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An Exploration of the Relationship between "Time-Space Compression" Theory and Changes in the Aesthetic Experience of Classical Poetry

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Abstract:
Drawing on the theory of time-space compression proposed by David Harvey in The Condition of Postmodernity, this paper analyzes the phenomenon of the dissolution of homogeneous time and space fostered by rapid social development and ever-evolving modern technology. The convenience formed by transportation compressing travel time, and global connectivity through instant communication creating a "global village," are profoundly reshaping public perceptions of time and space and significantly altering the aesthetic experience of classical poetry. This paper examines the impact of time-space compression on the aesthetics of classical poetry from three dimensions: First, compressed temporal-spatial perception diminishes the profound empathy carried by imagery of parting, wandering, and homesickness in ancient works; accelerated time and collapsed spatial barriers dilute the poignant, distant poetic beauty nurtured within traditional temporal-spatial contexts. Second, it disrupts the traditional stable order of time and space, shifting the enduring, contemplative, and precipitated eternity of poetic aesthetics toward fleeting and transient experiences. Third, the core of aesthetics shifts from spiritual empathy and mental realization toward superficial material and sensory perception.

Keywords:
Time-Space Compression; Classical Poetry; Aesthetic Experience

1. Introduction

The theory of "time-space compression" is a concept proposed by David Harvey in The Condition of Postmodernity. Through this concept, Harvey sought to demonstrate that with the vigorous development of capitalism, the experience of time and space is no longer homogeneous. The advancement of modern science and technology has significantly reduced the time spent traversing space, leading to a loss of process in our perception. Simultaneously, space has contracted into a "global village," fostering economic and ecological interdependence and a sense of totality. This appears paradoxical—the loss of process on one hand, and dependence on totality on the other—yet it is not contradictory. In Harvey's view, "aesthetic practices and cultural practices are particularly sensitive to changing experiences of time and space, precisely because

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they must construct spatial expressions based on the flow of human experience." Consequently, the reality of "time-space compression" has induced changes in our aesthetic feelings and experiences, and this is particularly evident in the aesthetic experience of classical poetry.

2. The Current State of "Time-Space Compression" Curbing or Dissolving the Generation of Aesthetic Experience

Contemporary appreciation and experience of classical poetry primarily stem from the inner resonance evoked by poetic imagery and themes. Imagery is a key category in literary theory. Particularly, the emotions triggered in readers by poetic lines—expressing what one cannot articulate oneself—encapsulate myriad feelings within the poem. Among the most resonant are poems of parting. For the ancients, transportation was inconvenient, making meetings difficult and subsequent reunions even harder. Thus, the theme of parting frequently appears in works by many poets. Parting was a significant event in ancient life. However, Harvey posits that profound changes in our social transportation, commodity services, and urban construction have drastically shortened the time spent traversing space and, simultaneously, eliminated spatial barriers through modern transport and remote communication, forming a "global village." Consequently, the aesthetic experience derived from the imagery in ancient parting poems has been greatly diminished.

Regarding temporal experience, Mu Xin's poem "Once Upon a Time, It Was Slow" illustrates this point. Whether it is the slow passage of time felt through the daylight, or the slow anticipation of letters delivered by horse-drawn carriages, time is, in one sense, a physical issue, but the experience of time is a psychological and aesthetic one. Modern people have lost much of the aesthetic feeling associated with the experience of time. The ease of parting, the difficulty of meeting, the bitterness of longing, and the sorrow of drifting—these universal and pervasive emotions persistently lingered in the hearts of ancient literati, giving rise to countless classic poems, forming splendid cultural treasures and a collective unconscious. When we face vast mountains and rivers, or boundless winds, these cultural genes invariably surface; they need not be constantly remembered but are never forgotten. These poems, whether concerning family, friendship, or love, carry an indescribable melancholy and profound sorrow. Imagine the past, at the dawn of humanity, when timekeeping instruments were not precise; perhaps people's perception of time was not as acute as now. Sitting on a rock, watching the sun rise silently, amazed by its wonder, they continued gripping their tools, hoping to sharpen them more effectively for the next hunt. As the sun reached its zenith, they ate, rested in the shade, drank, wiped sweat, and continued their work, unaware of the sun's decline until they saw it set and darkness gradually fall, their thoughts and feelings entrusted to the bright moon above. Thus, over a long time, they came to know the alternation of day and night, the cycle of seasons, the succession of cold and heat, birth, aging, sickness, and death—all meanings endowed by time. Hence, we wish for perfect blossoms and moons, for everlasting reunions, for eternal love, and for freedom beyond time. Yet these are unattainable. Looking up at the moon, we share the same orb and the flowing rivers with the ancients. This sense of connecting past and present is wondrous and enchanting, relieving the loneliness of existing between heaven and earth. Through this, we grasp the eternity of the universe and the transience of life: "The ancients never saw the moon of today, yet today's moon once shone upon the ancients." This inexhaustible, ineffable sense of life and history has always accompanied us—petty, fragile, yet resilient and great. Therefore, we must cherish this finite time,

