, and movements have shaped and reshaped our understanding of beauty, art, and the role of aesthetics in Western culture.

Keywords: aesthetic, Zhu Guangqian, western aesthetic

1. Introduction

Aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy dedicated to studying the nature of beauty, aesthetics and art, has always occupied an important position in Western culture. Over time, Western aesthetic thought has undergone multiple evolutions and developments, influenced by different historical periods, philosophical concepts and social backgrounds. This paper will use Zhu Guangqian's book *History of Western Aesthetics* as a reference to deeply explore how Western aesthetic ideas have evolved over time, and focus on the main aesthetic perspectives in different historical periods and how they influence and evolve with each other.

2. The Foundation of Ancient Greek Aesthetics

The ancient Greek period usually refers to the historical period from the 8th century BC (about 800 BC) to the 4th century BC (about 300 BC). Ancient Greece is generally considered the birthplace of aesthetic thought. The philosophers and cultural forms of this period provided a key foundation for the initial exploration and theoretical construction of aesthetic thought. In classic documents in the fields of philosophy and aesthetics, such as Plato's *Symposium* and *The Republic*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, etc., these documents contain the in-depth discussion of the nature, value and meaning of beauty provided an early theoretical basis for aesthetic thought.

Ancient Greek aesthetics is one of the foundations of Western aesthetics. Its influence not only profoundly shaped ancient Greek culture, but also provided a rich theoretical foundation for later aesthetic thoughts. In Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics*, we can get a glimpse of the glory of ancient Greek aesthetics and how it became an important source of aesthetic concepts and artistic practice.

Ancient Greek aesthetics originated in ancient Greece from the 6th century BC to the 4th century BC. This period is known as the golden age of culture. The aesthetic thought of ancient Greece widely covers many fields such as philosophy, literature, sculpture, architecture and drama. In this fascinating aesthetic journey, beauty is not only an aesthetic enjoyment, but also a medium for thinking about life, morality, politics and the order of the universe.

This chapter will conduct an in-depth study of the foundation of ancient Greek aesthetics, exploring how it shaped aesthetic concepts, inspired artistic creation, and how it continues to this day, exerting a profound influence on contemporary aesthetics and culture. The greatness of ancient Greek aesthetics lies in its unique

understanding of beauty and how to integrate beauty into the core of human thinking, which has become the cornerstone of aesthetic philosophy. On this aesthetic journey, we will travel through time together to explore the precious legacy of ancient Greek aesthetics and how it takes on new life in the contemporary world.

2.1 Philosophical Basis

One of the foundations of ancient Greek aesthetics is reflected in the field of philosophy. For the first time, ancient Greek philosophers began to systematically think about the nature and characteristics of beauty and regarded beauty as a philosophical issue. The aesthetic thinking of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle links beauty with wisdom, ethics and soul, providing a profound foundation for the philosophical study of beauty.

- Plato's ideal aesthetics: Plato believed that real beauty exists in ideas, and things in the material world are just imitations of ideas. He advocated that works of art are imitations of ideas. Through aesthetic experience, individuals can approach ideas and achieve soul improvement and moral perfection. Plato's aesthetic thought links beauty with wisdom and ethics, providing a profound foundation for the philosophical study of beauty.

- Aristotle's Imitation and Pleasing: Aristotle believed that art is the imitation of nature and human behavior. He proposed the concept of "Kafkasia" and believed that art can purify and please the audience's emotions through the audience's emotional experience, especially pity and fear in tragedy. Aristotle associated beauty with pleasing qualities and viewed aesthetic experience as a form of inspiration and education.

2.2 The Importance of Art

The second foundation of ancient Greek aesthetics is reflected in the field of art. Zhu Guangqian emphasized in his works that the prosperity of art and culture in ancient Greek culture gave aesthetic thought a practical basis for expression and practice. The ancient Greeks made outstanding achievements in the fields of architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, drama and other fields. These art forms not only reflect the pursuit of beauty, but also provide specific objects for the formation of aesthetic ideas.

- Architecture and Sculpture: Ancient Greek architecture and sculpture pursued perfect proportion and symmetry. Works such as the Parthenon and the Venus de Milo statue reflected the ancient Greeks' understanding and pursuit of beauty, and also inspired later architecture and sculpture.

- Drama and Poetry: Ancient Greek drama, especially tragedy and comedy, was an important vehicle for aesthetic experience. Aristotle's theory of drama had a profound influence on later drama creation and performance, emphasizing emotional purification and audience pleasing.

