

# Analytic Aesthetics in Mainland China

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**ABSTRACT** | Since its emergence in the 1950s, analytic aesthetics has become the mainstream approach to aesthetics in the English-speaking world, and it has subsequently spread throughout most of the world, including mainland China. Although it was introduced into the Chinese academic world at an early time, around the late 1950s, and has been disseminated and researched in China over the past three decades, analytic aesthetics remains underdeveloped in China. Chinese academics tend to have little familiarity with, and exposure to, analytic approaches to aesthetics. Unsurprisingly, given this situation, Chinese contributions to analytic aesthetics have had a marginal impact on the international academic discussion. This paper aims at providing a picture of the development of analytic aesthetics in China. In section 1, I clarify the scope of the paper. Section 2 briefly introduces aesthetics in China so as to outline the context for our discussion about analytic aesthetics. In section 3, I first offer a brief historical narrative of the dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China, and then explore how analytic aesthetics has been researched and taught in China.

**KEYWORDS** | Aesthetics; Analytic Aesthetics; Chinese Aestheticians

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## 1 Introduction

Some qualifications regard the paper's scope are in order.

First, since the academic environment in mainland China is notably different from that in other parts of China, analytic aesthetics is also treated and practiced differently.<sup>1</sup> For example, in mainland China, analytic aesthetics is a marginal area in the aesthetics research, but it is more popular in Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in this paper, I narrow the scope of discussion, which only covers analytic aesthetics in mainland China, and treat it as a distinctive academic phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

Second, although it is beyond the purpose of this paper to answer the question "What is analytic aesthetics?", it is necessary and helpful to provide a profile of it, especially to the readers who are unfamiliar with it.<sup>4</sup> Analytic aesthetics is an approach to philosophical aesthetics which is characterized by its use of linguistic or conceptual analysis, and its preference for linguistic precision, clarity, and succinctness. Historically speaking, analytic aesthetics emerged from the philosophical movement of linguistic analysis in the 1950s, and has developed over the past 70 years into the dominant academic approach to aesthetics in the English-speaking world. Early analytic aesthetics, which culminated in the 1960s, is more destructive, in the sense that it is characterized by the application of a *reductive* method of analysis to clarify concepts which may have been used ambiguously in previous theories of art and art criticisms.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, later analytic aesthetics, such as the works of Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Wollheim, is more constructive, in the sense that they are characterized by the application of a *reconstructive* method of analysis so as to positively contribute to our understanding of concepts and phenomena in aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use 'aesthetics' to refer to both aesthetics and philosophy of art.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Paisley Livingston used to work at Lingnan University for over ten years, from 2003 to 2015; In the younger generation, Andrea Sauchelli and Rafael De Clercq are working at the same institution.

<sup>3</sup> In the rest of this paper, by 'China', I mean mainland China.

<sup>4</sup> It is easy for an analytic aesthetician to identify whether a paper or book in aesthetics belongs to the analytic tradition, but it is hard to define analytic aesthetics in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, because there are no elements (such as claims, methods, and purposes, etc.) that are shared by all and only works of analytic aesthetics (Shang and Peng 2007). Thus, a promising alternative way to characterize analytic aesthetics, as suggested by Shusterman (1994), is to summarize the salient features and themes of analytic aesthetics and provide a social-historical narrative of how analytic aesthetics is developed. For an overview of the salient characteristics of analytic aesthetics, see Shusterman (1989, 1–19). For a Chinese counterpart, see Shang and Peng (2007).

<sup>5</sup> To have an impression of early analytic aesthetics, see Elton (1952). For a discussion of the characteristics of early analytic aesthetics, see Silvers (1987).

<sup>6</sup> For the distinction between reductive and reconstructive methods of analysis, see Shusterman (1989, 4–5). For an overview of several major topics that analytic aestheticians contribute to, see Levin-

Third, this paper intends to introduce the development and state of analytic aesthetics in China for the first time,<sup>7</sup> and it mainly focuses on two aspects: research and teaching. Since there is very little teaching of analytic aesthetics in China, more attention will be paid to research. When it comes to research related to analytic aesthetics, this paper discusses both research *in* analytic aesthetics, as well as, and indeed mainly, research *about* analytic aesthetics. I shall thus discuss notable translations, introductions, and interpretations of works in analytic aesthetics. The discussion of such contributions is necessary in order to help the reader understand which views, authors, and trends in analytic aesthetics have had a broad impact in China, and which ones have been sidelined or ignored.

