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A STUDY OF LAO TZU'S AND HEIDEGGER'S
PHILOSOPHIES OF BEAUTY IN PAINTINGS
THROUGH AN AESTHETIC CRITIQUE ON
ZHU DA AND FRANCIS BACON



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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of beauty has been argued and debated for centuries, whether in China or Western countries, particularly examining human association with beauty that developed culturally. This research aims to deepen the understanding on 'beauty' according to Lao Tzu (571 B.C.-470 B.C.), as a representative of Chinese philosophy of Beauty, and Heidegger (1889-1976), as a representative of Western philosophy of Beauty. The purpose of this study is to reveal the similarities and differences between these two influential philosophies of beauty by conducting a comparative analysis on series of painting between Zhu Da (1626-1705), the Chinese ancient prominent painter, and Francis Bacon (1909-1992), the Western distinctive painter. This study conveys a qualitative study using document reviews, visual analysis, thematic analysis, and comparative analysis which consists of three main stages. The first stage reviews the philosophies of beauty according to Lao Tzu and Heidegger to obtain the significant elements of their philosophies of beauty. The second stage identifies the influences of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings through visual analysis and thematic analysis. The third stage reveals the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty through a comparative analysis on Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings based on the significant elements discovered in Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty. Consequently, the results show that there are similarities that both philosophies have employed images to pursue the truth in the first place, used metaphor, time, and space to confirm existence in the second place, employed nihilism and the subject of death to express transcendence in the third place. However, both have different ways to achieve them. Obviously, this research provides important insights into understanding the diverse phenomena of beauty and implications on the communication of beauty between different cultures.





KAJIAN FALSAFAH KECANTIKAN MENURUT LAO TZU DAN HEIDEGGER DALAM CATAN MENERUSI KRITIKAN ESTETIK TERHADAP ZHU DA DAN FRANCIS BACON

ABSTRAK

Falsafah kecantikan telah diperdebatkan berabad-abad lamanya, sama ada di Barat atau pun di China, terutamanya dalam mengkaji hubungan manusia dengan kecantikan yang telah berkembang dari segi budaya. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mendalami pemahaman tentang 'kecantikan' menurut Lao Tzu (571 B.C.-470 B.C.) sebagai pembentang falsafah Kecantikan Cina, dan Heidegger (1889-1976) sebagai pembentang falsafah Kecantikan Barat. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mendedahkan persamaan dan perbezaan antara dua falsafah kecantikan yang berpengaruh ini dengan menjalankan analisis perbandingan ke atas siri lukisan Zhu Da (1626-1705), pelukis terkenal purba Cina, dan Francis Bacon (1909-1992), pelukis tersendiri Barat. Kajian ini menyampaikan inkuiri kualitatif menggunakan semakan dokumen, analisis visual, analisis tematik, dan analisis perbandingan yang terdiri daripada tiga peringkat utama. Peringkat pertama adalah kajian tentang falsafah kecantikan menurut Lao Tzu dan Heidegger untuk mendapatkan unsur-unsur penting falsafah kecantikan mereka. Pada peringkat kedua, pengkaji mengenal pasti pengaruh falsafah kecantikan Lao Tzu dan Heidegger dalam lukisan Zhu Da dan Francis Bacon melalui analisis visual dan analisis tematik. Pada peringkat ketiga pula, persamaan dan perbezaan antara falsafah kecantikan Lao Tzu dan Heidegger didedahkan melalui analisis perbandingan terhadap lukisan Zhu Da dan Francis Bacon berdasarkan elemen penting yang ditemui dalam falsafah kecantikan Lao Tzu dan Heidegger. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat persamaan antara kedua-dua falsafah, iaitu menggunakan imej untuk mengejar kebenaran di tempat pertama, menggunakan metafora, masa, dan ruang untuk mengesahkan kewujudan di tempat kedua, menggunakan nihiliti dan subjek kematian untuk menyatakan transendensi dalam tempat ketiga. Walau bagaimanapun, kedua-duanya mempunyai cara yang berbeza untuk mencapainya. Jelas sekali, penyelidikan ini memberikan pandangan penting untuk memahami pelbagai fenomena keindahan dan implikasi terhadap komunikasi kecantikan antara budaya yang berbeza.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



This chapter will provide an introduction to the study by first discussing the philosophy of beauty in general and stating why the study is done. Then, the background is employed to contextualize the research problems, followed by a statement of the specific problem, which proceeds to explain the research objectives and research questions, and the key terms are defined, the limitations and significance of the study are also identified. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.





1.1.1 The Philosophy of Beauty in General

The nature of beauty is one of the most enduring and controversial themes in Western philosophy, and is with the nature of art - one of the two fundamental issues in the history of philosophical aesthetics. Beauty has traditionally been counted among the ultimate values, with goodness, truth, and justice (Sartwell, 2012). From Plato to modern neuropsychological studies, the concept of beauty has always been a theme for adamant debates and passionate thoughts. Different aspects of beauty, from intellectual to pure physical, have received a tremendous amount of attention. The true definition of the concept of beauty is still ambiguous, and there is no unanimous explanation for it. It seems that the definition of beauty differs in every individual's mind and over the history of humankind (Sisti et al., 2021). Among art critics, historians, and philosophers who aspire to the scientific method or objective scholarship, the terms beautiful and beauty have fallen into some disfavor in recent years. Until the First World War, many books and articles appeared with titles such as *The Sense of Beauty*, *The Psychology of Beauty*, and *The Philosophy of the beautiful* to define "the beautiful" correctly, and give a true account of its nature and criteria, was commonly regarded as the sole or central task of aesthetics (Munro, 1955). Throughout history, the philosophy of beauty has been praised, cherished, scorned, and debated. It has been viewed as an underlying quality with associations to perfection or as being synonymous with truth. However, beauty is a widely used term, and its meaning is vague and diverse in different contexts (Xiao, 2003).

A well-known example of this is Plato. The first person to develop aesthetics was the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 B.C.), who sought to summarize a





general law of beauty from a variety of particular beauties and provide an essential description of beauty from a scientific standpoint. Plato discussed the very essence of beauty in his book entitled *Plato's Views on Arts*. Plato makes a distinction between “beautiful things” and “beauty in itself”. According to him, when individuals are asked to define beauty, they typically just mention things that are beautiful rather than “beauty in itself.” Many beautiful things share the essence of beauty, which serves as the foundation for many other beautiful things to be beautiful. Plato discussed “beauty in itself” and denied various popular views at the time, holding that beauty is not something that is beautiful, not a substance or form that gives things appearances of beauty, not a spiritual satisfaction, not appropriate, useful, beneficial values, not pleasure brought on by sight or hearing, and so forth. Plato believed that “beauty in itself” is an absolute beauty that is eternal, has no beginning or end, is immortal, and does not increase or decrease. All beautiful things are based on it, and only with it can all beautiful things. He believed that this sacred, eternal, absolute, and wonderful “beauty in itself” is the essence of beauty. The essence of beauty is objective and exists before beautiful things in the real world. All kinds of beautiful things in the real world, such as beautiful ladies and beautiful scenery, are beautiful because they contain the ideas of beauty. Plato separated the things and phenomena of beauty in the real world from “beauty itself”. He believed that behind the beautiful things and phenomena lies the essence of beauty. The task of philosophers is to find out the essence of “beauty in itself”. Nevertheless, he fails to offer a clear and precise solution to the question of beauty and concludes in the book entitled *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Question of Art Today* that “So I think, Hippias, that I have benefited by conversation with both of you; for I think I know the meaning of the proverb: beautiful things are difficult” (Grossmann, 1990, p. 112).





Since ancient times, both China and the West have had theories about beauty. In ancient China, thinkers such as Confucius and Lao Tzu proposed and illustrated the proposition of the essence of beauty; many thinkers and aestheticians conducted in-depth discussions on the category of beauty. In the West, the study of the principles and essence of beauty has drawn a lot of interest. All of them have made an effort to define beauty precisely, but there have always been differences among different schools of philosophy. From the perspective of China, philosophical reflections and discussions on beauty are often included in aesthetic works and literary books. Unlike the West, the philosophy of beauty is not a central idea in many aesthetic categories and has not developed into a comprehensive system in Chinese literary theory (Ding, 2013). For Chinese aesthetics, Western culture has always been the most significant frame of reference because it is the mainstream of the globe. The Chinese had the opportunity to explore well-known ideas that could be consistent with their traditions, in addition to being given a variety of fascinatingly novel ideas as a result of their experience with Western thought. Many philosophical ideas of beauty in Chinese philosophy are primarily formed within the cross-cultural setting of comparing Western and Chinese philosophies (Yu, 2011).