2.3 The Value of Aesthetic Experience

The third foundation of ancient Greek aesthetics emphasized the value of aesthetic experience. Ancient Greek society emphasized the value and significance of aesthetic experience and believed that through the experience of art and beauty, individuals can improve their moral, spiritual and ethical concepts. This emphasis gives aesthetic thought a broader social and moral context.

- Plato's moral improvement: Plato believed that aesthetic experience can bring individuals closer to ideas and achieve spiritual improvement and moral perfection. He associated beauty with goodness and truth, and regarded aesthetics as a process of soul improvement.

- Aristotle's Emotional Purification: Aristotle's concept of "Kafkasia" emphasizes the emotional role of art, purifying and pleasing through the audience's emotional experience. This emotional catharsis helps people achieve emotional balance and inner purification.

2.4 Lasting Impact

The theories and views of ancient Greek aesthetic thought continue to influence later aesthetic thought, and are still of great significance even today. The aesthetic theories of ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle have been widely studied, commented on and expanded by subsequent generations of philosophers and aestheticians. This tradition provides a solid foundation for the evolution and development of aesthetic thought.

In the historical evolution of aesthetic thought, ancient Greek aesthetics can be regarded as a key foundation stage. Its philosophical foundation, the importance of art, the value of aesthetic experience, and its lasting influence provided key support and inspiration for the development of aesthetic thought. The aesthetic thinking at this stage provided a profound cultural and philosophical foundation for subsequent aesthetic thoughts, constantly inspiring people to think about the nature and value of beauty.

3. Renaissance and Humanist Aesthetics

The Renaissance was a period of revival of aesthetic thought. The aesthetics of the Renaissance and humanism were not only a glorious chapter in European culture, but also provided a rich historical background for the development of Western aesthetics. In Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics*, we can gain an in-depth

understanding of the aesthetics of this period and their profound impact on art and culture. The intersection of the Renaissance and Humanism served as a wonderful bridge in aesthetic theory, which together emphasized the revival of the classical tradition and the intrinsic value of the individual.

The Renaissance, as a revival movement of art, culture and thought, swept across the European continent. This period, from the beginning of the 15th century to the beginning of the 17th century, emphasized the rediscovery and inspiration of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Artists and scholars seek the beauty of antiquity and try to incorporate it into contemporary artistic creations. In the Renaissance aesthetics described by Zhu Guangqian, the beauty of the human body became the focus, emphasizing the human body as the pinnacle of aesthetics, and at the same time developing a strong interest in humanistic themes such as philosophy, history, literature, etc. The principles of perspective and proportion were introduced, allowing artists to more accurately represent three-dimensional space and the proportions of figures, thereby increasing the realism and aesthetic value of paintings. The aesthetics of the Renaissance demonstrated a love for classical beauty and humanistic themes, while also paving the way for artistic innovation and development.

At the same time, humanistic thought emerged, placing the individual at the center of aesthetics and culture. Humanism advocates that human beings have intrinsic value and emphasizes the importance of individual aesthetic experience and unique perspectives. Human beings are seen as the measure of aesthetics and culture, promoting artistic creations of humanistic themes, such as figure paintings and literary works. Inspiration and education have become the core of humanistic thought, which believes that art can stimulate people's rationality and creativity, thereby cultivating aesthetic feelings and cultural accomplishment.

In Zhu Guangqian's works, we can explore more deeply the aesthetics of the Renaissance and humanism, and understand how they jointly shaped the development of Western aesthetics and continue to influence contemporary aesthetic concepts. The aesthetics of this period represented the worship of classical tradition, and also reflected the respect for individuals and humanistic themes, providing a solid foundation for the diversity and richness of aesthetics. In this feast of aesthetics and humanism, we will jointly explore the power and meaning of beauty, highlighting the unique charm of European cultural heritage.

3.1 Renaissance: Renaissance of Art and Anthropocentrism

The Renaissance was an important period in European history, from the late 14th to the early 17th century, known for its revival and emphasis on art, culture, and knowledge. The aesthetic concepts of the Renaissance were closely related to the humanistic tradition of ancient Greece. Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* provides profound insights into Renaissance aesthetics.