With these clarifications in mind, in the following section I will attempt to locate analytic aesthetics in its Chinese academic and institutional background.

## 2 Aesthetics in China

Historically speaking, since the founding of People's Republic of China, the development of aesthetics can be roughly divided into three periods: before the reform and opening-up 改革开放,<sup>8</sup> from the reform and opening-up to the end of the 20th century, and from the beginning of the 21st century to now. Ideological factors played an important role in the first period, the aim of which was to build a Marxist aesthetics in China. The most important event of this period is the "Great Aesthetics Discussion" from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, in which various aestheticians (e.g., Cai Yi, Gao Ertai, Zhu Guangqian, Li Zehou) defended different accounts of the nature of beauty.<sup>9</sup> After the reform and opening-up, aesthetics became a heated discussion topic in China. This resulted in an atmosphere of aesthetics research and teaching that is referred to as the "Aesthetics Craze", lasting until the mid-80s.<sup>10</sup> The mainstream approach to aesthetics in this period was the Aesthetics of Practice (*Shijian Meixue* 实践美学), established by Li Zehou, which argued that beauty is the product of human praxis and the nature of beauty lies in the dialectical unity of objectivity and sociality.<sup>11</sup> Besides, there were two major trends

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son (2003, 7–20).

<sup>7</sup> To my knowledge, this has not been attempted before in English, though a relevant precedent in Chinese is Wu and Liang (2018).

<sup>8</sup> Reform and opening-up is a program of economic reforms in China, initiated in 1978. It has had great and long-lasting impacts on almost every area of contemporary China, including the Humanities.

<sup>9</sup> For an introduction to the "Great Aesthetics Discussion", see Gao (2018, 157–158); Man (2012, 164–166)

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the "Aesthetics Craze", see Gao (2018, ch. 10).

<sup>11</sup> For an introduction to the aesthetics trends in this period, see Yuedi Liu (2018).

in the aesthetics of this period: the revival of traditional Chinese aesthetics,<sup>12</sup> and the introduction of western aesthetics, including the works of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Freud, Lacan, Arnheim, Benjamin, Adorno, Foucault, Sartre, Langer, Jauss, Derrida, Barthes, Dufrenne, Merleau-Ponty, and others. The third period witnessed a more pluralistic development of aesthetics, during which many more theories were introduced and researched in the Chinese aesthetics world, most notably pragmatist aesthetics (particularly the works of Richard Shusterman), postmodernist aesthetics (with a focus on the works of Lyotard, Deleuze and Baudrillard), analytic aesthetics (particularly the works of Danto), and contemporary continental aesthetics (particularly the works of György Lukács, Jacques Rancière, and Giorgio Agamben). A cluster of topics received more attention in this period. These are body aesthetics/somaesthetics, the definition of art, eco-aesthetics (*Shengtai Meixue* 生态美学), and aesthetics of living (*Shenghuo Meixue* 生活美学), etc. In this academic context, analytic aesthetics was introduced at the beginning of the first period, but only received sustained attention in the 21st century. Although aesthetics has always been an important area of research in the Chinese humanities, analytic aesthetics occupies only a marginal place in the picture.

I will now introduce the institutional dimension of aesthetics in China. When discussing aesthetics in China, I think that an important distinction should be made between aesthetics as a *disciplinary area*, and aesthetics as an *area of research*. At least three disciplinary areas in the Chinese discipline system of higher education are closely related to aesthetics: aesthetics (discipline code: 010106), theory of literature and art (discipline code: 050101), and art theory (discipline code: 1301).<sup>13</sup> What's more, these three disciplines are normally set up in three different types of institutions in Chinese universities: aesthetics is set up in the Department/School of Philosophy, theory of literature and art in the Department/School of Literature, and art theory in the Department/School of Arts. Thus, differently from the English-speaking world, where most people who work in aesthetics do so in philosophy departments, aestheticians in China work in at

<sup>12</sup> For example, reconstructing contemporary Chinese aesthetics via concepts from traditional Chinese aesthetics, such as *Ganxing* 感兴, *Yixiang* 意象 and *Yijing* 意境. See L. Ye (1985).