In general, there are many articles in the comparative study of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's thoughts. The Chinese and foreign scholars have compared the differences and similarities between the two philosophers from distinctive perspectives. The former vice-minister of China Culture Division Zheng Zhenduo (2018) clearly stated in his book entitled *The History of Chinese Literature* that “Regardless of the differences between times and nations, the lofty feelings of mankind can understand each other. There is no gap between race and times in literary works”. (p. 19). Throughout the





world, literary and artistic works have been passed down, sharing the common spiritual realm of humanity comprehensively and profoundly through reasonable structures, artistic forms, fine language, and vivid thinking. They serve as an essential way for people to observe society, learn about themselves, and comprehend the world as a whole.

Throughout this process, classic works broaden the meaning and scope of the human spiritual realm by delving deeper into its unknown depths. Literature and art can be presented in a wide range of ways on external surfaces. The aesthetic consciousness and ideological value should be universally acceptable, even though the narrative style, rhetorical devices, and expression of beauty are distinctive. Literature and art are world languages that contain fundamental principles of society and life, helping people of different ethnicities, regions, and backgrounds to eliminate barriers, achieve mutual understanding, and facilitate intellectual and spiritual communication. Literary and artistic creation should explore the unity of the human spirit from the characteristics of ethnicity and locality, overcome cultural barriers and conflicts, and thus move readers from all over the world, creating strong emotional resonance.

Furthermore, Professor Deng Xiaomang (2010), the Dean of the Institute of German Philosophy and Culture at Hubei University, said in his article *Comparison of Chinese and Western Art Spirit* that contemporary Chinese literature and art need to break free from their one-sidedness and limitations, actively participate in the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind in an aesthetic way, and synchronize with the world literary trend. However, Chinese and Western cultures are essentially distinct. But since humans are inherently connected, it is theoretically





understandable. Such comprehension is based on the comparison; to understand Westerners and Western culture, aesthetics and art are indispensable. For example, if Westerners want to comprehend ancient Chinese culture, research on art and aesthetics must reach the innermost part of Chinese cultural psychology. The focus will be on the insight into human nature and heart, reflecting the intricacies of the human spiritual world, helping humanity form a solid spiritual bond, and becoming a bridge for cross-cultural understanding and communication. Consequently, it is precise because human feelings have something in common that the researcher can compare the traditional Chinese paintings with the Western paintings on beauty (Deng, 2010).

However, the ideas of beauty are undoubtedly complex, consequently, the philosophy of beauty is also an unavoidable proposition in painting theory. Beauty is neither a central idea nor an essential category in Chinese painting theory. The discussion is frequently fragmented and the philosophy of beauty has never been adequately clarified or defined. The philosophy of beauty is constantly generated and changed in meaning in different contexts due to their combination with different words. The Chinese words have a wide range of meanings, and the term “beauty” is unstable and extremely flexible. It has deeper cultural and contextual implications in addition to its many meanings (Ding, 2013, p.2).

For these reasons, the purpose of this study is to find out the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in paintings. This research aims to deepen the understanding on the philosophies of beauty of the two philosophers', Lao Tzu and Heidegger, particularly to comprehend the expressions of beauty in painting. To do this, the researcher will conduct a comparative analysis on





Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings based on the common significant elements in Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in order to reveal the similarities and differences.

1.1.2 The Artists to Represent the Philosophy of Beauty

In Chinese philosophy, the researcher chose an ancient Chinese philosopher, historian, founder, and main representative of Taoism named Lao Tzu (571 B.C.-471 B.C.). In the book entitled *The Outline of Chinese Aesthetic History* written by Professor Ye Lang (2005), an aestheticist and Professor of Philosophy and Social Sciences at Peking University, he said "Lao Tzu's aesthetics is the starting point of Chinese aesthetic history". (p. 19). According to Professor Ye Lang (2005), Lao Tzu's philosophy has had a far-reaching impact on the formation and development of Chinese literati painting. This is also agreed by Xu Fuguan (1987), a representative figure of the New Confucian School, in his book entitled *Chinese Artistic Spirit*, he said "The philosophical thought of Lao Tzu centered on the Tao contains the true artistic spirit of China". (p. 43). Lao Tzu's philosophy served as the foundation for traditional Chinese philosophy and had a significant influence on succeeding generations. It not only established the philosophical basis for the philosophies of beauty and their value orientation, but it also had a significant impact on the growth and development of the nation's consciousness of beauty (Kohn & LaFargue, 1998; Ye, 2009; see also Xu, 2020).

In Chinese traditional art, Zhu Da (1626-1705) is the best representative painter of the traditional Chinese literati painting (Wang, 2003). Lao Tzu's aesthetic thoughts





of simplicity, truth of life, and naturalness are presented obviously in the data analysis of Zhu Da's paintings. Zhu Liangzhi (2008), Director of the Center for Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education at Peking University and former Senior Researcher at the Asia Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, mentioned in his book entitled *Research on Bada Shanren*, that “Zhu Da attached great importance to Taoism” (p.452). According to Zhu Liangzhi, Zhu Da's paintings are simple in composition. He makes full use of the blank space which shows the truth behind the void. The images in the paintings are exaggerated and grotesque, showing an infinite vitality, which are used to metaphor his contempt and dissatisfaction with the rulers at that time (see, Figures 1.1 & 1.2). The paintings below clearly demonstrate how Zhu Da conveyed his inner loneliness and desolation, and lamented his fate in troubled times. The intense lonely spirit embodied in paintings is the result of his long-term thinking about the value of





Figure 1.1

“Solitary Bird” by Zhu Da (1694) Handscroll, ink on paper. 26.5cm×23cm



(Source: *The Painter's East-West Shadow*, Zhu, 2020, p. 89)



Figure 1.2

“Swimming Fish” by Zhu Da (1694), Handscroll, ink on paper. 31.8cm×21.9cm



(Source: Research on Bada Shanren, Zhu, 2008, p. 131)

In Western philosophy, the researcher chose Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). In the book entitled *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, American Professor Taylor Carman said “Martin Heidegger now widely recognized as one of the most important philosophers in recent history, radically redirected phenomenology by applying it to the question of the meaning of being and the structure of human existence”. (Hannabuss, 2003, p. 842). This is also agreed by Jeff Malpas (2007), an Australian philosopher and emeritus distinguished professor at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, he said “Martin Heidegger is one of the most significant and influential philosophers of the twentieth century. Through his appropriation of Kierkegaardian ideas, Heidegger was pivotal in the development of twentieth-century existentialism” (p. 143).



Moreover, in the article entitled *Being and Martin Heidegger* written by Dr. Richard Gilbert (2007), he said “Martin Heidegger is widely considered to be the father of modern atheistic existentialism”. (p. 1). Accordingly, Heidegger stated in his book entitled *Being and Time* (2018), that as a “being”, people face nothingness. The reason why people suffer is that people are facing an absurd world, and people can only have angst and fear. It is angst and fear that reveal people's real existence. Existentialism advocates exploring life and asking people's living conditions in artworks (Heidegger, 2018). Also, according to Professor Li Xingchen (2021), an aestheticist and Professor of Philosophy at Peking University, in his book entitled *The Western Aesthetic History Course*, he said Heidegger believed that the value of art lies in revealing the truth in Heidegger's speech on the origin of works of art. Heidegger's aesthetic social theme is to oppose the rule of technology over man, save the modern world, and restore real



In Western art, according to David Sylvester (2016), a British art critic and curator, Francis Bacon (1909-1992) is a significant British painter of the twentieth century. His paintings are famous for rough, violent, distorted, deformed images. The paintings below clearly demonstrate how the common images of Bacon's paintings are the combination of man and animal which are metaphors alienation of people, and the distorted faces and bodies reveal the pain and helplessness of human beings (see, Figures 1.3 & 1.4). As can be seen, Bacon often used a closed space to indicate a dilemma of human survival, and metaphorically implied a series of psychological emotions such as alienation, loneliness, fear, and so on (Sylvester, 2016). Dr. LiuWenwen (2017) who has been committed to the study of Francis Bacon mentioned that Bacon's paintings express a kind of violence, despair, or angst, showing that human



beings exist in an unrealistic and absurd world without faith and morality, and further emphasize the relationship between Bacon's art and existentialism.

