



Review and Prospect of Publishing Aesthetics Research

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Abstract. Publishing aesthetics is an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of publishing studies and aesthetics. In the academic community in China, research on publishing aesthetics began in 1988. Over the past thirty years, a series of achievements have been made in the study of publishing aesthetics. However, through the analysis of the quantity and quality of existing literature, it can also be seen that the development of research on publishing aesthetics has been slow, and the diversity and sustainability of research topics and domains are not satisfactory, reflecting the current situation and challenges faced by research on publishing aesthetics. This paper argues that the reason for the lack of ideal results in the study of publishing aesthetics is that most previous research has focused on the study of aesthetic activities in the publishing practice process, failing to timely expand the research domain with the development changes in the publishing industry, thus unable to achieve the diversity and sustainability of research topics. The integration of the publishing era, technological iterations, media convergence, cultural metaverse, etc., have brought about new changes in publishing forms, content, and presentation methods, providing new materials for the study of publishing aesthetics, expanding the space for research, and also posing new challenges. In future research, focusing on publishing products, especially integrated publishing products (aesthetic outcomes), is more sustainable and valuable for the study of publishing aesthetics. Efforts should be made to study the integrated publishing aesthetics in the era of integrated publishing.

Keywords: publishing aesthetics, aesthetics of publishing, integrated publishing aesthetics.

1 Introduction

Since Plato's inquiry into the concept of "beauty-in-itself," the Western academic discourse has perpetuated discussions and debates on the essence of beauty. However, prior to Baumgarten's establishment of aesthetics, discussions about beauty remained subordinated to philosophy without constituting an independent discipline. Aesthetics emerged as an independent field when Baumgarten founded it in 1750. In the history of aesthetics, Baumgarten attributed significance to aesthetics for the first time, characterizing it as a sensory cognition in art and the capacity to create beauty. Aesthetics, therefore, encompasses the study of sensibility and emotional principles.

Baumgarten's aesthetic framework was built upon the foundation of Western modern philosophy since Descartes. Western modern philosophy, with its subject-object dichotomy, placed emphasis on the core issue of how the subject apprehends and comprehends the object, making epistemology a salient feature. In contrast to continental philosophy's emphasis on the normativity of reason and Anglo-American philosophy's focus on the passive synthesis of sensory experience, Baumgarten particularly emphasized the integrity and creativity of sensory cognition. In Baumgarten's conception, beauty is defined as the harmonization of sensory cognition, order, and expression. Integrity pertains to the requirement for sensory cognition; order, as a scientific law, constitutes the combination of sensory cognition, while perfection is the demand for order; expression encompasses all means and techniques of artistic representation. These components collectively constitute a holistic work of art, where the truthfulness, distinctiveness, richness, credibility, and vividness of content serve as the primary criteria for a "beautiful" artwork. Baumgarten analyzed the relationship between aesthetics and aesthetic objects from both subjective and objective perspectives, positing that the essence of beauty lies in the beauty perceived by the subject. While acknowledging the objectivity of beauty, Baumgarten asserted that beauty cannot be divorced from the aesthetic activities of the subject. Owing to the intimate connection between beauty and the aesthetic subject, the inquiry into the essence of beauty gradually transitioned into the study of aesthetic activities and aesthetic subjects, extending into 20th-century aesthetic research.^[1]

In traditional Chinese thought, there exists no Western-style essentialism of aesthetics nor a philosophical form of subject-object dualism. Traditional Chinese thought instead emphasizes the integration of beauty within the holistic unity of heaven, earth, and humanity. Liu Zongyuan contended that "beauty does not exist autonomously but is revealed by people," signifying that "beauty" cannot be dissociated from human aesthetic activities. There is neither a substantial, external "beauty" independent of humans nor a substantial, purely subjective "beauty." Mazu Daoyi posited that "the mind does not exist autonomously but arises due to colors." Zhang Kai proposed that "externally, it is guided by nature; internally, it is derived from the heart." Zong Baihua argued that "the subjective life sentiment blends and permeates with the objective natural scenery, creating a lively and profound spiritual realm, which is beauty." The "heart" serves as the source of illumination for beauty. This "heart" is not substantial but ethereal, and it is precisely on this ethereal "heart" that the myriad changes of the universe naturally manifest and illuminate.^[2]

From the discussions on beauty in both Western and Eastern perspectives, aesthetics emerges as a discipline that investigates the relationship between humans and the aesthetic dimensions of nature and society. Beauty or aesthetics represents a state of human existence, wherein humans not only perceive and understand beauty but also possess a transcendent dimension in aesthetics, capable of creating and transforming the present world in accordance with beauty. Consequently, aesthetic relationships encompass not only aesthetic consciousness but also include aesthetic activities and their outcomes.