<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, there is a three-fold structure in the discipline system of higher education in China: category 学科门类–discipline 一级学科–subdiscipline 二级学科. In this case, **aesthetics** (discipline code: 010106) is a sub-discipline of the discipline **philosophy** (discipline code: 0101) under the category **Philosophy** (discipline code: 01). There are two versions of official discipline list published by the Ministry of Education, which are helpful in understanding the current discipline system of higher education in China. For the 1997 version, which adopts the three-fold structure, see: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe\\_833/200512/t20051223\\_88437.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe_833/200512/t20051223_88437.html). For the 2011 version, which adopts a two-fold structure (category-discipline) without listing subdisciplines, see: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe\\_833/201103/t20110308\\_116439.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe_833/201103/t20110308_116439.html).

least three different types of institutions. In terms of analytic aesthetics, another interesting comparison is that most aestheticians in philosophy departments in the English-speaking world only work in the analytic tradition; in China, however, very few people who work in a philosophy department are analytic aestheticians, and most scholars who do research about analytic aesthetics work in other types of institutions. For example, both Matteo Ravasio and Andrea Baldini,<sup>14</sup> the only two foreign aestheticians in China with an analytic background, work in a School of Arts (Ravasio at Peking University, and Baldini at Nanjing University). Li Meng, the first Chinese scholar who wrote a book to introduce philosophy of film in the analytic tradition, works at Southwest University's School of Literature. Wang Xuejia, the first Chinese scholar who wrote an introduction to analytic philosophy of music, works at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music. A similar situation can be found in other areas, such as publication venues, professional associations and research funding. For example, in terms of publication, there are several specialized aesthetics journals in China (*Research on Marxist Aesthetics*, *International Aesthetics*, *Chinese Aesthetics*, etc.), but important articles in aesthetics can also be found not only in some general philosophy journals and general journals in the humanities and social sciences (*Philosophical Research*, *Philosophical trends*, *Nanjing Journal of Social Sciences*, etc.), but also in specialized journals of art theory and literary theory (*Literature & Art Studies*, *Arts Criticism*, *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, etc.)<sup>15</sup> Papers in analytic aesthetics are more likely to be published in general philosophy journals, general journals in the humanities and social sciences, and specialized journals of art theory and theory of literary and art, than in specialized aesthetics journals. From this, one can understand that aesthetics research in China exists in a complex and fragmented institutional environment, which includes at least three different disciplinary areas, each with its own separate institutions, publication venues, research networks, and funding opportunities. As I will illustrate later, this institutional framework is also helpful in sketching a general picture of analytic aesthetics in China.

<sup>14</sup> For some representative works, see Ravasio (2019, 2020, 2022), and Baldini (2016, 2018, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> In China, most scholars who work in the humanities prefer to publish their works in the journals listed in Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) or A Guide to the Core Journal of China (AGCGC), because publications in CSSCI or AGCGC journals are always assigned more weights in the academic evaluation system. Since most specialized aesthetics journals are not listed in CSSCI or AGCGC, scholars may prefer to publish their works in general philosophy journals, general journals of humanities and social sciences, and specialized journals of art and literature, which are listed in CSSCI or AGCGC.

### 3 Analytic Aesthetics in China

In this section, I will first provide a historical narrative of the dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China, and then focus on how analytic aesthetics is researched and taught in the Chinese academic world.

#### 3.1 A Historical Narrative

The dissemination and reception of analytic aesthetics in China can be roughly divided into two stages: from the late 1950s to the middle of the 1960s, and from the late 1980s to the present day.

In the first stage, analytic aesthetics was critically introduced in China in the late 1950s as one of the approaches to aesthetics found in the Anglo-American capitalist world. Some papers in analytic aesthetics were translated and published in specialized journals that aimed at introducing philosophical issues from the international academic world (Wu and Liang 2018). For example, the Chinese translation of William E. Kennick's paper "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?", one of the most important papers in early analytic aesthetics, was published in the 5th issue of the *Digest of Contemporary Foreign Philosophy and Social Sciences* in 1959. Jerome Stolnitz's paper "Notes on Analytic Philosophy and Aesthetics" (originally a paper read at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1962) was translated and published in the 7th issue of the *Digest of Contemporary Foreign Philosophy and Social Sciences* in 1964. From the brief introductory words written by the translators of these papers, we can see a clear and strong critical attitude towards not only the ideas defended in the paper Kennick (1958), but also towards analytic aesthetics in general (Kong 1964). Analytic aesthetics was regarded as absurd and empty, because it merely focuses on the analysis of the linguistic structures of some aesthetic concepts, such as "art" and "beauty", without touching the essence of aesthetic phenomena and activities.<sup>16</sup> A similar attitude can also be found in the first research paper that systematically introduced early analytic aesthetics into the Chinese academic world (Z. Li 1980, 472–

