



Article

# The Theoretical Characteristics of Eastern and Western Art

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**Abstract:** This article examines efforts both east and west to account for the significance of art in human life. Despite such writings by many scholars over the years on separate traditions, the shared ground between them remains only vaguely described. The study builds on thoughts articulated by Farabi, Ibn Sina, Shakespeare, Diderot, Goethe, and Brecht, filling the gap through close reading of their works as well as historical accounts. According to the analysis, the Eastern writers treat the art as the world view philosophy and as the ability which strengthens a soul, balances the internal world of the individual and contributes to the formation of the moral character of the personality. For Western thinkers, the potential of art came from its ability to challenge society, provoke critical thought and compel individuals to view their world differently. Regardless of these differences, art was not viewed as entertainment, but rather, a medium that reflects life as well as a tool that molds the view that people take of the world, and hence, how they behave both in thinking and in action. The research implies these histories still have relevance today. They help put into perspective how art continues to lead to social change, increased human knowledge, and cultural bridges between civilizations that matured thousands of miles apart.

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## 1. Introduction

The processes of globalization taking place in the world today are having a significant impact on human thinking. In the spiritual development of human consciousness, art is considered to hold an important place. Since ancient times, art and culture have served as a “mirror of the era,” contributing to the upbringing of a morally mature and well-rounded individual [1]. Many great thinkers of both the East and the West have expressed their theoretical views on the influence of art, its distinctive qualities, its artistic maturity, its visual appeal, and the role of true works of art those capable of providing aesthetic pleasure in human life. Eastern scholars and creators such as Farabi, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Sharafiddin Ali Yazdi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Muhammad Nishapuri, Qutbiddin Shirazi, Abdurahman Jami, Binoyi, Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Ahmad Donish, Zokirjon Furqat, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, and Fitrat, as well as Western figures such as Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, William Shakespeare, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière, Denis Diderot, Carlo Goldoni, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, reflected on the artistic-aesthetic and educational essence of art and culture. In doing so, they contributed to the formation of a system of artistic principles and laws [2].

In the East, the formation of various art forms often faced significant pressure and lacked sufficient conditions for development. In particular, the limited opportunities to openly present and promote performing arts to the general public resulted in the professional theatre emerging later in the East than in the West. For this reason,

performances in the East were frequently shown to audiences in a concealed or restricted manner [3]. However, since Eastern peoples are naturally inclined toward spectacle, entertainment, and witty performances such as *asqiya*, these shows spread among the people despite various obstacles and found a place in their hearts. Alongside the art forms mentioned above, singing, dance, tightrope walking, as well as applied and visual arts also developed. The existence of these various art forms, in turn, nurtured individuals who were inclined to reflect on and theorize about them.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study draws on a close reading of historical, philosophical and literary tradition that may have influenced ideas about art in both the East and West. Given that the document unites aforementioned thinkers – from Farabi to Ibn Sina, Navoi to Behbudi, Shakespeare to Diderot to Lessing to Goethe to Brecht – the research oriented to interpretations of the contexts from which these writers emerged in socio cultural terms. This is a qualitative and comparative method: each thinker's views were searched not as standalone remarks, but, rather, as artifacts where the artistic *zeitgeist* and values of their time could be unfolded. We particularly noted instances where each Eastern scholar described art as something spiritually balancing, educative, and inwardly developing (something that belongs to the private sphere), while Western writers focused on analysis, critique, symbolism, and the audience intellectualized engagement with cultural symbols. Comparison of these interpretations to identify common themes and significant differences [4]. It also employs historical methods, relying on the accounts of theatre practices, traditions of music, and cultural circumstances referenced in the text. Through a fusion of these approaches, the methodology enables the article to reveal a coherent picture from many centuries of thoughts of both regions, revealing how art serves to create consciousness and social life.

## 3. Results and Discussion

At The Eastern thinker Farabi (873–950) devoted special attention to the art of music alongside other fields and studied this art form in a detailed and systematic manner [5]. According to Farabi, music brings comfort to a person, arouses emotions, makes one reflect, and develops human thinking. In his work *“Ihsa al-‘Ulum”* (*“The Enumeration of the Sciences”*), Farabi expresses the following ideas about the positive qualities of music: *“This science is beneficial in the sense that it preserves the balance of the character of those whose temperament has become unbalanced.”* *“It is also beneficial for the health of the body, for when the body becomes ill, the soul also weakens; when the body encounters obstacles, the soul, too, encounters obstacles...”* Farabi further emphasizes that melody is not only a source of physical and spiritual well-being, but also a product of human intellect and talent. He supports this idea with the following statement: *“Ishaq al-Mawsili said: ‘Melodies are a carpet woven by men and adorned by women.’* In this way, Farabi demonstrates that art has a positive influence on human consciousness and enriches human thinking [6].