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not betraying the spring rain, the summer evening breeze, the autumn frost, the winter's first snow, nor each meeting and parting with significant others. Whether sober or intoxicated, we can always find kindred spirits and converse with them across time. As we grow, we must leave our homeland for various reasons, seeking a spiritual haven. Behind every youth lies a string of earnest gazes; the wind blows north, and departures are resolute. "Life is elsewhere" always attracts restless souls. Do those discarded pasts never reappear? They do, perhaps. This homesickness, residing in memory, seems never to leave, always approaching infinitely yet unable to return to the past, much like Gatsby's green light across the river—so close, yet so far. The German poet Schiller said, "The steps of time are threefold: the future arrives slowly, the present flies like an arrow, and the past stands eternally still." In this era of high-speed development, the experience of time is felt more profoundly than ever. We see skyscrapers rise from the ground and host lavish banquets. So many hurried people, collars turned up, cross the streets and dissolve into the crowds. It seems impossible to pause and attend to other things.

Regarding spatial experience, "A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near" seems no longer metaphorical or symbolic; modern transportation has made it all possible. The feeling of traveling across mountains and rivers to see someone, the precious and cherished sentiments, can now be realized quickly, without hesitation or the need for ellipsis. Yet, when everything appears so clear and evident, why are there still so many lingering anxieties and melancholy? We need a spiritual habitat. "How much sorrow can one bear? Like a river of spring water flowing eastward." People's spheres of activity seem larger; traversing the globe is no longer so unattainable. But what about people's experience of space? Is it a vague backdrop or a primary dimension of existence? And with what attitude should we present the whole world? Space, as the main arena for daily activities, can provide a sense of security and stability—touching and loving something tangible. Time-space compression, by overcoming space through time, encroaches upon the aesthetic feelings generated by spatial experience. Whether it's the Yangzhou of "fireworks in March," the Yumen Pass where "spring wind never crosses," the Xunyang River where travelers once lodged, the Ba Mountains where night rain falls, or the Loulan where bodies were wrapped in horsehide—these spaces seem to have lost their intended meaning, reduced merely to nouns recorded in poems, empty shells for later generations to mourn. Moving from one place to another, wandering from city to city, seeing many sights—snowy Beijing, romantic Paris, rainy London, the frontier with white horses and autumn winds, and the misty, rainy Jiangnan. Yet how different are cities, really? Fresh white gauze covers old dreams covered in dust; now a bright moon, now fading blossoms.

3. The Current State of "Time-Space Compression" Transforming the Eternity of Aesthetic Experience into Instantaneity

Time and space are never severed; they are unified in our lives. However, if their development is unbalanced, problems inevitably arise. Amidst the fragmentation of time and space, people seem unable to perceive the reality of the world. Everything comes so swiftly, unavoidable, and we can only be swept along. Yet what we precisely need is to re-experience an ordered and relatively harmonious time-space within this involuntary drift. Here, time need not be artificially extended, nor space infinitely compressed. Aesthetic experience and self-expression merge seamlessly, without a sense of rupture. Especially when appreciating classical poetry, the subtle tones felt should not be lost. The rapid flow of temporal-spatial rhythms shatters the traditional aes-