3.1.1 Anthropocentrism

The aesthetics of the Renaissance first manifested itself as Anthropocentrism. This idea originated from the humanistic tradition of the ancient Greek period, which emphasized the importance and dignity of human beings in the universe. Renaissance artists and cultural elites began to place human beings at the center of attention, emphasizing human intelligence, emotion, and creativity.

In Renaissance art, this idea was reflected in portraits, studies of human anatomy, and profound discussions of human nature. For example, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Michelangelo's *David* demonstrate the exquisite pursuit of human body proportions and emotional expression. This anthropocentric aesthetic concept has also influenced literature, such as Shakespeare's plays and literary works such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which emphasize human nature, human emotions and thinking.

3.1.2 Classical Revival

The Renaissance also included the revival of classical culture, especially the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance scholars and artists were keen to study ancient cultures and looked to classical literature, philosophy and art as sources of inspiration.

In terms of aesthetics, this revival is manifested in the study and respect of ancient aesthetic theories. Aestheticians during the Renaissance began to re-examine the aesthetic theories of Plato and Aristotle and combine them with the artistic practices of the time. This process prompted profound thinking about the nature of beauty, the value of imitation, and aesthetic experience.

3.2 Humanism: Human Dignity and Free Thinking

Humanism was an important ideological trend during the Renaissance, emphasizing human dignity, free thinking and the importance of education. This ideological tradition has had a profound impact on aesthetics and is consistent with the view of aesthetic history proposed by Zhu Guangqian.

3.2.1 Human Dignity

Humanism places the dignity of the individual at its core and believes that each person has unique value. This

idea is reflected in aesthetics as the emphasis on individual emotions and aesthetic experience. The literary and artistic works of the Renaissance emphasized the richness and depth of individual emotions. For example, Shakespeare's plays showed the diversity of human nature through the inner emotions of the characters.

3.2.2 Free thinking and Creativity

Humanism encouraged free thinking and creativity, which had a positive impact on aesthetic concepts. Artists and cultural elites during the Renaissance began to pursue innovative and individualized expressions. This idea of free thinking and creativity is reflected in literature, painting and music, with works that demonstrate individual uniqueness and diversity of aesthetic expression.

3.3 Leonardo da Vinci's Aesthetic Thought

Leonardo da Vinci was a versatile artist, scientist, engineer and thinker in Renaissance Italy. His aesthetic thoughts profoundly influenced the art and aesthetic concepts of the Renaissance, and for the first time integrated science and art; they also had a lasting impact on subsequent art and aesthetic ideas. The following are key points about Leonardo da Vinci's aesthetic thought:

His aesthetic thoughts emphasize accuracy and authenticity, believing that only through careful observation and accurate performance can art better present the beauty of nature. His method and principles of observation are described in detail in his book *The Technique of Drawing*.

- The fusion of science and art: Leonardo da Vinci was an outstanding scientist who blended science and art in his works. His anatomical studies enabled him to more accurately depict the human body, and his knowledge of engineering influenced his perspective and composition. He believed that scientific knowledge could improve the quality of art, so he encouraged artists to study science.

- Fluidity and dynamism: Leonardo da Vinci's works are full of dynamism and fluidity. He emphasized capturing moments and movement as a way to better express the real world. The figures and landscapes in his paintings often feature vivid gestures and movements.

- Secrets and Mysticism: Leonardo had a strong desire to pursue knowledge and explore the unknown. He often incorporates mystical themes and symbols into his work, and this element of mysticism gives his works a deep meaning and appeal. The famous *Mona Lisa* has a mysterious smile and a mysterious meaning behind it.

- Integration of environment and emotion: Leonardo da Vinci emphasized the interaction between environment and emotion. His backgrounds and scenery often echo the emotions and themes in his works to enhance the viewer's emotional experience. What he pursues is a comprehensive and emotionally rich aesthetic experience.

Leonardo da Vinci's aesthetic thought embodies the Renaissance's pursuit of the integration of natural observation, science and art. His works are not only visual enjoyment, but also contain profound thoughts and philosophical views. His influence extended to subsequent artists and aesthetes, continuing to inspire the exploration and expression of beauty.

The aesthetics of the Renaissance and humanism still shine brightly in the history of Western aesthetics. In Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics*, Mr. Zhu Guangqian deeply discussed how these two ideological trends gave rise to profound reflections on beauty and new explorations of art in European history; and the aesthetics and perspectives of the Renaissance and Humanism complement each other. Renaissance anthropocentrism and classical revival emphasized the importance of people and respect for classical aesthetics, while humanism emphasized the value of individual dignity and free thinking. These ideas jointly shaped the aesthetics of the Renaissance, influenced the development of art, literature and philosophy, and provided rich soil for the evolution of Western aesthetic thought.