Furthermore, according to the book entitled *Francis Bacon: Painting, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* written by Ware and Caygill (2019), the authors stated that “Bacon is often associated with deconstruction. Most of Bacon’s paintings appeared to many as one of the most convincing artistic versions of the Heideggerian destruction” (Ware & Caygill, 2019, p.17). It is also agreed by Professor Rina Arya (2012), a

Figure 1.3

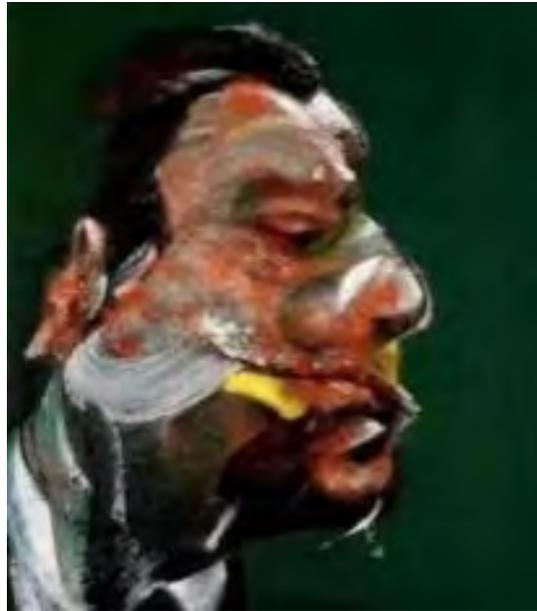
“Three Studies for Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne” by Francis Bacon (1965), Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 inches (for each panel),



(Source: <http://www.francis-bacon.com/>)

Figure 1.4

“George Dyer” by Francis Bacon (1967), Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 30.5 cm



(Source: <http://www.francis-bacon.com/>)

Professor of Critical and Cultural Theory and Head of the School of the Arts at the University of Hull, mentioned in her book entitled *Francis Bacon: Critical and Theoretical Perspectives* that existentialism became popularized in European milieus, at the same time, Bacon had established himself as a painter, a fact that further encourages the parallel between Bacon's art and existentialism. Arya (2012) said, “The similarity of iconography between Francis Bacon's art and existentialist literature about the single figure who contemplates destiny in unfamiliar surroundings and with no escape route has prompted critics to think about his work with existentialism” (p. 81).

From the above analysis, the researcher can see a lot of similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty, that is to solve the fundamental problem of human existence. Moreover, Heidegger has a strong



interest in Ancient Oriental philosophy. He frankly acknowledged Lao Tzu's philosophy influenced and inspired some viewpoints of his thought (Zhang, 2022b). Their philosophy of beauty represents the core ideas of the two major aesthetic traditions of China and the West. By comparing the ideas of beauty between the two, it can be found that they express similar and even astonishing views on core issues such as art and nature, art and life, and timeliness. This is also the deep historical reason why people generally believe that Heidegger's thought can be connected with Lao Tzu. Heidegger, in contrast to Lao Tzu, not only developed a comprehensive philosophical system but also a largely independent aesthetic system. But creativity and truthfulness, rather than work length, determine a theory's academic worth. Heidegger and Lao Tzu have a great deal of similar thinking when it comes to responding to the question of what the beauty is. Of course, Heidegger's response to this issue is more exacting, thorough, and rigorous than Lao Tzu's due to the influence of German-style speculative tradition as well as his outstanding ability for philosophical deduction (Cao & Han, 2017).

Consequently, there are also great similarities and differences between Chinese and Western paintings in pursuing beauty under the influences of their philosophies of beauty. For these reasons, The researcher takes Zhu Da's and Bacon's paintings as research samples and deeply explores the expressions of beauty based on the significant elements in Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty, and find out the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty, which is a better way to achieve a mutual understanding of beauty and cultural communication in painting, consequently one can also learn more about possibilities of the expressions of beauty.





1.2 Background of the Study

The English's philosopher and political theorist *Bernard Bosanquet (2017)* said that aesthetic theory is a branch of philosophy in his book entitled *A History of Aesthetic*.

He clearly stated:

It was not before the latter half of the eighteenth century that the term aesthetic was adopted with the meaning now recognized, to designate the philosophy of the beautiful as a distinct province of theoretical inquiry. But the thing existed before the name; for reflection upon beauty and upon fine art begins among Hellenic thinkers at least as early as the time of Socrates, if not, in a certain sense, with still earlier philosophers. If, then, aesthetic means the philosophy of the beautiful, and it must accept as its immediate subject matter the succession of systematic theories by which philosophers have attempted to explain or connect the facts that relate to beauty. (Bosanquet, 2017, p. 1)

However, Professor Zhao Lianyuan (1998), a professor of literature at Capital Normal University, in his article *Comparison of aesthetic differences between China and the West* said "Chinese aesthetics and Western aesthetics are two different cultural systems" (Zhao, 1998, p. 51). Each ethnic group has its own way of thinking, and due to the different ways of thinking, Chinese and Western ethnic groups have also formed different aesthetics. Moreover, Professor Liu Qingping (2006), a professor at the Higher Research Institute of Social Sciences at Fudan University, also agreed with this viewpoint in his article *The Worldwide Significance of Chinese Aesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*. He stated the contrast between ideas of traditional Chinese and Western aesthetics is deeply rooted in the fundamental difference in their philosophical spirits. In certain ways, we could argue that traditional Chinese philosophy mostly exhibits a practical–emotional spirit, whereas traditional Western philosophy primarily exhibits a cognitive–rational spirit. By this, the two philosophical schools examine and





clarify a variety of relationships in distinct ways, including the connection between humans and nature. Traditional Western philosophy is guided by its cognitive–rational spirit, which means that it always concentrates on human cognitive activities, particularly those that are guided by rational principles. It views the world and human beings as the subject and object of cognitive activities, respectively (Liu, 2006).

Traditional Chinese philosophy, guided by its practical-emotional spirit, consistently emphasizes the harmonious unity between humans and the world by concentrating on the practical activities of people, particularly those guided by emotional or affective principles. Similarly, traditional Chinese aesthetics has always held that beauty is not only a pleasing attribute of objective things, but rather a free state or way of human life itself in harmony with the natural world, and that the most important thing for humans is not just to feel or contemplate those beautiful things in the outer world through cognitive activities, but to make their own lives or existence beautiful through their practical–emotional activities (Liu, 2006). For example, Confucianism consistently emphasizes the significant importance of human endeavors in practical activities to enhance the quality of human life. Daoism frequently views beauty as the innocent yet harmonious unity of humans with the natural world. According to the book *Zhuang Zi*, Zhuang (2017), the Middle Warring States thinkers, philosophers, litterateurs, and representatives of the Taoist school, said that “Heaven and Earth are of the great beauty, but say nothing about it”; and, “when one takes no action and hence is honored, one will be simple and plain and none in the world can compete with oneself in beauty” (Zhuang, 2017, chapter 13 and 22). In these chapters, Zhuang Zi clearly explained that the great beauty of the natural world itself lies precisely on its fundamental feature of taking no action yet leaving nothing undone; if





humans could follow this as the model for their own lives, they would become as beautiful as Heaven and Earth.

In contrast, traditional Western aesthetics always views beauty as a pleasant attribute or property of objective things in the outside world, and human beings as subjects who can feel or perceive beautiful objects outside through cognitive activities, either perceptual or rational (Liu, 2006). For example, the Greek philosopher Aristotle remarked the chief forms of beauty are order, symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree (Aristotle, 2007). In Medieval times, Thomas Aquinas made it more manifest in the book *The Summa Theologica* that the beautiful relates to a cognitive power, for those things are said to be beautiful which please when seen (Thomas et al., 2014). The modern German philosophers Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831) regarded beauty as the objectified expression of specific subjective states of human beings in external things, even as they noted the strong relationship between beauty and human life and practical activity. In other words, beauty as the object of human cognition is not an intrinsic part of human life itself, but is separated from life by the cognitive gap between subjective and objectives within the framework of traditional Western aesthetics (Liu, 2006).

In addition, Professor Peng Jixiang (2022), the Academic Dean of the China ASEAN Academy of Arts, President of the Chinese Association of Art Theory, Member of the Art Education Committee, and Professor of Arts at Peking University, expounded the great difference between Chinese traditional aesthetics and Western traditional aesthetics in his book *Introduction to Art*. He stated even if both traditional Chinese and Western philosophies indeed emphasize the significant and essential relationship





between the true, the good, and the beautiful in human existence. However, they comprehend each one of them and how they relate to one another in surprisingly different ways. Chinese traditional aesthetics emphasizes the unity of beauty and goodness, while the West emphasizes the unity of beauty and truth (Peng, 2022). In traditional Chinese philosophy, under the dominance of the practical-emotional spirit, views the true, the good, and the beautiful as essential components of human nature and existence. The true is a sincere state of human life in which people realize genuine unity with the natural world through emotional ties; the good is a virtuous state of human life in which people can fulfill their sincere emotional nature by practical endeavors; and the beautiful as the highest state of human life in which people can intrinsically unify the true and the good in a sensuous-effective harmony (Liu, 2006). In the Western tradition, the true refers to both the objective world itself and the true knowledge of it; the good often refers to those virtues that are fulfilled in human practical activities and are fundamentally based upon true and rational knowledge; the beautiful is a sensual and pleasant property of objective things that are always subordinated to the true. Because of this rational spirit's dominance, traditional Western philosophy prefers to identify contemplative life aimed at the true rather than the aesthetic life as the highest state of human life (Liu, 2006).