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thetic process of slow sedimentation and prolonged savoring. The ancients savored poems by lamplight, reciting repeatedly, digesting the sorrows of parting, wandering, and nostalgia over long days. A single sentiment could linger for days or even years, and this prolonged reflection constructed the eternal quality of aesthetic experience. Du Fu's sorrow over aging and sickness in "Climbing the Heights," Li Bai's fantastic visions in "Dreaming of Tianmu Mountain," the lament of the fallen in "Song of the Pipa," the restrained, deep remembrance in "Records of the Xiangji Studio," the positive spirit of climbing in snow in "Record of Climbing Mount Tai," the liberating release in "Immortals by the Riverside," and Su Shi's optimism in "Remembering the Past at Red Cliff"—these philosophical reflections on life and the sorrows of time,over millennia in classical poetry, find it difficult to root themselves in fleeting sensory impressions.

The hurried pace brought by temporal-spatial imbalance also dissolves the blank space for aesthetic gestation. The charm of classical poetry lies precisely in the gaps between reality and illusion, distance and proximity, urgency and leisure. Gazing at distant mountains while thinking of old friends, facing long nights pondering the date of return, sitting under the lamp organizing thoughts, traveling afar to broaden horizons—these prolonged waits and observations are an essential part of aesthetic feeling. Yet time-space compression smooths over distance and waiting. The ability to meet when desired, to receive instant replies, eliminates the longing of distant anticipation and the complex emotions of reunion after long separation. The profound sentiments nurtured by the long duration in poetry lose their fertile ground. Readers find it difficult to calm down and immerse themselves in the life situations of the ancients—years of parting, half-life wandering—gaining only fleeting, superficial emotional resonance rather than lasting, profound, and repeatable eternal aesthetic memories.

To preserve the subtle, exquisite tones of classical poetry, to regain composure in the flow of time, to re-embark on a spiritual journey in the depths of years, and to rediscover oneself in quietness—we must not rush or hurry, but encounter life in leisure. This requires actively breaking free from the passive state of being swept along by high-speed time-space. In stable temporal-spatial perception, we must relax, slow down the pace of reading, and carefully ponder the weight of years behind each image, actively building our own balanced temporal-spatial perceptual system. In the fast-paced daily grind, we must set aside the anxiety of ringing alarms and learn to connect with the slow-flowing years within poetry through a tranquil mindset. Only by freeing aesthetic experience from fleeting stimuli and no longerpursuing efficiency, speed, and quantifiable things can we reconnect with subtle sentiments, weighty texts, and vast time-space. Only then can we grasp the emotions of classical poetry spanning millennia, allowing that distant, delicate, and enduring aesthetic appeal to continue, preventing the profound, lingering poetic meaning from dissipating in the torrent of compressed time-space.

4. The Current State of "Time-Space Compression" Transforming the Spirituality of Aesthetic Experience into Materiality

Many domestic scholars have conducted in-depth elaboration and research on David Harvey's theory of "time-space compression," achieving fruitful results. Some scholars have meticulously traced the theoretical origins and the resulting changes in aesthetics and aesthetic experience; others have interpreted the relationship between modernism and postmodernism from a spatial perspective; others have connected this theory

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to the practice of daily life, indicating the new temporal-spatial experiences in social development and their advantages and disadvantages; some have attempted to delve deeper into its theoretical connotations from various angles; others have focused on the relationship between visual turns in American modernist fiction and time-space compression. Particularly noteworthy is scholar Tan Wenqi's article, "Changes in Western Aesthetic Concepts under Time-Space Compression," which proposes that under the rapid development of late capitalist society and time-space compression, individual aesthetic experiences have undergone significant changes, thereby causing transformations in aesthetic concepts.