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<sup>16</sup> This attitude can be seen clearly from the following excerpt: "Contemporary capitalist aesthetics has declined entirely. In order to get rid of this decadent situation, capitalist aestheticians manufactured some bizarre and weird 'theories' of aesthetics. The so called 'analytic aesthetics' is one of them. This kind of 'aesthetics' denies that the law of art can be known in principle. It claims that the task of aesthetics is not to explore the substantial content referred to by concepts such as 'art', 'aesthetic object' and 'beauty', but merely to conduct 'diagnosis' and 'analysis' to the linguistic structures of these concepts. In this way, it eliminates the objective content of aesthetics, and thus regards the aesthetic criterion and aesthetic judgement as purely subjective, which is obviously reactionary and absurd" (Stolnitz 1963).

487).<sup>17</sup> In this paper, Li distinguished two distinct analytic approaches to aesthetics: a linguistic approach (early analytic aesthetics), and a semiotic approach (Susanne Langer). He introduced the basic ideas of early analytic aesthetics, including works of Wittgenstein, Alfred Jules Ayer, Morris Weitz, and papers from *Aesthetics and Language* (Elton 1952), and treated the analytic approach as an eliminativist one, which replaces real aesthetic questions with complicated but trivial linguistic ones. Since the middle of 1960s, analytic aesthetics, together with other aesthetics trends from the Anglo-American capitalist world, was silenced and almost disappeared from the Chinese academic world due to the Cultural Revolution.

In the second stage, starting in the late 80s, analytic aesthetics (particularly later works in the field) was re-introduced into the Chinese academic world as a new and inspiring approach to aesthetics, with more and more works being published (including translations, research papers and monographs). In 1987, Gene Block's book *Philosophy of Art* was translated into Chinese by Teng Shouyao. This book was the first Chinese translation of an aesthetics book from the analytic tradition, and it was regarded as something new to the academic circle in China at that time, as illustrated by the title of its Chinese translation: *New Insights in Aesthetics* (*Meixue Xin Jie* 美学新解). As Teng pointed out, this book was new in terms of both content and method, that is, it adopted a new method to discuss some topics about aesthetics and art which were unfamiliar to the Chinese academic world then. In contrast to the first stage, where the method of linguistic analysis was subject to a blanket criticism, the value of the analytic methodology was recognized in this book, mainly because of its contribution to the clarification of ambiguous concepts and expressions, and its related capacity to improve our understanding of aesthetics and art. In the same year, John Fisher, then the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, was invited to give a lecture at Shandong University, which introduced aesthetics trends in contemporary America (Wang 1987). This is one of the earliest interactions between analytic aestheticians and the Chinese academic world. Since the 1990s, analytic aesthetics has received more and more attention in China, with over sixty book translations, and the publication of over thirty monographs, and hundreds of articles. In this period, more analytic aestheticians have been introduced into the Chinese academic world, including Goodman, Wollheim, Danto, Monroe Bearsley, George Dickie, Kendall Walton, Roger Scruton, Jerrold Levinson, Peter Kivy, Noël Carroll, Stanley Cavell, David Bordwell, Allen Carlson, Stephen Davies, and others, and more topics in analytic aesthetics have been researched, including the definition of art, aesthetic experience, the ontology of art, expression, pictorial

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<sup>17</sup> This paper was written in 1964, but published in 1979. See Z. Li (1980, 457).

representation, environmental aesthetics, everyday aesthetics, etc.