Abu Ali ibn Sina also regarded music among the arts as a means that influences the health of both the human body and the heart. In his work *“Kitab al-Shifa”* (*“The Book of Healing”*), he writes that *“one of the factors that affects a person’s sensory organs is sound.”* A harmonious and pleasant melody produced by musical instruments brings comfort to a person, whereas unpleasant sounds cause a feeling of discomfort or agitation. Ibn Sina emphasizes that the primary reason for the emergence of art, particularly music, is spiritual need [7]. Through his works, he sought to provide spiritual nourishment to people and believed that knowledge and enlightenment would save them from ignorance and darkness. With this intention in mind, he titled his major works *“Ash-Shifa”* (*“The Book of Healing”*), *“An-Najāt”* (*“The Book of Salvation”*), and *“Danishnama”* (*“The Book of Knowledge”*).

During the era of Amir Temur, the historian Sharafiddin Ali Yazdi described the positive influence of the performing arts on people in the following lines: "The return of Amir Temur from battles and campaigns was celebrated with festivities such as fairs and performances." In particular, he writes the following about Sahibqiron's triumphant return to Mawarannahr in 1396: "The people of Samarkand, filled with joy and delight, began to festively decorate the city, and everywhere was filled with the enchanting songs of those gifted with beautiful voices. It was as if the entire world overflowed with happiness..." From this, it becomes clear that Amir Temur, like in many other spheres, paid serious attention to the development and enrichment of the arts [8].

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, in his *Baburnama*, notes that Sultan Ahmad and Umarshaykh Mirzas enjoyed public spectacles and various competitions. He also mentions that Sultan Mahmud, in addition to being a poet, formed a troupe of jesters, musicians, singers, and dancers in his palace. Babur further emphasizes that he was not a patron of art and literature like Alisher Navoi. The special attention given to art and the development of various artistic forms during the Eastern Medieval Renaissance brought about new perspectives in people's consciousness.

In the second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, the dhikr and samā' dances of dervishes became popular. Musicians and singers took an active part during their performance [9]. Alisher Navoi notes that Mawlana Muhammad Tabadkani, one of the notable figures of that time, would evoke such strong emotions whenever he entered a state of dhikr that many people could not hold back their tears.

Reflections on works of art developed and improved over many years. In particular, various views related to Uzbek theatre studies and criticism had a significant impact on the development of this art. During the 1870s–1890s, Ahmad Donish (1827–1897) visited St. Petersburg and several cities in Europe, providing accounts of the performances he witnessed there. He writes that he was deeply impressed by the achievements of European theatre. "In every city of Russia there is a playhouse, and performances are held every evening until midnight. Fair-faced women who perform melodies and songs, who dance with graceful movements, girls with hair flowing like lavender and faces blooming like red roses, slender and elegant, enchant the eyes of the spectators and bring them delight, making the gathering lively."

On October 11, 1890, the poem "Suvorov" by Zokirjon Holmuhammad ogli Furqat was published in the newspaper *Turkiston Viloyati*. In the poem, he describes the full plot of the play and partially touches upon the performance, stage decorations, costumes, and makeup [10]. In Furqat's poetic review, the impressions he wrote after being influenced by the play "Suvorov" provide information about the dramaturgy of that time, the quality of the performances, and matters related to acting.

Furqat also mentions in his articles the performances presented during the touring visits of Russian, Tatar, and Azerbaijani theatres, as well as the magnificence of theatre buildings and the discipline of the audience. "That playhouse is a grand and splendid building, and men and women come there and all sit politely in their seats. Among us Muslims, there is no such custom. Our performances take place outdoors, in open courtyards." Comparing European-style theatre with the existing theatrical art in the Turkestan region, Furqat dreams of having a highly developed theatre with all necessary conveniences in his own homeland as well. "... And many times I went to the theatre what the Russians call a playhouse and observed the forms of imitation performed there [11]. The performances they present, their art, are not like our buffoons' shows meant for mockery and laughter, but rather for edification. In this way, they depict the conditions of people of the past, their way of life, and the problems they faced. And if there happen to be some humorous scenes, the audience still takes both lesson and delight from them. For this reason, it is not permissible there to utter shameful or indecent words."