2 Characteristics of Publishing

China has long been known as a "land of etiquette." In traditional Chinese culture, ritual is a primary symbol distinguishing civilization from barbarism, and gentlemen from commoners. The essence of ritual lies in the manifestation of humanity, and humanity is the hallmark of human existence; without humanity, humans are no different from animals. So, how do people learn etiquette? How do they acquire modern knowledge? It is through learning, through education. Without publishing, education cannot be universalized, and humanity cannot be widespread. Education and publishing complement each other, mutually supporting one another. Their essence lies in cultivating humanity, which is the process of becoming cultured individuals. Publishing, by recording and disseminating knowledge, inheriting civilization, becomes a powerful guarantee for human survival, progress, and continuation, while also serving as an important symbol of human existence.^[3]

A History of Human Civilization, in a certain sense, is a history of knowledge creation and dissemination. Without the creation and dissemination of knowledge, civilization cannot progress. Publishing is a historical product of civilization development. It is not only a great achievement of civilization development but also plays a significant role in advancing civilization. The importance of publishing to a nation, a country, and the entire human society is self-evident. The continuous accumulation and improvement of human civilization cannot be achieved without publishing; it is not only indispensable but also essential for its establishment.^[4]

Publishing is an important means of cultural inheritance for humanity, and its characteristics mainly manifest in four aspects:

2.1 Reliance on Media for Transmission

Publishing is neither body language nor oral transmission; it is about leaving traces in the world and passing them on to future generations. What medium is used to carry it? Over thousands of years, the medium has undergone changes: clay tablets in the Mesopotamian region, stone tablets in ancient Egypt, oracle bones in ancient China, palm leaves in ancient India, metals in ancient Rome, as well as bamboo slips, silk, papyrus, parchment, paper, etc.

2.2 Primarily Reliant on Text

Writing is the most important invention of humanity. Its connotations are not intuitive but profound, closer to the essence, and can reflect abstract concepts, systematic thoughts, and profound philosophies of humanity. Its function is unmatched and irreplaceable by any other communication tool. Many concepts such as rationality, asceticism, humanism, etc., can hardly be expressed without text. The nobility of the publishing industry lies in its use of text as a tool and thoughts as its research object.

2.3 Valuable Content

Valuable ideological content should be published and disseminated. Du Fu said "articles cover thousands of years," and Shusun Bao said "three imperishables," both referring to the value of ideas. It can be said that a history of publishing is a history of human thought development and human civilization.

2.4 Open Dissemination

Publishing is a mass communication activity, a public tool, not private. Copernicus completed the manuscript of "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium" at the age of 40 but kept it in a drawer, unknown to society; at the age of 70, he handed it over to the publisher and spread it to the world, then it was considered publishing.

Aesthetics is a science that studies the aesthetic relationship between humans and reality, while publishing itself exists as a social phenomenon or social behavior, closely related to people and various aspects of society. ^[5]As an intermediary for knowledge production and circulation, publishing reflects important achievements in human understanding of the world. At the same time, publishing itself is a creative activity that reflects human understanding and creation of beauty.^[6]

3 Overview of Publishing Aesthetics Research

Publishing aesthetics research explores the relationship between publishing and aesthetics, aiming to establish and create the science of publishing aesthetics. Publishing aesthetics belongs to applied aesthetics, blending universal aesthetic consciousness with specific publishing activities, thereby promoting publishing activities to become aesthetic outcomes.^[7]

Clarifying the common aesthetic relationship between publishing and aesthetics, and researching publishing aesthetics, is a logical progression. The research results should be brilliant and splendid. However, over the past thirty years, research in publishing aesthetics has not yielded ideal outcomes, and the development of publishing aesthetics research has been slow.

This paper conducts a quantitative analysis of research on publishing aesthetics using data retrieved from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) as of June 24, 2023. Employing the "advanced" and "precise" search methods, searches were conducted with "publishing aesthetics" as the main subject term. Only 6 research papers and 1 monograph (a doctoral dissertation) were found, with literature dating back to 1998. When searching with "publishing aesthetics" as the topic, 18 research papers and 2 monographs were retrieved, beginning from 1994. Searching with "editorial aesthetics" as the main subject resulted in 104 academic papers, 2 master's theses, and 1 monograph, with literature starting from 1988. Similarly, searching with "editorial aesthetics" yielded 252 academic papers, 4 master's theses, with literature starting from 1988. Analysis of the retrieval data indicates that although research on publishing aesthetics has spanned over thirty years since 1988, the number of related research papers is limited, and monographs are scarce.