Moreover, the famous Contemporary Chinese Philosopher Zhang Shiyong (1996), said in his article *Traditional Chinese Philosophy and Modern Western Philosophy* that “traditional Chinese philosophy is dominated by the unity of man and nature, while traditional Western philosophy is dominated by the subject-object dichotomy”. (p. 115). Traditional Chinese philosophy and traditional Western philosophy have different dominant thoughts, which has resulted in some distinct





differences between the two. Traditional Chinese philosophy places a strong emphasis on the unity of man and nature, and does not make a distinction between subject and object, so there is less emphasis on epistemology which is the study of how the subject comes to know the object. Instead,

Traditional Chinese philosophy is more concerned with life and the ethics of how people should live in the world. On the contrary, traditional Western philosophy emphasizes the dichotomy of subject and object, thus emphasizing the subjectivity of human beings toward nature. Consequently, the opposition to subjectivity and the dichotomy of subject and object is the main feature of modern Western philosophy. (Zhang, 1996, p. 117)

The unity of man and nature, thought and poetry, is one aspect of modern Western philosophy that is comparable to or connected to traditional Chinese philosophy.



Although there are differences, this characteristic of Western modernism emerged after Westerners experienced the drawbacks of the dichotomy of subject and object and the principle of subjectivity, causing people to blindly seek and fight against nature, thus pursuing endlessly, and ultimately unable to obtain spiritual peace and freedom, which makes Westerners gradually realize the thought of the unity of man and nature, and they should coexist harmoniously (Zhang, 1996). From traditional Western philosophy to modern philosophy, it can also be said that it is a philosophical transformation process from a demand for a fight against nature to a demand for a harmonious integration with nature. From Heidegger's philosophy to Derrida's philosophy, although their philosophies are different, they all have the idea of the unity of man and nature. This is a manifestation of modern Western philosophy approaching traditional Chinese philosophy, and it is also a manifestation of the thought of





harmonious integration between man and all things in the world, which is close to the Chinese thought of the unity of man and nature. Both traditional Chinese philosophy and modern Western philosophy seek to get a kind of aesthetic pleasure and poetic realm in the harmonious integration of man, objects, and nature (Zhang, 1996). Furthermore, Zhang Shiyong's *Lecture on New Philosophy* (2004) presented the new philosophical viewpoints that to use of Heidegger's philosophy to interpret the thought of unity of man and nature in ancient China in more detail.

Additionally, in the book entitled *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, Professor Wendy Griswold provides us with insights that will help to get past cultural misunderstandings, conflicts, and ignorance in order to assist us gain a deeper understanding of culture and society (Griswold, 2013). Professor Liu Kang (2022), Foreign academician of the European Academy of Sciences, Professor at Shandong University, and in the Department of Asia and the Middle East at Duke University, stated in his article *The Chinese Question of Western Theory: Dialogue in the International Academic Community* we need to think and discuss how to construct a community with a shared future for mankind from the perspective of shared human values. As for the international dialogue and exchange of literary theory, we should also consider the construction of China's literary and artistic theory, and engage in communication with the world's academic circles. With the rapid development of science and technology and the rapid change of culture nowadays, the comparison, exchange, and integration of the cultures of all nations have become a trend of the times (Liu, 2022).





Also, Professor Yu Kailiang (2011), Department of Aesthetics at Renmin University of China, stated in his journal *The Problem Consciousness in the Comparison of Chinese and Western Aesthetics*, that in the era of Globalization, world culture is in an unprecedented state of transition. Globalization has brought together the cultures of numerous nations and ethnic groups, resulting in the blending of various modes like conflict, pursuit, integration, and transformation. As the global norm, Western culture has always served as the primary frame of reference for Chinese aesthetics in this cross-cultural aesthetic comparison (Yu, 2011). Many theoretical types of contemporary Chinese aesthetics are primarily developed within the cross-cultural setting of comparing Chinese and Western aesthetics. In this comparative perspective, one can recognize the benefits of both Chinese and Western aesthetics as well as their relative drawbacks by viewing China through a Western vision and viewing the West through a Chinese vision. One can approach each other's aesthetics with a clear cultural consciousness, learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, and integrate them, to achieve a basic universal recognition (Yu, 2011).

1.3 Problem Statement

The philosophy of beauty has been a complex topic since antiquity. This is particularly true when examining the cultural development of our relationship with beauty. Professor Liu Qingping (2006) explained the traditional Chinese philosophy of beauty is dominated by a practical–emotional spirit, which demonstrates in-depth differences from the traditional Western philosophy of beauty dominated by a cognitive–rational spirit. There is no doubt that traditional Chinese aesthetics has some one-sided and even





serious weaknesses in its interpretations of the essence and purposes of beauty, as well as in its comprehension of human nature and aesthetic activities, due to the relative lack of cognitive-rational spirit. Consequently, most Chinese aesthetic theories appear in the form of comments and perceptions, and lack of aesthetic system with a modern theoretical form. Western aesthetics is rational aesthetics which is mainly based on the abstract analysis of the essence of beauty. The categories of Western aesthetics are strictly defined, which shows that the categories of Western aesthetics are theoretical and scientific (Liu, 2006).

It is also agreed by Karl-Heinz Pohl. In his journal *An Intercultural Perspective on Chinese Aesthetics* (2018), he stated:

The category of the 'beautiful' has not played a significant role in traditional China, whether as artistic beauty or in the form of natural. In early Confucian scriptures, the character beautiful was used almost similarly to 'moral goodness' without further differentiation or emphasis on a category of beauty. Apart from this connotation, Confucian discourse on art and literature seems to have slighted formal beauty, disdaining it, as outward ornament, to be less valuable than the substantial ethical or moral content. For Daoist writers, the recognition of beauty only led to the notion of ugliness, as Lao Tzu, Chap. 3, succinctly states: 'When everyone in the world knows the beautiful as beautiful, ugliness comes into being.' In Chinese literary theory and art philosophy, therefore, 'beauty' used to carry more of a negative, if not a vulgar, connotation. More important in terms of aesthetic categories were attributes such as harmonious or natural. (Pohl, 2018, p. 339)

Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty is a good illustration that offers rich ideas of beauty but lacks systematic elaboration (Ye, 2009). Lao Tzu was a brilliant thinker who had a significant influence on ancient China. In addition to being chock-full of dialectics, the Tao Te Ching had a significant influence on traditional Chinese aesthetics (Ye, 2009; see also Kohn & Lafargue, 1998). The true aesthetic soul of China is rooted





in Lao Tzu's ideological system, according to the representative figure of the New Confucian School Xu Fuguan (2020). Tao Te Ching, however, has become the most challenging to interpret because of its close resemblance to clan ideology and his artistic depiction of it. According to Professor Chen Guying, a famous Taoist scholar, there have been 265 different types of works on the annotation of Lao Tzu which are included in the *Lao Tzu Collection* published by the Religious Culture Publishing House in 2011 from the Warring States Period in the Spring and Autumn period to the Republic of China. These annotations far outnumber those on other ancient documents from the pre-Qin period (Chen, 2009). The research of Lao Tzu's aesthetic thought has already established a solid foundation. However, compared to Lao Tzu's profound ideological system, current research on the philosophy of beauty still lacks necessary depth. Lao Tzu, unlike Western philosophers, failed to elaborate on beauty or create an entire ideology or philosophical framework (Ding, 2013).