Harvey's time-space compression is rooted in the rapid expansion of capital and modern technological systems. Under the logic of capital, efficiency, speed, and convenience become the primary benchmarks. Aesthetic activity gradually shifts from its original inward spiritual pursuit to an outward inclination, becoming attached to and constrained by material carriers and material enjoyment. The deep spiritual aesthetics of classical poetry are continuously displaced by superficial material and sensory experience. The aesthetic essence of classical poetry is spiritual interconnection—connecting with the past across millennia. The ancients, relying on a single letter, a bright moon, a willow branch, or a touch of lingering snow, entrusted their longings and sorrows. Without the need for physical companionship, they achieved aesthetic sublimation through spiritual empathy and resonance of sentiments. Appreciating poetry is a spiritual journey, allowing one to transcend mundane trivialities through verses, experiencing the profound contemplation of life and death, family and state, mountains and rivers, and the cycle of time. Beauty is born from the spiritual dialogue between hearts, between present and past, independent of material conditions. Yet under time-space compression, convenient transportation, instant communication, and various entertainment and consumer goods fill the spiritual blanks. Missing a loved one no longer requires sending feelings through moonlit verses; a video call or a high-speed train enables physical meeting. Inner distress is no longer resolved by reciting poetry but through consumer spending, travel, and entertainment. The refined, enduring sentiments of longing, melancholy, and nostalgia lose their necessary contexts for expression; the spiritual solace function of poetry is replaced by material means.

The consumption model, driven by capital, further exacerbates aesthetic materialization. Contemporary engagement with classical poetry is often packaged commercially. Ancient-style cultural tourism sites replicate poetic locations as internet-famous photo spots; poems are paired with short video effects and commercial background music. Traffic, check-ins, and photo-taking become the primary purposes of engaging with poetry. People flock to "Twenty-Four Bridges," "Yang Pass," or "Xunyang River," focusing not on experiencing the melancholy and desolation within the verses, but on leaving check-in marks and sharing on social media. They measure aesthetic gains through tangible outputs like physical travel, photographs, and materials. The evaluation criteria for aesthetics shift from the depth of inner emotional impact to the existence of visible material traces such as objects, images, or itineraries. The originally inward, purifying spiritual aesthetic is thus transformed into an outward display, a consumer behavior consuming material resources. Concurrently, in the fast-paced, compressed temporal-spatial environment, the public favors intuitive and immediate sensory stimulation, finding it difficult to tolerate theimplicit and introspective spiritual depth of classical poetry, which requires quiet contemplation. Spiritual aesthetics demands calmness, solitude, and prolonged thought. Yet people pushed forward by high-speed time-space have become habituated to short, immediate material sensory gratification. Compared to patiently reading "Spring River Moonlit Night" to contemplate its cosmic

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philosophy, they prefer edited short videos of poems; compared to personally feeling homesickness through verse, they tend to drown sentiments in material enjoyments like travel and fine food. The unique metaphysical spiritual insights of poetry become marginalized, and aesthetic experience is degraded to superficial sensory pleasure.

To reclaim the spiritual core of aesthetics, it is necessary to guard a spiritual preserve within the materialized, compressed temporal-spatial reality. We must strip poetry appreciation of its consumerist, check-in, and materialattributes, returning to the text itself and engaging in a dialogue with the sentiments of the ancients. We should not replace spiritual empathy with material means, understanding that no matter how fast the vehicles or instantaneous the communication, they cannot replicate the unique spiritual longing and distant mood within ancient poetry. Only by allowing aesthetics to return to its spiritual core can we reawaken the transcendent, soul-stirring spiritual beauty inherent in classical poetry.

5. Conclusion

Classical poetry, as one of the most refined parts retained in traditional Chinese culture, contains national sentiments and the subtle, implicit Oriental aesthetic. It is an indispensable component of Chinese traditional culture. "Time-space compression" is an inevitable trend in the process of modernization, a consequence of era development and modern technology, and as individuals, we cannot reverse it. Faced with this situation, we can actively adjust our modes of perception to balance the contradiction between the fast-paced modern life and the aesthetics of classical poetry. We must learn to break free from the grip of high-speed time-space, preserving a space for ease and leisure. We should proactively slow down the reading rhythm, mindfully appreciate the poems, return to the text itself, and understand the historical background and humanistic connotations behind them. In today's fast-paced life, we must hold fast to the aesthetic experience in the spiritual realm, not replacing spiritual empathy with material convenience, and actively build a balanced temporal-spatial perceptual system of our own. Only in this way can we break free from superficial sensory aesthetics and, millennia later, achieve spiritual resonance with the ancients, inheriting the unique charm and spiritual mettle of classical poetry. This ensures that classical poetic aesthetic culture achieves long-term inheritance and innovative development under the contemporary backdrop of compressed time-space.

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