Although these developments are notable, analytic aesthetics remains highly underdeveloped in China. This phenomenon can be clearly illustrated by considering the amount of people who carry out research in this field, as well as the number of funded projects in the area. Since 1994, the National Social Science Fund of China (the most important research fund in humanities and social sciences in the country) has sponsored around 300 projects in aesthetics. However, fewer than 20 such projects are closely related to analytic aesthetics.<sup>18</sup> It is hard to exactly quantify how many people in China do research related to aesthetics, but a rough estimate can be given by looking at the number of members in the Chinese Academy of Aesthetics, which is the only nation-level association of general aesthetics. Currently, there is a total of 99 committee members and 583 regular members in the Chinese Academy of Aesthetics.<sup>19</sup> However, only around thirty among them do some research related to analytic aesthetics.<sup>20</sup>

An interesting question follows: why is analytic aesthetics underdeveloped in China? It is not surprising that analytic aesthetics was underdeveloped before the reform and opening-up. On the one hand, analytic aesthetics was regarded as a research methodology from the Anglo-American capitalist world, and thus treated as trivial or even reactionary from an ideological perspective (Dai 2012); on the other hand, early analytic aesthetics embraces anti-essentialism and focuses exclusively on art (Shusterman 1989), whereas the central concern of aesthetics at that time in China was to explore the essence of beauty, particularly the beauty of nature and society. Thus, analytic aesthetics was in tension with the aim of building a Marxist aesthetics system (Dai 2012). After the reform and opening-up, aesthetics became extremely popular around the late 1980s, and a great deal of western aesthetics theories were introduced into China. The present lack of development in Chinese analytic aesthetics can be explained in terms of a competition with other western aesthetics approaches, and especially in light

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<sup>18</sup> This number is calculated by searching the project data in the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC) online search system, see: <http://fz.people.com.cn/skygb/sk/index.php/Index/seach>. The total number of projects about aesthetics can be larger, because there are also some projects which are about aesthetics under the categories of Chinese Literature, Foreign Literature, and Art. In this paper, when discuss funded projects, I only consider projects sponsored by the NSSFC.

<sup>19</sup> For the list of committee members, see: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/YggaAMn-fa7k1jst5zvjUw>. For the list of regular members in total, see: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/UsR1NOEwq-4Tb3FOYQLy1w> and <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/obOEj9NSgFSt086TXRBqmQ>.

<sup>20</sup> As a rough criterion for a focus on analytic aesthetics, I looked at those scholars who published at least one research book in analytic aesthetics, or work on at least one project sponsored by NSSFC, or have at least two papers about analytic aesthetics in top journals (journals listed in A&HCI or CSSCI or AGCGC).



of the long-lasting dominance of Germany classical aesthetics (Liu 2009, 26; Dai 2012; Gao 2018, 170). Besides these historical factors, analytic aesthetics often requires a background in other subfields of analytic philosophy, such as philosophy of language, metaphysics, and logic, and Chinese aestheticians sometimes lack familiarity with these areas.

Given all of the above, it is still too early to write a detailed and systematic historical narrative of how analytic aesthetics developed in China, and this is because of a sheer lack of subject matter. If someone in the future were to narrate the historical development of analytic aesthetics in China, this section would at best be a prehistory to that history.

### 3.2 Analytic Aesthetics Research in China

In this subsection, I will discuss how analytic aesthetics is researched in China by answering three different but closely interrelated questions: What types of research are there? Who is doing the research? What subject matters are being researched?

As indicated in the Introduction, the majority of analytic aesthetics in China are research *about* analytic aesthetics. Among them, a basic type of research is translation. Currently, the most translated works are classical books in analytic aesthetics including Goodman's *Language of Arts* (1976[2013]), Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1979[1990]), Wollheim's *Art and Its Objects* (1976[1980/1990/2011]), Danto's *The Transfiguration of Commonplace* (1981[2012]), Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990[2013]), Carroll's *Beyond Aesthetics* (2001[2006]), Davies' *Definitions of Art* (1991[2014]), etc. Besides, two important anthologies of analytic aesthetics have been translated into Chinese: Kivy's *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (2004[2008/2018]), and Carroll's *Theories of Art Today* (2000[2010]). As for the quality of translations, works translated by scholars who are familiar with analytic aesthetics are generally of good quality; however, other translations are less satisfactory, possibly because of the translator's lack of familiarity with the field.