By contrast, the rigorous definitions of Western aesthetic categories demonstrate their theoretical and scientific nature (Liu, 2006). Furtherly, Professor Zhang Xianglong (2022b), a renowned Professor at Peking University, said in the preface of his book *Biography of Heidegger* that undoubtedly, Martin Heidegger is the most influential Western philosophical thinker of the 20th century. His influence extends beyond the field of philosophy, involving theology, aesthetic, literary criticism, history, psychoanalysis, and broader humanities. For Chinese people, Heidegger holds special significance. Heidegger, with his profound philosophical and historical literacy, as well as his sensitivity and rigorous logic in thought, opened up a new path for people to understand various ultimate problems. The aesthetic philosophy of Heidegger should be highly regarded (Zhang, 2022b). Moreover, Professor Zeng Fanren (2022) at





Shandong University, stated in his article *The Absence of Chinese Aesthetics in the Field of World Aesthetics and Its Solutions: A Response to Professor Liu Kang's "The Chinese Question of Western Theory"* that Chinese aesthetic studies should step up communication with aesthetic researchers across the world and actively take in the accomplishments of modern Western aesthetic theories if they are to keep up with the fast pace of the worldwide aesthetic field (Zeng, 2022). Also, Professor Zhu Zhirong (2007) at the Chinese Department of East China Normal University, mentioned in his book *Research on Chinese Aesthetics* that Chinese aesthetic research institutes should take note of his investigations into the connections between art and beings, language and art, thinking about the relationship between thought and poetry, hermeneutic interpretation of art, analysis of the importance of art for human existence, art and truth, and the free relationship between art and people (Zhu, 2007). Consequently, Heidegger's aesthetic could be used as a guide to help Chinese aesthetics focus on the systematic construction of theories as well as the interpretation of truth and artistic freedom. Heidegger's research strategies and aesthetic viewpoints should be adopted by Chinese aesthetic researchers as they reevaluate their own country's indigenous traditional aesthetic theories, delve deeply into the theoretical foundations of classical aesthetics, and advance aesthetics and artistic theories to a new level. Within the philosophical framework of Heidegger's existentialism, which offers aesthetics a strong basis and guidance (Jin, 2010).

Moreover, Li Zehou and Liu Gangji, two well-known modern Chinese aestheticians, stated that Chinese aesthetics are inferior to Western modern aesthetics from a rational perspective. Modern Western aesthetics is at a higher state of development than Chinese aesthetics because the issues posed by ancient Chinese





aesthetics have not been systematically analyzed and argued (Zeng, 2022). And the Chinese painting aesthetics should emphasize the accuracy of the description and take more inspiration from Western logical thinking. In terms of theory and methodology, Heidegger's and Lao Tzu's aesthetics both offer substantial illumination for the establishment of aesthetics. It seems crucial to further organize and sort out the theoretical regard of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty (Jin, 2010, p. 103).

Furthermore, according to Professor Liu Gusheng (2000), Director of the Taoist Research Center at Central China Normal University, in his article *The Outline of Lao Tzu's Aesthetic Thought*, he mentioned that before the 1980s, most Lao Tzu's scholarship concentrated on deciphering Lao Tzu's writings, investigating his philosophical ideas, and analyzing his autobiographical documents. Research on Lao Tzu's aesthetic ideas, however, was essentially nonexistent. As aesthetics gained popularity in the 1980s, an increasing number of academics turned their focus to the analysis of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty. However, research on the Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty hasn't received much attention. Only Li Tiandao's *Contemporary Significance of Lao Tzu's Aesthetic Thought* (2008) is available in terms of philosophical monographs on Lao Tzu's beauty; furthermore, it only introduces some Lao Tzu's aesthetics in several aesthetic history textbooks, such as Ye Lang's *Outline of the History of Chinese Aesthetics* (2005), Chen Wangheng's *Twenty One Lectures on Chinese Classical Aesthetics* (2007), Li Zehou and Liu Gangji's *History of Chinese Aesthetics* (1984), Wang Zhenfu's *Course on the History of Chinese Aesthetics* (2004), Zhang Fa's *History of Chinese Aesthetics* (2000), Qi Zhixiang's *General History of Chinese Aesthetics* (2008), and Zhu Zhirong's *Research on the Aesthetic Thought of Xia, Shang, and Zhou* (2017). Currently, there aren't many single articles on Lao Tzu's





philosophy of beauty, and there isn't much research done on his aesthetic. These investigations into Lao Tzu's aesthetics, meanwhile, are still insufficient (Liu, 2000). Consequently, it seems crucial to study Lao Tzu's philosophical thought on beauty thoroughly.

From the above literature review, the researcher also identifies three key points with Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty: the first key point is 'human existence', the second key point is the 'truth elements', and the third key point is 'the transcendence'. The explanation of these three key points is stated below;

i) **The Human Existence**



Based on the research context, the researcher assumes that Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty are to solve the fundamental problem of human existence. This is confirmed by Professor Li Tiandao (2008) at Sichuan Normal University in his article entitled *"Being and Nonbeing Lies Upon Each Other" Theory of Lao Tzu and the Openness of Chinese Aesthetics Artistic Conception*. He mentioned Lao Tzu's Tao is the ultimate form of existence and has a natural tendency of all things. Lao Tzu regards naturalness and letting things take their own course in life as the essence and supreme principle of beauty. Lao Tzu believed that true beauty and true goodness lie in the free development of individual life and the freedom from all enslavement and bondage of external objects. In Lao Tzu's view, all things and behaviors should be subordinate to and assist the natural development of individual life and the unrestricted extension of





individual sentiments. Lao Tzu's aesthetic is full of deep concern and respect for human beings (Li, 2008).

Similarly, Heidegger attempted to clear away the confusion and disclose the fundamental nature of human existence, believing that it was the most significant thing. Heidegger's existentialism focused on the fragmented state of modern people's hearts. People gradually lose individuality as science and technology advance. People start to become enamored and intoxicated with the material. In addition, people in the modern world have forgotten entirely to contemplate existence in the face of this materialized universe. Heidegger believed that people can comprehend human nature and the ultimate purpose of existence finally even though being fully immersed in the world. In summary, the first key point clearly shows that Lao Tzu and Heidegger are both philosophies oriented toward life itself, and they pay much attention to life. Both Heidegger and Lao Tzu studied human civilization, and deeply felt that there was a huge crisis hiding behind civilization. They were both concerned for human survival (Hannabuss, 2003; see also Malpas, 2007).

ii) The Truth Elements

Based on the research context, the researcher assumes that Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty are to pursue the truth. Lao Tzu insists on the necessity of truth as the foundation for beauty. This is confirmed by Professor Peng Fuchun (2013) at Wuhan University in his article entitled *Heidegger and Lao Tzu on Taoism*, he mentioned Lao Tzu rejects the reckless pursuit of sensual and physical desire as being





attractive. La Tzu supports genuine, deep, and true beauty while opposing secular beauty. Internal, fundamental, and spiritual beauty is what Lao Tzu acknowledges and pursues, not external, surface, transitory, and sensual pleasure. Lao Tzu urged people to embrace simplicity rather than grandeur. The aesthetic expression of Dao is simplicity. He emphasizes the unity of truth and beauty (Peng, 2013).

Similarly, Heidegger's idea of truth-challenged conventional wisdom, directly connected current issues in life, and examined the inner meaning of the truth, discovering the transcendence of the truth. Heidegger primarily examined the essence of art from the standpoint of artworks throughout his later years. The truth is placed into works of art on its own. The purpose of art is to reveal the reality of one's own existence through the creation of art in order to achieve a state of clarity. In summary, the second key point clearly shows that Lao Tzu and Heidegger both start from the objectivity of actual existence and look for the meaning of truth when they contemplate existence. Heidegger's truth is more thorough, complete, and objective than Lao Tzu's. They all undoubtedly appear to be considering how people can survive better in their times and society, with a spirit of salvation (Peng, 2013).

iii) The Transcendence

Based on the research context, the researcher assumes that Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty are to pursue transcendence. This is confirmed by associate professor Li Hongxia (2013) at Suzhou University, she stated in her article entitled *Comparative Study on Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's Thoughts of Philosophy and*





Aesthetics according to Lao Tzu, the Tao is where life begins and where it ultimately finds its final spiritual homeland. All living things, including humans, have a finite lifespan. Both the occurrence of life and the commencement of death are accompanied by life's course. This is both the tragedy and the charm of life. Death approaches, life passes the limit, and Tao is fully restored. This is what Lao Tzu stated about going back to the original state where life has a final destination that it returns to. On the other hand, she said “Lao Tzu's Nothingness, like Tao, is the core word of Lao Tzu's thought, and the distinction between nothingness and being is also an important theme in Lao Tzu's philosophy” (Li, 2013, p. 168). Moreover, it is important to realize that “The highest realm of the Tao is the unity between nothingness and being, and the power of nothingness is more fundamental than that of being” (Li, 2013, p. 171).



Similarly, Heidegger attempted to guide people away from the mechanical life and bustle of the secular world and the restless mood of modern life, to find a state of returning to nature and uniting with the gods, heaven, and earth, which is his ideal for survival. The goal of the philosophers of Heidegger's generation is to figure out how to restore humanity to its actual existence, restore humanity to its lost connection to the earth, and to freedom. On the other hand, Tim Delaune (2015), Assistant Professor of Political Science at SUNY Cortland, said in his article entitled *The Tao of Heidegger* Heidegger too sees the nameless – the Nothing – as the source of Being”. (p. 15). Heidegger hints at the same process when he claims that Nothing, rather than being detached from what-is-in-totality, rather functions as if at one with what-is-in-totality. Thus, Heidegger appears to claim, like Lao Tzu, that Nothing turns and becomes a world of beings, being bringing itself to pass sheerly out of its own essence of concealedness. (Delaune, 2015, p. 14)





In summary, the third key point clearly shows that the issue of human spiritual freedom is the ultimate focus of Heidegger's and Lao Tzu's philosophical and creative ideas. They all want human freedom, fight against human alienation, and go back to their original state (Delaune, 2015).