4. The Age of Enlightenment and the Rise of Aesthetic Theory

The Enlightenment is a period from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 18th century, which is regarded as the birthplace of modern thought. During this period, influenced by the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution, people began to question traditional concepts of religion and authority, emphasizing rationality, freedom, and equality. The social, political and cultural changes of the Enlightenment era created conditions for the rise of aesthetic theory. The Age of Enlightenment marked an important turning point in human history, an era that sparked revolutionary changes in many areas, including politics, philosophy, culture, and art. In the field of aesthetics, the rise of Enlightenment thinkers also promoted the development of aesthetic theory and redefined people's understanding and appreciation of beauty; the Enlightenment era was the period of the rise of aesthetic theory in aesthetic thought, which emphasized rationality and universal principles. Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* provides an insightful analysis of this period, revealing how the Age of Enlightenment shaped the foundations of modern aesthetic theory. This chapter will explore the impact of the Enlightenment era on aesthetic theory, as well as Zhu Guangqian's views in this regard.

4.1 The Rise of Aesthetic Theory

During the Age of Enlightenment, aesthetic theory came to prominence. Enlightenment thinkers began to think about the nature of beauty, art, and aesthetic experience, which laid the foundation for the development of modern aesthetics. Here are some of the key aesthetic theoretical ideas that emerged during this period:

Kant's Principle of Universality: Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment is one of the classics of aesthetic theory. He proposed the universal principle of aesthetic judgment and believed that aesthetic experience has a certain degree of objectivity and is also affected by subjective feelings. Kant's views provided a unique theoretical basis for later aestheticians, allowing them to study aesthetic experience more deeply.

Hume's empiricism: David Hume's empiricism has had a profound impact on aesthetic feeling. He believes that aesthetic experience originates from sensory perception, in which emotion plays an important role. Hume's thought emphasized the close connection between perception and emotion, providing inspiration for later aesthetic thought.

Rousseau's Cultural Commentary: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's cultural commentary emphasized the opposition between nature and culture. His emphasis on the purity of nature and the corruption of culture had an important impact on aesthetic theory, encouraging people to rethink the relationship between beauty and morality, society and culture.

The above three philosophers, Kant, Hume and Rousseau, put forward different but valuable perspectives in the field of aesthetic theory, respectively emphasizing the universality of aesthetic experience, the importance of perception and emotion, and the relationship between beauty and morality, society, and culture. relationship between. The following is a summary and comparison of these three perspectives:

1) Kant's Principle of Universality

- Kant emphasized that aesthetic experience has a certain degree of objectivity and is also affected by subjective feelings. He believes that aesthetic judgment is general and universal, that is, people can reach a universal consensus on beautiful things.

- This perspective provides a strong theoretical foundation for aesthetic theory, allowing aestheticians to explore the objectivity and universality of aesthetic experience, not only focusing on individual subjective emotions.

- Kant's perspective emphasizes the role of reason in aesthetics and encourages in-depth study of the universal principles of beauty.

2) Hume's Empiricism

- Hume's empiricism believes that aesthetic experience originates from sensory perception, in which emotion plays an important role. He emphasized the close connection between perception and emotion, believing that emotion affects aesthetic feelings.

- This perspective emphasizes the subjectivity and individual differences of aesthetic experience, and that people's aesthetic feelings are affected by their emotions and perceptions.

- Hume's views emphasize the importance of perceptual experience and promote a deeper discussion of aesthetic feelings and emotions in aesthetic research.

3) Rousseau's Cultural Comments

- Rousseau's cultural commentary emphasized the opposition between nature and culture, emphasizing the purity of nature and the corruption of culture. He proposed the negative impact of culture on the moral and aesthetic education of individuals.

- This perspective makes people rethink the relationship between beauty and morality, society and culture, and triggers thinking about the role of culture in shaping aesthetic experience.

- Rousseau's point of view emphasized the influence of cultural and social values on aesthetic theory, causing aestheticians to begin to pay more extensive attention to the relationship between aesthetics, ethics and society.