There are also monographs, journal papers and doctoral theses discussing theories in analytic aesthetics. Although some critical reflections can typically be found in them, in general, they are more introductory and interpretative, in the sense that their primary purpose is to explain the theories as correctly, clearly, and comprehensively as possible. In terms of subject matter, very few publications are aimed at introducing analytic aesthetics in general. Among them, Peng Feng (from School of Arts at Peking University, formerly Department of Philosophy at the same institution) wrote a book entitled *Return—Eleven Questions in*

*Contemporary Aesthetics*, which was published in 2009. Peng's book is the first introductory book to aesthetics covering a large amount of material on different topics from the analytic tradition. Another important contribution was made by Liu Yuedi, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Liu's *The History of Analytic Aesthetics*, published in 2009, is the first book which introduces the historical development of analytic aesthetics into the Chinese academic world. In this book, Liu introduces the aesthetics theories of a cluster of analytic philosophers including Wittgenstein, Beardsley, Wollheim, Goodman, Danto, and Dickie etc., as well as several important topics in analytic aesthetics, such as definition of art, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic concepts. Besides, Zhang Hui, from Qufu Normal University (formerly China Three Gorges University), published a series of papers to introduce analytic aesthetics under two funded projects.<sup>21</sup>

Most research focuses on theories of particular philosophers, or discusses some particular topics in analytic aesthetics. Several philosophers have received more attention in the Chinese academic world. Exemplary figures are Danto (B. Zhang 2012; Jian Zhou 2018; Jing Zhou 2019; Jia Wang 2020), Langer (Wu 2002; Z. Wang 2012; Bao 2013), Goodman (An 2013), Dickie (Manting (殷曼婷) Yin 2010; Huang 2021), Wollheim (Zhao 2016), Beardsley (Deng 2015), and Carlson (Xue 2018). Besides, though not as popular as the above philosophers, the theories of Frank Sibley, Walton, Cavell, Levinson, Scruton, Kivy, Carroll, George Currie, Malcolm Budd, Davies, Arnold Ber-leant, Dominic Lopes, etc. have been introduced into the Chinese academic world through some book chapters, journal articles, and doctoral theses.

Three topics in analytic aesthetics has been extremely popular in China, namely, the definition of art, the end of art, and environmental aesthetics. The definition of art is discussed in dozens of journal papers, and widely introduced in textbooks of aesthetics or art theory published in last twenty years, partly because it is one of the most basic questions in the philosophy of art. A recent and systematic research on this topic is the funded project "A Research on the History of 'Art' Definition in Contemporary Western Aesthetics" (project code: 20FZWA007), which is being conducted by Huang Yingquan, from Capital Normal University. Since the 2010s, Danto's theory of the end of art has received heated discussion in China, not only because of the topic's intrinsic interest, but also because it resonates with Hegel's idea of the end of art, which was already widely discussed in the Chinese academic world. Among countless publications on this subject, a particularly interesting point is contributed by Peng, who explores the theoretical influence of

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<sup>21</sup> The two projects are "History of Contemporary American Aesthetics" (project code: 16AZX024) and "A Research on The History of Contemporary British Aesthetics" (project code: 11CZX074).

Zen Buddhism on Danto's theory, and argues that what is ended is just a particular type of historical narrative centered on artworks, whereas the historical narrative of art in the so-called "post-historical era" may be centered on artists (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2019, Feng (彭锋) Peng 2021a). Environmental aesthetics has been met with considerable interest in China, not only because the aesthetics of nature is a major topic in both traditional and contemporary Chinese aesthetics, but also because it fits well with the construction of ecological civilization in China.<sup>22</sup> Although they are familiar with theories of analytic environmental aesthetics, such as the work of Carlson, Glenn Parsons and Yrjö Sepänmaa, Chinese scholars who work on environmental aesthetics, or eco-aesthetics, prefer to engage this topic from different theoretical resources, including traditional Chinese philosophy, phenomenology, Marxism, German classical philosophy, critical theory, etc. (Zeng 2010; Chen 2015; Feng (彭锋) Peng 2005; Cheng 2010).

Other topics have been introduced or researched from an analytic point of view: aesthetic experience (Deng 2015), interpretation (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009), pictorial representation (especially the perceptual account) (Manting (殷曼婷) Yin 2015, 2018, 2019), the ontology of artworks (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2011; M. ( Yin 2020), the paradox of fiction (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009), art and ethics (Han 2021), the philosophy of music (Song 2011; X. ( Wang 2017; W. Wang 2019), and the philosophy of film (M. Li 2008).