Hence, to prove these three key points, the researcher will analyze on Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings by conducting a comparative analysis focusing on the visuals and themes in their paintings to deepen the understanding on the expressions of beauty of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies.

Another issue is the comparison of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty is a kind of seeking common grounds in differences. According to Zheng Zhenduo (2010), the Chinese modern litterateur, cultural relic collector, appraiser, archaeologist, and member of the academic department of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, he mentioned in his book *The Outline of Literature* that the purpose of the platform for cultural communication between China and the West was to promote interactions and exchanges based on an understanding of the contrasts between the two cultures. It is clear that excessively seeking parallels and purposefully seeking differences in the comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetics do not help create a platform for cross-cultural communication. Consequently, the task of sorting out and clarifying the significant elements of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty is required to have a clear self-positioning. Moreover, Yu Kailiang (2011), Professor at the Aesthetics Teaching and Research Office of the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China, said in his article *Problem Consciousness in the Comparison of Chinese and Western Aesthetics* that in the comparison of Chinese and Western





aesthetics, we should select some common propositions, categories, and specific issues of concern from the resources of Chinese and Western aesthetics for macro or specific discussions. Firstly, these propositions, categories, and specific issues should have similar meanings in both Chinese and Western aesthetics. Secondly, there are distinctions between Chinese and Western aesthetics that are permissible in equal interactions and that both parties may comprehend when communicating. In addition, in many kinds of research on the comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetics, scholars always expound the differences from different perspectives, and they often neglect the similarities. It is more important to seek similarities, which is directly related to the significance of comparative study. The expected results of this study will deepen the essence of the beauty of painting systematically and seek more ways to express the beauty, to provide more consensus for the beauty of both Chinese and Western painting



Furthermore, the philosophy of beauty should be put into practice. In the preface of the book *History of Western Aesthetics* written by Chinese aesthetician Zhu Guangqian (2015), famous Aestheticist, literary theorist, philosopher, translator, and educators, clearly said that “aesthetics must be studied coupled with literary and artistic works” (preface). The study of aesthetic thoughts now focuses mostly on aesthetic ontology and does not fully extend to aesthetic phenomena. It has few studies to apply the philosophy of beauty to specific disciplines. Aesthetic theory is the summary and guidance of literary and artistic practice, and the understanding of a certain era of literature and art will inevitably contribute to the understanding of the aesthetic ideas of that era, and vice versa. Therefore, we must not separate aesthetic ideas from literary and artistic creation practices and study abstract theories in isolation. The philosophy





of beauty should be linked with specific disciplines to reveal and clarify aesthetic phenomena, help people understand the general characteristics and laws of beauty, appreciation, and creation, and further improve people's capacity for aesthetic appreciation (Zhu, 2015).

Additionally, in Professor Ding Weiwei's book *Beauty and Ugliness in Chinese Painting Theory* (2005) at Shanghai Normal University, she discussed that there are papers about the understanding of beauty in the theory of calligraphy and painting that, respectively, discussed the modes of expression and aesthetic connotations in many aspects, but the scope is constrained and there isn't a thorough investigation of the category of beauty. The speech about beauty shows that Chinese people have their own particular grasp and knowledge of this category, even though the theoretical language of Chinese painting theory is only a few words. However, there is no in-depth, systematic, or comprehensive research on the philosophies of the beauty of Chinese art up to now (Ding, 2005). As a result, in this study, the researcher will look into Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in paintings step by step.

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives of the present study are:

- 1: To identify the significant elements of the philosophies of beauty according to Lao Tzu as a representation of traditional Chinese's philosophy and Heidegger as a representation of modern Western's philosophy.



- 2: To analyze Zhu Da's paintings are in accord with significant elements of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty and Francis Bacon's Paintings are in accord with significant elements of Heidegger's philosophy of beauty.
- 3: To conduct a comparative analysis on Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings based on the common significant elements in Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty to reveal the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in paintings.

1.5 Research Questions

In correspondence with the research objectives, the specific research questions

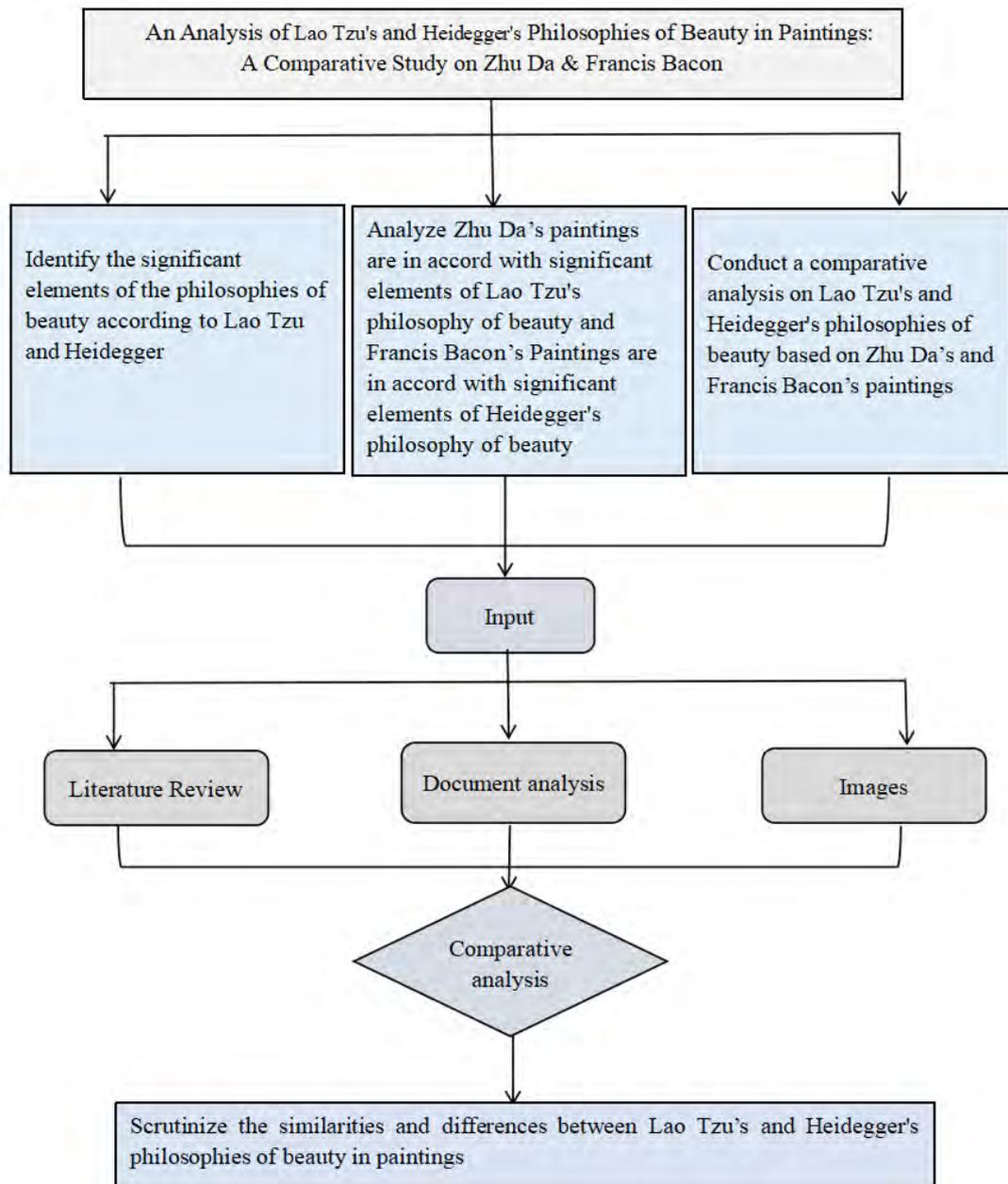
addressed by this study are:

- 1: What are the significant elements of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty?
- 2: What are the influences of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty in Zhu Da's paintings and Heidegger's philosophy of beauty in Francis Bacon's paintings?
- 3: How to scrutinize the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in paintings?

1.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1.5

Conceptual Framework for an Analysis of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's Philosophies of Beauty in Paintings: A Comparative Study on Zhu Da and Francis Bacon





1.7 Definition of Terms

Several terms are used throughout the present study. To ensure a consistent understanding of these terms in the context of this study, their definitions are provided as follows.

