Chapter 1
Western Aesthetics

ABSTRACT
This chapter studies the development and basic ideas of Western aesthetic thoughts by reviewing the aesthetic history of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages and by investigating the modern and contemporary aesthetics. It initially discusses the dominant classical Greek aesthetics, the medieval aesthetics, the 19th century aesthetics, and finally the modern aesthetics. The chapter finds that while the history of aesthetics is marked by countless schools of thoughts, only a few people of rare talent have made significant contribution to the entire human civilization through their aesthetic theories and ideas.

INTRODUCTION
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CLASSICAL GREEK AESTHETICS
The Greek civilization, originated by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers, is a well-formed and sublime exemplar of culture, whose timeless vitality and creativity have made it a breeding ground for the western civilization.

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Socrates’ Aesthetics

Socrates (1997) believed that beauty is that which is appropriate, and it was not the nature but the soul that forms the essence of beauty.

By saying “know thyself” (Xenophon, 1994) in one of his quotations, Socrates suggested that one should know his/her soul. Since the essence of the human soul is rationality, the knowledge of beauty can therefore be acquired through first the knowledge of soul and then the knowledge of rationality. Soul-rationality-beauty, in this order Socrates came to understand what beauty truly is. This way of understanding beauty marked the birth of rationalism and spiritualism, the advent of idealism, and a great leap forward for the aesthetic epistemology.

In Socrates’ view, beautiful things are relative, yet beauty itself is eternal and unalterable. There are many beautiful things but only one universal
The Beauty of Design
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