There are only a few people who carry out research *in* analytic aesthetics in China. Two representative aestheticians who mainly work in the analytic tradition are Ravasio and Baldini. Currently, they are also the only two foreign philosophers who do research in analytic aesthetics in the university-level institutions in China. Ravasio mainly works on the philosophy of music, especially musical expressiveness. Baldini's research is primarily in the philosophy of public art, with a focus on street art. Most of their works are published in high-ranked international journals of aesthetics or philosophy. There is also one Chinese scholar, Peng Feng, who does some original research in analytic aesthetics. Peng proposes a solution to the "paradox of fiction" that appeals to Polanyi's theory of body-mind relation, particularly the distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2009). The same theoretical framework is applied by Peng to distinguish different types of seeing and different types of pictures in his studies on traditional Chinese *xieyi* 写意 painting, which can be regarded as a development of Wollheim's theory of twofoldness (Feng (彭锋) Peng 2021b).

As illustrated in this subsection, an important feature of current analytic aes-

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<sup>22</sup> The construction of ecological civilization 生态文明建设 is a national policy proposed in the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, which aims at protecting the environment and pursuing sustainable development.

thetics research in China is that it is highly selective in terms of subject matter. Almost all research is focused on classical works and philosophers from previous generations. In comparison, the younger generation of philosophers who work in analytic aesthetics, such as Derek Matravers, Catherine Abell, Bence Nanay, and others, are almost unknown in the Chinese academic world. In addition, not all of the important figures from previous generations are equally well-known. For example, nine of Danto's books have been translated into Chinese, and a total of four books and around 100 journal papers discuss Danto's theories. However, there are only a few journal papers and book chapters introducing the theories of widely known and discussed philosophers, such as Frank Sibley, Malcolm Budd, or Joseph Margolis.

### 3.3 Analytic Aesthetics Teaching in China

Aesthetics is widely taught in China. Courses in aesthetics are not only found in School/Department of Philosophy, but also in other institutions such as School/Department of Art, Literature, Communication, etc. Courses that are nominally in "aesthetics" are typically centered on philosophical aesthetics, though at times include substantial content from other disciplinary areas, such as cultural studies, art history, and cognitive science.

Within philosophical aesthetics, analytic aesthetics receives very little attention in teaching. On the one hand, in the courses which are more introductory to aesthetics in general (such as Introduction to Aesthetics, History of Aesthetics etc.), analytic aesthetics is always introduced rather briefly, and without more detailed discussion;<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, in the courses which are more specialized to some particular topics (such as Aesthetics of Music, Aesthetics of Film), materials from the analytic tradition are also rarely covered.

Up to now, very few scholars in China have ever taught courses which are mainly focused on analytic aesthetics – perhaps no more than ten. In terms of general aesthetics courses, Peng Feng has taught an undergraduate course "Principles of Aesthetics" in the Department of Philosophy and School of Arts at Peking University. This course is a general introduction to aesthetics which discusses

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<sup>23</sup> This can also be verified indirectly by considering how analytic aesthetics is introduced in the important textbooks of aesthetics or history of aesthetics published in the recent two decades. In most of the textbooks, when introducing analytic aesthetics, what is covered is always at most a combination of no more than four topics as follows: the method of linguistic analysis, Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance, Weitz's view on why "art" cannot be defined, Danto's artworld theory and theory of the end of art, Dickie's institutional definition of art, Goodman's semiotic theory of art, and Wollheim's account of seeing-in. See, for example, D. (Wang (2001), X. Zhou (2004), L. (Ye (2009), Y. Wang (2011), Niu (2014), F. Zhang (2015), Zhu (2018).