1.7.1 Tao – The Origin of Beauty

Tao is the origin of beauty since it is the origin of everything (Lao Tzu, 2010)¹. Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty is based on his theory of Tao. The core idea of Lao Tzu's philosophy is Tao. In the book *Tao Te Ching*, the word Tao is mentioned 73 times. Tao serves as the foundation for Lao Tzu's whole philosophy. Therefore, the prerequisite for studying Lao Tzu's philosophical thought is to clarify his original category of Tao. Professor Henricks (2010, p. xviii), the Preston Kelsey Professor of Religion, Emeritus at Dartmouth College, gave the term Tao a reasonable explanation in his book *Te-Tao Ching: a new translation based on the recently discovered Ma-wang-tui texts*:

Tao is Lao Tzu's name for ultimate reality (though he continually points out that he doesn't know its true name, he simply calls it Tao. For Lao Tzu the Tao is that reality, or that level of reality, that existed before and gave rise to all other things, the physical universe (Earth and Heaven), and all things in it, what the Chinese call everything. The Tao in a sense is like a great womb: it is empty and devoid in itself of differentiation, one in essence; yet somehow it includes all things in seedlike or embryo form, and all things emerge from the Tao in creation as babies emerge from their mothers. But Tao does not simply give birth to all things. Having done so, it continues in some way to be present in each individual

¹ Lao Tzu's book *Tao Te Ching* was written in the Ancient Spring and Autumn Period; however, the publisher reprinted the new edition in 2010 by Inner Mongolia People's Publishing House as the editor.





thing as a power or energy, a power that is not static but constantly on the move, inwardly pushing each thing to develop and grow in a certain way, in a way that is in accord with its true nature. (Laozi & Henricks, 2010, p. xviii)

Furthermore, Associate Professor Chen Guying at Taiwan University, stated in his book *Translation and Comment on Lao Tzu's Annotation* that Tao has several meanings basically: one is that it is the origin of the universe, another is that it is a natural law, and the third is that it is the code of conduct for individuals. These three interpretations are distinct but connected. After all things in the world were created, the chaotic and unseen Tao, which is the source of the universe, took the form of the Tao of the natural law. When the Tao of the natural law was put into practice in social life, it took the form of the Tao of the personnel norms. On the contrary, the Tao as the rules of human affairs reflects the Tao of natural laws, and the Tao of natural laws reflects the Tao as the origin of the universe. In a word, the concept of Tao occupies an important place in Lao Tzu's philosophical system, which embodies both the ultimate significance and the practical significance. It has a very profound meaning and a very wide application, covering all the principles and rules of the universe, nature, and society. Tao is the origin of cosmic life, a free existence existing both inside and outside of time and space. It is the general rule and approach to ensuring human social survival (Chen, 2009).

1.7.2 Aesthetic - The Branch of Philosophy That Deals with Beauty

Aesthetics is the science that studies the aesthetic relationship between man and reality. It mainly studies the general laws and principles of beauty in nature, society, and art,





and discusses the nature of beauty, the characteristics of beauty appreciation, the general laws of beauty creation, and so on. Aesthetic thoughts have a long history and can be traced back to ancient times. Human aesthetic activities and labor combined together in ancient times. Primitive man, who emerged from the lower animal state through labor, had a vague sense of aesthetics since he was familiar with decorating and entertainment. Aesthetic consciousness has a strong base in social activity. Since the invention of language, the field of aesthetic consciousness has grown and eventually transformed into a more abstract concept (Ye, 2015).

Thus, aesthetic ideas with a particular theoretical structure started to emerge. According to the investigation, literary and artistic theoretical works, epics, the Book of Changes, and other works of art with written records in the world can be extended to around the 9th-8th century BC, and the 6th century BC is the approximate time for the theoretical works with aesthetic ideas. Throughout history, aesthetic concepts have been continually represented in the writings and literary theories of philosophers. Even though ancient aesthetic thought was extremely rich and contained many brilliant viewpoints, the discussion of beauty was not a fully developed subject for a very long time in history. In the middle of the 18th century, with the start of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, philosophy and natural science at the time rapidly developed under the development, and aesthetics emerged as a separate subject (Ye, 2015).

In addition, the researcher Alessandro Nannini (2021) at the University of Bucharest, in his article *Aesthetic Experimentalist Baumgarten and the Aesthetic Dimension of Experience* included in the book *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy*, stated that Aesthetics is conventionally identified in





academia with the philosophy of art and beauty. But despite the considerable consensus on such a definition, the concept of the aesthetic remains ambiguous, complex, and essentially contested. This is partly because the notions of art and beauty themselves involve such ambiguity, complexity, and contestation, but also because the notion of the aesthetic has an especially complicated, heterogeneous, conflicted, and disordered genealogy. Though the term was coined by Alexander Baumgarten (1735), who is remembered mainly as a founder of aesthetics, in the middle of the 18th century to define his project of a science of sensory perception, the theoretical roots and topics of aesthetics can be traced back to ancient philosophy where they receive their first substantive formulation in Plato's seminal theories of beauty and art. Also, Karin de Boer (2021), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Leuven, in her book *The Experiential Turn in Eighteenth-Century German Philosophy* said “Nannini demonstrates that Baumgarten held that aestheticians should not limit themselves to studying the sensuous basis of experiments but should also conduct experiments in order to achieve the highest goal of aesthetics, that is, beauty” (de Boer, K., & Prunea-Bretonnet, 2021, p. 55).

Furthermore, Richard Shusterman (2006), the Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar in the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy at Florida Atlantic University, mentioned in his book *The Aesthetic* there is already a very strong tension in Plato's accounts of beauty and art. Beauty plays an extremely positive role in Plato, serving as an exemplar of the very highest level of the ideal Forms and associated with truth and the good. Moreover, beauty is seen as the inspiration and goal of philosophy itself. In the *Phaedrus*, it is characterized as the clearest, most understandable form, and in the *Symposium*, Plato describes the philosopher as a master of erotics who ascends from





the love of beautiful bodies to the love of beautiful deeds and discourses, and finally to a vision of beauty itself from which he can give birth to the beautiful (Shusterman, 2006).

1.7.3 Existentialist Aesthetics- Study Beauty from the Perspective of Existentialism

Professor of Philosophy Jean-Philippe Deranty (2009) at Macquarie University, in his article *Existentialist aesthetics* stated that numerous philosophers who are frequently categorized as “existentialists” have significantly and creatively enriched aesthetic thought. Typically, a significant level of involvement in artistic activities (such as writing novels, plays, or compositions developed their perspectives on the aesthetic experience. Existentialism's emphasis on “existence” is what gives it its name.

Regardless of their differences, the thinkers all believe that existence demonstrates the unique way that humans are in the world relative to other species. According to existentialists, a human being is more than what it is because, in addition to knowing that it exists, it also has the freedom to choose how it will use its existence and, consequently, interact with the outside world. Thus, existence and freedom in the sense of actively participating in the world are strongly associated (Deranty, 2009).

In addition, Richard Gravil, the Chair and founder of the Wordsworth Conference Foundation, gives a thumbnail sketch of existentialism in his book *Existentialism*:





Existentialism is the philosophy of existence, as opposed to those kinds of philosophy which are concerned with a realm of eternal realities above and beyond this world of unstable appearance or are restricted to what one can be logically positive about. To Descartes's famous declaration, 'I think therefore I am', the Existentialists reply, in a variety of voices, 'I think therefore I think: but whether I exist is another matter altogether'; 'I rebel, therefore we exist'; 'I am, therefore, I think. They assert, in contradistinction to a purely rationalist view of man, the themes of human being, and human freedom, and human action. (Gravil, 2007, p.1)

Equally important, Existentialists agree that existence is limited to persons. The word's Latin root, *er-sistere*, means to stand out. Since man is inherently self-aware, he must be able to look at himself objectively and transcend his identity. Humans are inherently self-transcendent beings. However, some existentialists would rather use the word existence to refer to a specific human quality. Existence always refers to the way a tangible individual life exists, but it can also refer to a self-determined, awakened life (Gravil, 2007).



Furthermore, Thomas Robert Flynn (2009), an American philosopher, Roman Catholic priest, and Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor at Emory University, stated in his book *Existentialism* that Existentialism is one of the main schools of contemporary Western philosophy. Existentialism respects human individuality and freedom. There are five basic themes that the existentialist appropriates each in his or her own way. Rather than constituting a strict definition of existentialism, they depict more of a family resemblance among these philosophers. Firstly, existence precedes essence. What you are is the result of your choices rather than the reverse. Essence is not destiny. You are what you make yourself to be. Secondly, time is of the essence. We are fundamentally time-bound beings. Unlike measurable, clock time, lived time is qualitative: the not yet, the already, and the present differ among themselves in meaning





and value. Thirdly, humanism. Existentialism is a person-centered philosophy. Though not anti-science, its focus is on the human individual's pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressures of mass society for superficiality and conformism. Fourthly, Freedom and responsibility. Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom. Its basis is the fact that we can stand back from our lives and reflect on what we have been doing. In this sense, we are always “more” than ourselves. But we are as responsible as we are free. Fifthly, ethical considerations are paramount. Though each existentialist understands the ethical, as with freedom, in his or her way, the underlying concern is to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society (Flynn, 2009). Appendix A (p. 410) shows the main viewpoints of representative existentialist philosophers.