Taken together, the perspectives of these three philosophers provide a rich and colorful perspective that helps us understand more fully the nature of aesthetic theory and art. Kant's principle of universality highlights the universality of aesthetic experience, Hume's empiricism emphasizes perception and emotion, and Rousseau's cultural commentary links aesthetics with morality, society, and culture, which together enrich the development of aesthetic thought. These perspectives complement each other and help us gain a deeper understanding of the diversity and complexity of beauty.

4.2 Aestheticism and the Social Function of Art

Aestheticism and the social function of art in the Enlightenment era represent two seemingly opposing aesthetic

viewpoints, but they both play an important role in the history of Western aesthetics. Enlightenment aesthetes emphasized the importance of aesthetic experience, and art was seen as a useful tool for society, capable of improving moral and ethical values. These two perspectives explore the role and impact of art, as well as the nature of aesthetic experience, providing insightful reflections on the relationship between art and society.

4.2.1 The Perspective of Aestheticism

Aestheticism emphasizes that the primary purpose of art is to provide aesthetic pleasure. Representatives of this view include the 18th-century British artist Joshua Reynolds and the philosopher Edmund Burke. They believe that the main task of art is to arouse the audience's emotions of beauty and provide them with aesthetic enjoyment.

The perspective of aestheticism highlights the independence and self-sufficiency of art. Art does not have to pursue a social or moral purpose but can exist in a purely aesthetic realm. Aestheticism emphasizes the individuality of aesthetic experience. Everyone's understanding and feelings of works of art may be different, but they are all legitimate. This idea was further emphasized during the Romantic period, when artists began to emphasize creating their own work rather than being bound by social or political demands.

4.2.2 Social Function of Art

The opposite view of aestheticism is that art has a broader social function. During the Age of Enlightenment, some philosophers and cultural critics, such as Kant and Adam Smith, argued that art played an important educational and moral role in society.

Kant emphasized the "noble mission" of art and believed that art could improve moral and ethical standards by providing examples of beauty. He believes that through the expression of beauty, people can cultivate noble feelings and rational thinking, and promote the cultural and moral progress of society.

Adam Smith emphasized the social value of art. He believes that art is a social activity where people can build resonance and social cohesion through shared aesthetic experiences. Art can promote cultural inheritance and social identity.

4.2.3 Integration and Balance

In fact, aestheticism and an emphasis on social function are not necessarily antagonistic. Many views in modern aesthetics attempt to integrate these two positions, arguing that art can both provide the enjoyment of beauty and play an important role in society.

For example, the idea of art education is an example of combining aestheticism and social function. By learning and appreciating art, individuals can gain aesthetic pleasure while also improving their cognition and creativity. This contributes to the overall development of the individual and also has a positive impact on the culture and education of the society.

In modern society, the social function of art cannot be ignored. Art can convey information, spark discussion, and promote social change, while also providing aesthetic pleasure. This balance reflects the multifaceted nature and multiple functions of art, making it an integral part of cultural life.

Taken together, Enlightenment aestheticism and the social function of art represent two different but sometimes intertwined perspectives. Aestheticism emphasizes the importance of aesthetic experience, while the social functional perspective emphasizes the role of art in society. In modern aesthetics, these two perspectives are often blended together, allowing us to better understand the multiple roles and meanings of art. Art is not only a source of aesthetic pleasure, but also plays an important role in education, cultural inheritance and social interaction, contributing to the development of society and individuals.

The Age of Enlightenment is an important chapter in the history of Western thought, and it is also a critical period in the development of aesthetic theory. In Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics*, we followed the ideological giants of this era and learned about their understanding of beauty and their profound thinking on aesthetic concepts. The Age of Enlightenment emphasized the importance of reason, freedom, and knowledge, and these ideas had a profound impact on the rise of aesthetic theory. During this period, beauty was no longer just a superficial feature of artworks, but was linked to reason and intertwined with moral, social, political and other ethical factors. Thinkers of this era, such as Kant, emphasized the universality of aesthetic judgment and believed that beauty is not just a product of subjective feelings, but has universal principles. This perspective provides a more solid foundation for aesthetic theory and enables us to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of beauty.

At the same time, the Age of Enlightenment also promoted aesthetic education and emphasized the social function of art. Art is not only a source of aesthetic enjoyment but can also contribute to social and cultural progress. This thought has influenced the field of aesthetic education, cultivating citizens with more aesthetic

accomplishments, and at the same time improving the status of aesthetic concepts in society.