Mahmudkhoja Behbudi emerged at the threshold of the 20th century as one of the most prominent figures of the new era of Uzbek culture. He worked as the founder of modern Uzbek culture, the recognized leader of the Turkestan Jadids, the theorist and practitioner of the new-method school movement, the first playwright who initiated Uzbek written dramaturgy, as well as a theatre organizer, publisher, and journalist [12]. He strove to instill in people's consciousness that a school alone was not enough for enlightenment, and that one must stay informed about current world events, as well as the condition and daily life of the nation and the homeland. He put forward the idea that a nation needs a mirror through which it can see both its flaws and its virtues. It was precisely this need and necessity that led Behbudi toward the theatre. In 1914, in issue 29 of the journal *Oyna*, he wrote an article titled "What is Theatre?", in which he emphasized that theatre plays a particularly important role in guiding people toward enlightenment and opening their eyes. In answer to the question "What is theatre?", he writes: "Theatre is a house of admonition; theatre is a place of moral instruction; theatre is discipline and refinement [13]. Theatre is a mirror in which the general condition of society is embodied and displayed, where the sighted can see, and the deaf can hear, and thus take heed." Through this article, Behbudi demonstrates that theatre is an institution of moral guidance, a noble place that imparts spirituality and enlightenment to people.

"The theatre is a place of education, a source of intellectual exchange, a literary platform, and a mirror of our life, where spectators see events with their own eyes and hear them with their own ears. It exposes bad habits and speaks the truth without hesitation. It criticizes wrongdoing and calls for renewal, while at the same time lifting people's spirits, bringing them joy, and providing them with rest. Just as every era has its own means of influencing human consciousness, the theatre is such an institution as well... In books and novels, people learn about life and moral issues through reading, whereas the theatre presents these events on stage through action, and for this reason its impact is stronger [14]. Moreover, theatre is understandable even for those who are illiterate, and thus it serves as a school in its own way," he writes.

Western scholars have also expressed their views on the spiritual value of art and its influence on people. William Shakespeare, a representative of the Western Renaissance, emphasized the immense power of art through the themes he explored in his works. This can be observed, for example, in the "play-within-the-play" scene of *Hamlet*.

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622–1673) glorified humanistic ideas and laid the foundation of the high genre of comedy. Stressing that theatre is a great force, he set for himself the goal of bringing light into the hearts of the oppressed and those bowed under tyranny and injustice. "Both Molière's pen and his acting mastery were sharpened and perfected through the enthusiastic applause, shouts, laughter, or tones of discontent from the world of spectators". Drawing the ideas and plots of his works from the people themselves, reworking and refining them, he elevated them to the level of art and then returned them to the people. Through art, he awakened in their hearts feelings of hope, confidence, and a spirit of struggle.

The French Enlightenment thinker Denis Diderot (1713–1784), believing in the great power of the arts, actively participated in creating the *Encyclopédie* (*Encyclopedia of Arts, Sciences, and Crafts*). In his treatises *Conversations on the Natural Son* and *Reflections on Dramatic Poetry*, Diderot expressed his thoughts on the influence of theatre art. He emphasized that aesthetic understanding is closely connected with morality [15]. Among the first to do so, he explained the differences between imitative and representational art and their unique characteristics, while also advocating for the actor's exceptional intelligence and skill. "Truth and goodness are the allies of art," Diderot says. "Do you wish to be an author? Or a critic? First, be a good person. What can you expect from someone who has not truly felt pity or sorrow? What else, besides the great creative gifts of nature such as truth and goodness, can move the human heart?"

One of the representatives of the German Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1709–1781), as a playwright and theorist of art, stated: “True art must begin with the human being.” Lessing advocated for freedom and the development of a mature, independent individual in the fields of dramaturgy and artistic theory. He defined art as a battlefield against all forms of tyranny.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) also emphasized that the art of theatre should harmonize with the spirit of the age. He stated, “In fact, we should study only those things that truly inspire wonder.” For him, the concepts of East and West, a person’s origin, or the significance of their nation were not important. Goethe expressed his admiration for the lives and works of great figures of the Eastern world, such as Saadi, Hafez, Omar Khayyam, Jami, and Navoi. In his works, he did not limit himself to issues specific to the German nation or the Western world, but addressed universal ideas concerning the pressing problems, flaws, and virtues of all humanity. He emphasized the boundlessness of the human heart.

In Goethe’s book *Treasury of Wisdom*, there are also insightful reflections on art and its role in human life. He writes: “A perfect work of art is a reflection of the human spiritual world; in this sense, it can be considered a child of nature,” “Taste does not develop in the mediocre, but is cultivated on the foundation of perfect works,” and “Art engages in difficult and noble endeavors.” Beneath these seemingly simple definitions lies a profound philosophical essence.

He also notes, “Even at the height of happiness and bliss, or in moments of great misfortune, we feel the need for the support of the artist.” Notice that humans constantly experience not only a need for art but a genuine dependence on it. Such reflections are rarely encountered in the works of other creators.