In the Chinese academic publishing community, the initial exploration of publishing aesthetics primarily revolved around the aesthetic aspects of editorial work in the publishing process, which was termed as editorial aesthetics or aesthetic editing. In the spring of 1988, Liu Dawei's "Several Issues on Editorial Aesthetics" was published in Beijing's "Publishing and Distribution Research", while simultaneously, Zhang Yongdong's "A Preliminary Exploration of Editorial Aesthetics" was published in Shanghai's "Journal of Editing". Zhang Yongdong proposed that the editorial process essentially embodies an editorial aesthetic process, emphasizing the close relationship between editorial studies and aesthetics. Editorial aesthetics is defined as the discipline that investigates the formation and developmental laws of beauty within the editorial process, integrating editorial studies with aesthetics. Aesthetic editing constitutes an integral aspect of editorial aesthetics.^[8] Liu Dawei attempted to establish a general framework for editorial aesthetics, proposing that it encompasses various aspects such as the aesthetic perception of editorial staff, their enjoyment of aesthetic sensations, the motivation behind editorial aesthetic activities, and the principles guiding the aesthetic processing by editors.^[9] The publication of these two articles marked the budding stage of research in publishing aesthetics.

In the 1990s, academic research in publishing aesthetics gradually increased, with many scholars publishing their research findings. Concepts such as editorial aesthetics, aesthetic editing, publishing aesthetics, and publishing aesthetics began to be used concurrently. Yao Dequan proposed: "Editorial aesthetics researches the general rules of the aesthetic relationship between the editorial subject, readers, authors, and the aesthetic expression methods of editorial activities. Its main content includes the beauty of editing objects, the beauty of editing operations, the beauty of layout design, the beauty of editing information processing, and the beauty of editorial style."^[10]

In 1994, Gao Si's book "On Publishing Aesthetics" was published, which is a monograph that positively discusses the laws of publishing aesthetics. Gao Si believes that beauty is an inherent quality of publishing. "Publishing, which involves a series of activities such as compiling, editing, printing, and distributing books, is an aesthetic process. Therefore, publishing naturally has an inseparable connection with aesthetics."^[11] "All publishing aesthetic activities must be carried out by publishing professionals as the aesthetic subjects. The moral integrity of publishing professionals determines the success of publishing aesthetic activities and whether books fulfill their function of aesthetic education in society."^[12] "The significant contribution of 'On Publishing Aesthetics' lies in raising questions about the regularity of publishing aesthetic activities, affirming publishing professionals as the subjects of publishing aesthetics, and emphasizing the importance of aesthetic awareness in publishing work. However, the book did not delve into the research on the aesthetic outcomes of publishing.

"In 1998, the Ministry of Education promulgated the 'Directory of Undergraduate Majors and Program Descriptions for Regular Institutions of Higher Education,' in which 'Publishing Aesthetics' was listed as a major course for Editing and Publishing majors. In the same year, Huang Libiao's doctoral dissertation titled 'Aesthetics of Book Publishing' was published. This was the first monograph to systematically discuss the aesthetics of book publishing, marking a new breakthrough in the study of

publishing aesthetics. The book defined publishing aesthetics for the first time, proposing that it 'is the science that studies the laws of aesthetic activities, the construction of aesthetic relationships, and the aesthetics, aesthetic sensibility, and creation of beauty in book publishing activities.'^[13] The book guided book publishing activities with aesthetic theory and validated and enriched aesthetic theory through publishing practices. It conducted a comprehensive and systematic study of the aesthetic laws of book publishing activities from various perspectives such as macro and micro, universality and particularity, horizontal and vertical, static and dynamic, self-discipline and heteronomy, thereby constructing a logically structured, scientific, and rigorous theoretical system of publishing aesthetics.^[14] However, research on the aesthetic outcomes of publishing remains largely unexplored.