materials from the analytic tradition on a cluster of topics, such as aesthetics experience, interpretation, definition of art, fiction of paradox, expression of emotion, appreciation of nature, aesthetic category, etc. At the same institution, Matteo Ravasio teaches the PhD course “Introduction to Analytic Philosophy of Art”, which covers representative authors in the early analytic tradition (particularly Goodman and Wollheim). Ravasio also teaches a PhD course on western musical aesthetics that makes extensive use of Andrew Kania’s *Philosophy of Western Music: A Contemporary Introduction* (2021), an introduction to the philosophy of music focused on the analytic approach. Ouyang Xiao (Department of Philosophy, Peking University, formerly Wuhan University), also teaches a general introduction to analytic aesthetics. In terms of courses specialized on some topics, Cheng Xi-angzhan used to teach the graduate-level course “Specialized English for Graduate Students” at the Centre for Literary Theory and Aesthetics of Shandong University. Although designed as an English language course, the course subject was in fact analytic environmental aesthetics, as can be seen by the course textbook: *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (2007), an anthology of papers edited by Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott on environmental aesthetics. At the undergraduate level, Yin Manting taught a seminar course “Pictorial Representation from the Perspective of Cognitive Psychology” at Nanjing University’s Department of Philosophy in 2021. This course introduces some theories of perception, as well as perceptual account of pictorial representation, discussing authors such as Gombrich, Goodman, Wollheim and Lopes.<sup>24</sup>

There are at least two reasons for the lack of teaching about analytic aesthetics in China. On the one hand, people typically teach analytic aesthetics when they are also doing research in the area. Lack of researchers thus normally translates in a lack of teaching. On the other hand, scholars who do carry out research about analytic aesthetics may not have the opportunity to teach analytic aesthetics because of institutional constraints. For example, Shi Xiongbo from Lanzhou University (formerly Shenzhen University) published a paper which employs Wollheim’s concept of retrieval to explain the particular mode of appreciation of Chinese calligraphy (Shi 2020). Peng Shuixiang from Southwest University wrote her PhD thesis about the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and she also applied for a project (project code: 15FZX037) and published a book on analytic aesthetics in the United States based on her PhD research (S. Peng 2018). However, both Shi and Peng are working at the School of Foreign Language at their respective universities, where courses of aesthetics are not offered. Therefore, they would not have the opportunity to teach analytic aesthetics unless invited by other institutions. A

<sup>24</sup> See: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KLVXj05Q\\_aZm4VeECVT7cg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KLVXj05Q_aZm4VeECVT7cg).

similar situation may occur to other scholars who would otherwise want to teach analytic aesthetics, as they are supposed to design course content in accordance with the general plan formulated by their institution. If the general plan does not include analytic aesthetics, they may not have the opportunity to teach it. In conclusion, the teaching of analytic aesthetics is possibly even more underdeveloped in China than research in the same field.

The above discussion should have made it clear that analytic aesthetics is still highly underdeveloped in China, in terms of both teaching and research. Does this mean that we should do something about it? I argue that we have at least two good reasons to promote analytic aesthetics in the Chinese academic world. First, developing analytic aesthetics is helpful in providing new methods to carry out aesthetics research in the country, placing an emphasis on conceptual analysis and clarity. Second, since analytic aesthetics is the mainstream approach to aesthetics in the international academic world, it would be easier for aesthetics from various cultural traditions to be acknowledged by the international community if it is researched and presented in relation to topics and frameworks in analytic aesthetics. Thus, developing analytic aesthetics in China can be helpful in introducing Chinese aesthetics to the international academic world. For example, it would be easier for foreign aestheticians to understand the concept of *xieyi* 写意 in Chinese aesthetics, when it is characterized in relation to the theory of twofoldness, which is more familiar to aestheticians in the international academic world.<sup>25</sup> This does not of course imply that Chinese aesthetics can be reduced to analytic aesthetics, or that the analytic approach is preferable, but simply that a plurality of research methodologies can be beneficial to the Chinese academic environment. This is not unlike what happens in continental Europe, where the analytic approach is now widespread, and coexists alongside several other more traditional approaches, often resulting in interesting theoretical syntheses.

## Acknowledgment

Thanks to Matteo Ravasio for recommending me to write this paper and discussing relevant issues with me during the whole process. He read all the earlier versions of this paper and provided helpful comments on the content and writing. Thanks to Qianyu Wang for his help in the search and collection of papers published in Chinese. Also thanks to Feng Peng, Meng Li, Xiangzhan Cheng, Zhen Yang, Manting Yin, Xiongbo Shi, Qianqian Sun, Ding Lu, Xiao Ouyang, Hao Chen, Claudia Westermann, Yun Fan, Zhao Zhang, Jianjun Zhang and Fuxing Xue for patiently answering

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<sup>25</sup> This idea and this example are due to Feng Peng.

my questions about the research and teaching of analytic aesthetics in Mainland China.

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