“Art, by its very nature, is noble, and therefore no baseness can intimidate the artist. Art enhances human virtues, cultivates good character, and in this way, we see great artists boldly exercising their rightful grandeur.” “We cannot conceive of the world apart from Humanity, and for this reason, we desire no art that lacks this essential connection...” From this perspective, it is clear that Goethe believed that true art is capable not only of bridging East and West but of uniting the entire world.

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) emerged as the greatest playwright and theorist of the Symbolist movement. The Symbolists did not accept the requirement to depict life realistically; they believed that the essence of the world can only be understood through symbols and signs. In his treatises, Maeterlinck argued that the mortal world cannot be comprehended by reason alone and is beyond human perception. Only the glimmer of the true nature of existence is accessible. The secrets of this world are revealed only to the rarest and most perfect individuals, and even then, only faintly and intuitively. Maeterlinck developed his aesthetics on the basis of these philosophical views. Within his aesthetic theory, the concepts of the “theatre of the soul” and the “theatre of silence” occupy a special place.

The theory of the “theatre of the soul” is aimed at revealing the “profound difficulties of everyday life.” On stage, it is not external events that should be shown, but rather a person’s inner life and the dominion of their spiritual world. As Maeterlinck writes, “Life’s true difficulties begin only where adventures, conflicts, and superficial struggles end,” and the essence of drama is revealed in “the comforting and ceaseless dialogue between the living being and its destiny.” However, such dialogue occurs only through silence. The theory of silence emerges as a stylistic tool to implement the theory of the theatre of the soul in practice. According to Maeterlinck, the dialogue he envisions manifests only through silence: “Among people, speech may disappear, but silence never does; true life consists solely of silence; only silence belongs to a life that leaves a trace.” Maeterlinck argues that people often speak not of what is essential, but of trivial or superficial matters, because words frequently prevent them from confronting the profound reality of silence.



"In a dramatic work," he states, "at first, words that seem unnecessary are the most essential. The soul of drama is concentrated in these words. Alongside the continuous dialogue, there exists another dialogue, which seems superfluous, yet accompanies it."

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) marked the pinnacle of 20th-century German dramaturgy with his work. Brecht referred to his theatre as "non-Aristotelian" or "non-traditional" theatre. He developed the forms of this theatre over a period of more than thirty years. Brecht's theatre theory is fairly fully expressed in his works such as "Notes to the Threepenny Opera" (1928), "Street Scene" (1940), and "A Short Organon for the Theatre" (1953).

For Brecht, active thinking on the part of the audience is crucial: the spectator should not simply fall under the influence of the events on stage and remain a passive observer. Brecht was not interested in the usual logical progression of a scene unfolding in a continuous, predictable sequence. Once an event occurs, another scene that contradicts or contrasts with it should follow, and the spectator must distance themselves from the previous event, seeing it from a new perspective. As a result, the audience begins to analyze and examine aspects of earlier scenes that might have gone unnoticed. Brecht called this technique of shifting the spectator's attention from one event to another the "art of distancing".

An important aspect of Brecht's "epic theater" is that it appeals not to the audience's emotions, but to their intellect. While the masterpieces of "dramatic theater" traditionally aimed to convince the spectator of the reality of the events on stage, making them feel like participants in those events, epic theater is built on maintaining distance, comparing viewpoints, and encouraging analysis. At the same time, in his early works, Brecht wrote: "It is absolutely wrong to remove emotion from this theater, but the spectator should not merely empathize; rather, they should enter into a dialogue with it." Brecht refers to the audience's perspective toward this theater as a "socially critical" point of view.

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite divergences in historical circumstances in addition to social formation, the analysis reveals that Eastern and Western philosophers agreed on the idea that art is at the core of composing human awareness and society, but from various perspectives in regard to its function. In the East thinkers like Farabi, Ibn Sina, Navoi, and Behbudi considered art a shaper of spiritual root, moral elevation, and soul enrichment, while in the West people like Shakespeare, Diderot, Goethe, Lessing, and Brecht stressed the power of art to challenge social order, improve critical thinking skills, and depict struggles of life. Cumulatively, these findings suggest art has always had a dual role as a reflective and a prescriptive medium, one that can teach, provoke, and uplift anyone, anywhere, at the right time. Modern cultural institutions, particularly theatre and music, should draw on this synthesis by integrating these complementary perspectives, both for artistic education and for audience engagement. While the extended historical range investigated in the book implies a need for more work examining how digital media, transnational cultural circulation, and new artistic practices continue to transform these deeply rooted notions regarding art's power and its public function.

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