1.8 Limitations of the Study

In this research, the researcher focuses on Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty. In order to scrutinize the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty in paintings, the researcher will analyze Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings as representatives.

The advantage of the studies of Zhu Da and Bacon is that they allow the researcher to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth study of their respective philosophies of beauty. At the same time, due to the in-depth and objective information obtained, the researcher is able to fully analyze the visuals and themes in the painting, the reasons for the appearance of the painting, and its significance of beauty. The study





provides the most inspirational, the most vivid analysis that an inquiry could offer. The comparative studies of Zhu Da and Francis Bacon are especially good for getting a rich picture that shows their particular features and gaining analytical insight from them. It is good at seeing something in its completeness, and looking at it from many perspectives.

However, the disadvantage is that these two painters may lack typicality in analyzing Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty. It is obvious that the researcher can't use the experience of a single painter as the foundation for generalization, that is, saying that the philosophy of beauty has occurred in this sample of painters and that the researcher is able to extend these findings to the population as a whole. For this reason, great care must be taken in this study to ensure that the sample is representative of the general population. This is why the researcher chose the most representative painters Zhu Da and Francis Bacon. The researcher must drill down as deep as possible can to get evidence, penetrating into every nook and finding everything of beauty that is needed.

Furthermore, each person has a distinct aesthetic preference and method of expressing themselves. In addition to being important individuals in the histories of Chinese and Western art, Zhu Da and Francis Bacon are two painters who live in separate times and spaces. Their varied cultural backgrounds have resulted in differences in compositional organization, color use, performance, and emotional expression. However, they do share a lot of commonalities in their quest for the ideal of creative beauty. Communication takes the form of comparison. By contrast, we can gain a deeper understanding of one another, which we can then apply to see our own





art from a fresh perspective and comprehend the special connection between art and human beings. The researcher should also find convincing evidence to support their similarities.

Moreover, the two painters Zhu Da and Francis Bacon have a great number of paintings. The selection of typical paintings to have a comparison is a little difficult. To overcome this issue, the researcher will follow these principles: first, the philosophies of beauty are the foundation for the comparative study between Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings. Paintings by Zhu Da and Bacon should be chosen based on their evident common significant elements of beauty. Second, comparison is not based on superiority or inferiority of their paintings. Comparative study serves to prevent independence, stillness, and one-sidedness in the comprehension of the philosophy of beauty by allowing the researcher to have a clearer and more objective understanding of the compared paintings. In addition, the researcher will overcome the prejudice in painting appreciation and analyze it with critical thinking because the interpretation of the paintings may be subjective; for this reason, the researcher needs to apply the Feldman Method.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study depends on its important contributions, which include:

Firstly, it contributes to the construction of aesthetic theory. Through nearly twenty years of exploration by scholars, a solid foundation has been established for the





study of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty. However, compared to Lao Tzu's broad and profound ideological system, current research still lacks depth, such as the relationship between Lao Tzu's Tao and beauty, Lao Tzu's view on the essence of beauty, and the application of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty to specific disciplines, all of which require further research and exploration (Liu, 2000). Lao Tzu didn't go into great detail about beauty or develop a philosophical framework. From the perspective of beauty, Lao Tzu's Tao is still in the stage of rational abstraction, and its regularity is relatively monotonous.

On the contrary, Heidegger's theory has reached the stage of rational concreteness, and its combination of philosophy with practices has been quite rich. In this study, the researchers compared the philosophical ideas of beauty between Lao Tzu and Heidegger, and identified the significant elements of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty that could serve as a guide to assist people in understanding the general characteristics and laws of beauty, deepen their understanding of the diverse phenomena of beauty, and improve their ability to appreciation. In the comparative analysis, it was found that Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty became more systematic. The comparative study is beneficial for broadening research horizons, and more accurately understanding the connotation and characteristics of Lao Tzu's philosophy of beauty, as well as promoting Lao Tzu's philosophy to occupy a position in the history of aesthetic development worldwide.

Secondly, it contributes to using the philosophy of beauty to painting which is helpful to appreciating the artworks deeply in the field of Fine Arts. The philosophy of beauty should be connected with specific disciplines in life, which makes theory more





practical and concrete. On the one hand, the philosophy of beauty belongs to the humanities discipline. This leads to an important characteristic of aesthetics: the philosophy of beauty is closely related to life. The goal of the study is eventually to encourage individuals to work toward a better quality of life and to pursue a more fascinating, worthwhile, and meaningful existence. On the other hand, the philosophy of beauty is connected with specific disciplines to reveal and clarify aesthetic phenomena, help people understand the general characteristics and laws of beauty, and creation, and further improve people's ability for aesthetic appreciation.

Additionally, many important theories of beauty in the history of Chinese and Western aesthetics were proposed through the study of art. So, those who study the philosophy of beauty should love art and have rich direct experience in art appreciation.

In this study, under the influences of Heidegger's and Lao Tzu's philosophies of beauty, there are definitely striking similarities and differences between Chinese and Western paintings in pursuing beauty. The researcher takes Zhu Da's and Bacon's paintings as research samples and deeply exploring into everything from the analysis of the external forms of paintings to a spiritual level of philosophy, which is a comprehensive way to understand the philosophy of beauty in practice.

Thirdly, it is beneficial to cultural communication, and one can also learn more about the possibilities of the expressions of beauty. Comparison is a kind of communication and exchange. For one thing, it can promote cultural understanding and respect. People can learn to appreciate and comprehend cultural differences more effectively by conducting cross-cultural study. We may improve our awareness of other cultures and see how crucial it is to respect cultural variety in the context of





globalization by drawing comparisons between the ideas, philosophies, art, and social norms of various societies. For another, it can cultivate different thinking and a global viewpoint. Research on cross-cultural interactions can assist us in fostering diverse thinking and a global perspective. Understanding the thought processes and knowledge systems of other cultures helps us broaden our horizons, see the world from new perspectives, and adapt more effectively to the difficulties posed by globalization. Moreover, it can promote cross-cultural research and education. More participants are needed for cross-cultural research to have the social importance it does. By doing cross-cultural research and education, developing more cross-cultural researchers, and raising people's knowledge and awareness of cross-cultural concerns, we can contribute to creating a more harmonious society.



In this way, we can promote mutual understanding and integration on philosophies of beauty between the two cultures. This will enable Chinese and Western people to learn more about each other's paintings and various expressions of beauty, so as to understand their paintings from a new perspective.

1.10 Structure of the Thesis

There are five chapters in this thesis and each one will be summarized and structured as follows: the introduction of the study constitutes Chapter One. It offers a general background of the study regarding previous literature and encloses the statement of the problem, research objectives, and questions as well as the significance, and limitations of the study. Some key terms are also defined in this chapter.





Chapter Two explores literature concerning the research topic which includes an overview of the representative philosophers in the traditional Chinese's philosophy of beauty and chooses Lao Tzu as a representation of traditional Chinese's philosophy and the representative philosophers in modern Western's philosophies of beauty and chooses Heidegger as a representation of modern Western's philosophy, and the philosophy of beauty according to Lao Tzu and Heidegger, and explore Zhu Da and Francis Bacon.

Chapter Three elaborates on the methodological approaches adopted to achieve the research objectives. It consists of research design, data collection which includes document review, images, and data analysis which includes visual analysis, thematic analysis, and comparative analysis. Chapter Four reports the major findings by analyzing the data collected from the study. Each research question will be answered and discussed in this chapter. Chapter Five, the researcher will relook at the aim and the purpose of the research study. The chapter also contains theoretical and practical implications of the findings, recommendations for action, and guidance for future research on related areas.

1.11 Summary

The different understandings of Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies on beauty will inevitably affect the artistic creation of Chinese and Western artists, and their creative methods, cultural value choices, aesthetic tastes, and other aspects. Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to find out the similarities and differences between Lao Tzu's





and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty, and deepen the understanding of the philosophy of beauty of the two philosophers, particularly applying their philosophies of beauty in painting more systematically. The next chapter will present a literature review of the philosophies of beauty in general, Lao Tzu's and Heidegger's philosophies of beauty, and Zhu Da's and Francis Bacon's paintings.