Therefore, the aesthetic concepts of the Enlightenment era broadened our understanding of beauty, linked it with rationality and ethics, and opened up a new path for the development of aesthetic theory. The thoughts and theories of this period not only had a profound impact at the time, but also provided important references for modern aesthetic theory and practice.

5. The Transformation of Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics

The transition between modern aesthetics and postmodern aesthetics represents an important watershed in the history of Western aesthetics. This evolution is also reflected in Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics*. The following is a discussion of the aesthetics of these two periods — the aesthetic ideas of modernism and postmodernism challenged traditional aesthetic concepts. This change represents an important evolution in the history of Western aesthetics. It not only profoundly affects aesthetic perspectives, but also shapes the face of contemporary art and culture. Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* provides us with a profound historical background so that we can better understand this change. In this chapter, we explore the shifts in modern and postmodern aesthetics, starting with their origins and core features, and then delving into their impact on aesthetic theory and contemporary culture.

5.1 Origin and Background

The origins of modern aesthetics can be traced back to the late 18th century to the early 20th century. It was built on the rational thinking and classical tradition of the Enlightenment Era. Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant emphasized the principle of universality and believed that aesthetic experience has a certain degree of objectivity. The aesthetics of this period emphasized rationality, order and objectivity, linking beauty with rules and traditions. On the other hand, postmodern aesthetics emerged in the late 20th century and challenged the traditional views of modern aesthetics. Postmodern thinkers emphasize the relativity and subjectivity of aesthetic judgment and believe that aesthetic experience is an individual's subjective feeling rather than a universal rule. The aesthetics of this period focused on multicultural perspectives, emphasized cultural relativism, and attempted to deconstruct traditional aesthetic perspectives.

5.2 Core Features

The core characteristics of modern aesthetics include universal principles, normativeness, tradition and inheritance. The aesthetics of this period focused on the rational structure and rules of art and tended to inherit the tradition of classical aesthetics. Different from this, the core characteristics of postmodern aesthetics include relativity and subjectivity, pluralism and deconstruction, and anti-normativity. Postmodern aesthetics emphasizes a multicultural perspective, expresses doubts about norms and authority, and rejects traditional aesthetic rules and structures.

Some of the key features in modern aesthetics include:

- Principle of universality: Kant's aesthetics emphasizes the universality of aesthetic judgment and believes that aesthetic experience has a certain degree of objectivity and is independent of individual feelings.

- Normativity: Modern aesthetics focuses on the normative nature of art and emphasizes the rational structure and rules of art. This concern leads aestheticians to attempt to establish a rule- and principle-based basis for aesthetic judgment.

- Tradition and inheritance: Modern aesthetics tends to inherit the tradition of classical aesthetics and attaches great importance to the historical and cultural value of art.

Postmodern aesthetics:

Some key features of postmodern aesthetics include:

- Relativity and subjectivity: Postmodern aesthetics emphasizes the relativity and subjectivity of aesthetic judgment, believing that aesthetic experience is an individual's subjective feeling rather than a universal rule.

- Pluralism and deconstruction: Postmodern aesthetics focuses on a multicultural perspective, emphasizes cultural relativism, and attempts to deconstruct traditional aesthetic perspectives.

- Anti-normativity: Postmodern aesthetics is suspicious of norms and authority, and it tends to reject traditional aesthetic rules and structures.

Modern and postmodern aesthetics encompass multiple schools and ideas, each of which brings unique perspectives and contributions to the field of aesthetics. Here are some of the major modern and postmodern aesthetic schools and ideas:

5.2.1 Modern Aesthetic Schools and Ideas

1) Formalism: Formalist aesthetics emphasizes the inherent structure and formal elements of works of art, such

as lines, colors, composition, etc. Representative figures include Clement Greenberg, who emphasized the pure nature of painting and sculpture in art criticism.

2) Structuralism and Semi-Automatic Aesthetics: This school of thought links aesthetics to linguistics, arguing that texts and works of art can be analyzed into symbols and semiotic systems. Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze are important representatives in this field.

3) Existential aesthetics: Existential aesthetics explores the impact of individual existence and human experience on art. Existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre were an important influence in this regard.

4) Psychological aesthetics: This school of thought focuses on the relationship between aesthetic experience and psychological processes. Mainly studies the origin and psychological mechanism of aesthetic feelings.