From the pioneering research by Zhang Yongdong in 1988 with "An Initial Exploration of Editorial Aesthetics" and Liu Dawei's "On Several Issues of Editorial Aesthetics," to the publication of two academic monographs, Gao Si's "On Publishing Aesthetics" (1994) and Huang Libiao's "Aesthetic Study of Book Publishing" (1998), as well as the Ministry of Education's (1998) inclusion of "Publishing Aesthetics" as a major course in the publishing editing specialty, the decade from 1988 to 1998 was a crucial and active period for theoretical research in publishing aesthetics.

Entering the 21st century, while publishing activities continued to flourish, the corresponding theoretical research in publishing aesthetics progressed slowly. An analysis of existing literature on publishing aesthetics reveals that much of the research still follows the themes of the previous century, lacking diversity and sustainability, reflecting the current status and challenges facing the field. The reason why research in publishing aesthetics has not achieved ideal results is that past studies primarily focused on aesthetic activities in the publishing process, without examining the aesthetic outcomes (publications), and failed to expand research domains and topics in line with the development of the publishing industry.

We are aware that the news publishing industry has undergone significant changes, with technological iterations, media convergence, and cultural cosmology leading to new changes in publishing forms, content, and presentation methods. Integrated publishing has become the trend, providing new material and research space for the study of publishing aesthetics, but also presenting new challenges. However, despite the many research achievements related to integrated publishing, research in publishing aesthetics has yet to touch upon this field.

Through searches on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database until June 24, 2023, using "advanced" and "precise" search methods, 2860 related papers and 3 doctoral dissertations were retrieved under the topic of "integrated publishing," along with 5 relevant books. However, no effective results were obtained when searching with "integrated publishing aesthetics" as the main subject term, indicating a lack of literature directly addressing "integrated publishing aesthetics."

We believe that as integrated publishing continues to deepen, it is essential to keep up with the times and deeply understand and promote the development of publishing aesthetics. In future academic research, focusing on publishing products, especially integrated publishing products (aesthetic outcomes), would be more sustainable and

valuable for research in publishing aesthetics. Therefore, efforts should be made to establish integrated publishing aesthetics in the era of integrated publishing.

From its essence, integrated publishing aesthetics is a science that studies the aesthetic laws and relationships within integrated publishing materials.

In the publishing industry after the 21st century, two new forms have emerged: e-books and integrated publishing materials. For e-books, a single e-reader can store tens of thousands of books, significantly increasing information storage capacity. However, the text is still displayed on a screen in electronic ink form, retaining its traditional publishing characteristics. In contrast, integrated publishing materials have several distinct characteristics.

3.1 Integration of Content and Medium

In a network learning system, content and form are fully integrated and converted into digital information. When not in use, it can be stored on hard drives, USB drives, or in the cloud, and when in use, it can be displayed on any terminal such as desktop computers, tablets, smartphones, or projectors.

3.2 Openness of Content

Unlike traditional publications where content is fixed unless reissued, integrated publishing materials are extendable. Authors can add, delete, or change content anytime, anywhere.

3.3 Interactivity Between Authors and Readers

Readers can communicate with authors timely and universally, participating in content creation, blurring the boundaries between authors and readers.

3.4 Widely Accessible Creation

Traditional publishing imposes high requirements on content, with only a few fortunate individuals becoming authors. However, in the era of integrated publishing, anyone can engage in content production and dissemination through public media or self-media.

3.5 Diverse Profit Models

Traditional publishing costs are relatively simple to account for, including printing, paper, binding (PPB), editorial, marketing, and publicity expenses, with relatively clear profit models. While traditional publishing costs can be continually diluted, PPB costs are still necessary. However, after the initial investment is recovered, integrated publishing products incur almost zero costs. Additionally, besides sales profits, integrated publishing can generate profit through value-added traffic.

4 Conclusions

These characteristics of integrated publishing supported by new technologies are crucial considerations for studying publishing aesthetics. In the current scenario of reduced publishing barriers and widespread participation, it is essential to strengthen content monitoring to ensure the implementation of the "people's publishing" concept. It is also important to view the multimedia and multimodal characteristics of modern publishing through the concept of the metaverse, integrating the real world, the enhanced world, and the virtual world. Furthermore, it is necessary to regulate content production through publishing ethics and the disciplinary connotations of integrated publishing aesthetics.

The involvement of aesthetics disciplines is required for the production and management of integrated publishing content and forms. Future research in publishing aesthetics should focus on the characteristics of the current publishing industry, exploring the impact of new technologies on the publishing industry and the response strategies of publishing enterprises, thereby providing aesthetic theoretical guidance for the healthy and sustainable development of the publishing industry.

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