5.2.2 Postmodern Aesthetics School and Thought

1) Poststructuralism: Poststructuralist aesthetics challenges the inherent view of structuralism and believes that meaning is relative and polysemous. Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are representatives of poststructuralism.

2) Postmodern aesthetics: The core idea of postmodern aesthetics is to reject all universality and rules and emphasize plurality and subjectivity. Aesthetic judgment is viewed as relative, with no universal standards. This idea is closely related to the diversity and experimentation of contemporary art.

3) Postcolonial aesthetics: Postcolonial aesthetics studies cultural diversity and the relationship between Western and non-Western cultures in the postcolonial era. Representative figures in this field include Edward Said and Homi Bhabha.

4) Feminine aesthetics and gender aesthetics: This field focuses on the presentation of gender roles in works of art and how aesthetic experience is affected by gender and gender identity. Representative figures include Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler.

These schools and ideas represent the diversity of modern and postmodern aesthetics and reflect the continuous evolution and expansion of the aesthetic field. Together they constitute a rich and colorful knowledge system in the field of aesthetics, providing us with different perspectives for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexity and diversity of beauty.

5.3 Impact and Enlightenment

The transformation between modern and postmodern aesthetics has had a profound impact on aesthetic theory and contemporary culture. Modern aesthetics emphasizes the universality of aesthetic judgment and attaches great importance to the normative and historical value of art. This provides a solid foundation for aesthetic education, cultivates citizens with more aesthetic accomplishments, and also improves the status of aesthetic concepts in society. Postmodern aesthetics challenges traditional aesthetic concepts, emphasizes subjectivity and diversity, and makes people pay more attention to the diversity and complexity of aesthetic experience. It has also influenced the diversity and innovation of contemporary art and promoted the development of cultural diversity and inclusion.

5.4 Conclusion

The transition between modern and postmodern aesthetics represents a profound evolution in the history of Western aesthetics, emphasizing the diversity, complexity, and subjectivity of beauty. This change not only enriches aesthetic theory, but also affects contemporary art and culture, inspiring more aesthetic thinking and creativity. Through in-depth study of the characteristics and influences of modern and postmodern aesthetics, we can better understand the richness of aesthetic thoughts, which provides a strong foundation for continuing to explore the nature and meaning of beauty. This change tells us that aesthetic views are not static, but constantly evolving with the times and culture. Therefore, we should cherish this evolution and regard it as an inspiration for the continuous exploration of beauty to adapt to the needs of modern society and culture.

6. Conclusion

The evolution of Western aesthetic thought is like a picture full of layers and depth, showing the changes in culture, philosophy and social concepts. From the pursuit of ancient Greek philosophy to Renaissance humanism, to the aesthetic theory of the Enlightenment era and the challenges of modern postmodernity, aesthetic thought has moved forward, constantly reflecting and shaping the diversity of Western art and aesthetics.

The evolution of aesthetic thought first shows us how cultural and philosophical concepts in different historical periods affect aesthetic concepts. Ancient Greek philosophy focused on the nature of beauty and philosophical thinking, laying the foundation for aesthetic thought; Renaissance humanism emphasized the intrinsic value of individuals and the power of culture, inspiring in-depth discussions on beauty; the Enlightenment era focused on rationality and Knowledge promotes the universal principle of aesthetic viewpoint. The rise of postmodern

thought challenges traditional views and emphasizes diversity and subjectivity, making us realize that the nature of beauty varies depending on culture and subjective experience.

This historical evolution also reflects the continuous evolution of aesthetic thought. The complexity and diversity of aesthetic thought are driven by the interaction and debate between different schools and thinkers. From Kant's principle of universality to postmodernism's rejection of norms, the plurality of aesthetic thought provides us with a variety of aesthetic perspectives, allowing us to more fully understand the nature of beauty.

The evolution of Western aesthetic thought reflects the changes in culture, philosophy and social concepts. This historical process is colorful and full of profound discussions on beauty by thinkers in different periods. Zhu Guangqian's *History of Western Aesthetics* provides us with a profound historical background and helps us better understand the evolution of Western aesthetic thought. This historical evolution tells us that aesthetic ideas are not static, but continue to advance over time, reflecting the changing cultural and social environment. By deeply understanding this historical evolution, we can explore more deeply the nature of beauty and the value of art to adapt to the needs of contemporary society and culture. Aesthetic ideas will continue to evolve, constantly providing us with new aesthetic perspectives and inspirations.

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