

Aesthetic Education in China

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Abstract

As the educational content of education policy prescribed in the legal form, aesthetical education in China has the characteristics of visualization, emotionality and pleasure, which can enrich and develop individual perception to realize individual comprehensive development. Since ancient times, China has the tradition of aesthetical education, but from the modern times, it has been developed in the main way of art education, and the class hour has not yet been carried out according to the national regulation. Although scholars from every region have a wealth of research achievements, the key to implementing aesthetic education is still in the implementation of these policies and achievements.

Keywords: *China, aesthetic education, status, problem*

Aesthetic education is a kind of educational activity, which aims to cultivate students' aesthetic perception, aesthetic understanding, aesthetic evaluation and aesthetic creativity through a variety of good things (All beautiful things existed in nature, art, science and forms), also helps to develop good personal quality and wisdom. Its role can be summarized to cultivate aesthetic capacity, edify temperament and inspire wisdom.

1. The nature and function of Aesthetic education

Since 1949, the purpose of education in China is to foster all-round development of people. Educational content is mainly composed of five parts, moral education, knowledge education, physical education, aesthetic education and labor education, in which the first three have been at the core position and never wavered in the the education policy and practice for more than 60 years since the foundation of the state, while not the same with aesthetic education and labor education, for changes of understanding of researchers in educational theory and policy makers, there are several major modifications. Nearly 30 years since 1985, except from 1995 to 1999, aesthetic education is located in the national education policy, emphasizing and protecting its important role and significance in the form of law.

Year	Educational Content
1951~1955	moral education, knowledge education, physical education, aesthetic education
1956~1985	moral education, knowledge education, physical education
1985~1995	moral education, knowledge education, physical education, aesthetic education , labor education
1995~1999	moral education, knowledge education, physical education
1999~now	moral education, knowledge education, physical education, aesthetic education

Relative to other education, aesthetic education has its own characteristics. First of all, from the point of teaching means, it is an image education, whose educational media must have the form of sensible image appealing to people. Only through intuitive perception of the image, people obtain the aesthetic sense, and enter a higher realm of aesthetics, that is, experiencing the world, at last through the experience to grasp the deeper implication of the object. Secondly, from the point of recipients' learning way, it is an emotional education, which wants to stimulate the emotion activities of the educated, and through emotional experience to act on their hearts. Aesthetics is not to impart knowledge, teach skills, not to provide people with a certain code of conduct, but to give the recipients the orientation of the emotion, love, hate, good, and evil, to accept the rational content in the emotional acceptance.

Finally, from the point of the teaching effect, it is a kind of pleasure education, that is, aesthetic education is an

education activity which can make the educated feel pleasant and entertaining. She gives the sense and spirit the full enjoyment and pleasure. ^[1] Because aesthetic education has the characteristics of image, emotion, pleasure, she can play its unique mission: enrich and develop human sensibility. Emotion and ratiom form the human spirit, once, both of which are intertwined interwoven harmoniously and seamlessly, contributing to the improvement of human mental functioning. Unknown from when, perhaps from Descartes held high the banner of rationalism, human's spirit gradually advocated ratiom, even now evolved into the situation that ratiom dominates. Human's perception and emotion, as the deepest dynamic source of human activity, embody the nature of human. But because of the squeezing of ratiom, she gradually retreats, or lacks its own field, or reverts to the animal-like nature. Perceptual improvement and development, only resorted to moral education, knowledge education, physical education can't achieve, can only be completed by the aesthetic education which equally emphasizes the perception and emotion. Only with it, it is possible to cultivate all-round development of people.

2. The past of aesthetic education

Since ancient times, there has been aesthetic education thought and practice in China. From the remote ancient times, rituals and music existed and thrived together, the synthesization of ceremony, music, poetry, dance, is not only social system, but also ethics code and social educational means. Aesthetic education thoughts have been put forward in Early Qin Dynasty. For instance, Confucius advocated poetic education and music education, the so-called "prosperity in poetry, founding in ceremony, success in music. In late Han early Wei, at the seventh chapter "art discipline" in his writing "Zhong Analects", Xv Gan put forward clearly the word "aesthetic education", and based on the relevant records in "Zhou li", discussed the ways and methods the previous kings used to educate groups and argued that the aim of aesthetic education is to develop a gentleman personality. Six Arts in Chinese Ancient Education (etiquette, music, archery, riding, books, mathematics), comprises the contents of liberal and arts education.

After the Opium War in 1840, the weaken Chinese started to the historical transformation from traditional feudal agricultural society to the modern and democratic industrial society, who culturally translated and introduced a number of Western and Japanese theories and works. Among them, there were western aesthetics and aesthetic education thoughts and theory, also most closely related to the aesthetic education, such as the western literature and art, modern psychology, ethics, education and so on. At that time, the Chinese view on the role of arts and aesthetics in the society was come from the German classical aesthetics, among which, Kant is as a representative. "in China, the earliest spread of Western Aesthetics and discussion in the philosophical discourse of aesthetic education is Cai Yuanpei's "philosophy" in 1901." ^[2] Cai Yuanpei not only put forward the concept of "aesthetic education" and the proposition "aesthetic education replace of religion", which bears important theory significance and academic value, and made it become an independent discipline as the same with moral education, knowledge education, but also according to Kant philosophy and aesthetics of the basic concept the essence of aesthetic education community for emotional education, in the meantime, according to Kantism and the basic idea of aesthetics, also defined its nature as emotional education, which making its discipline construction was in the middle of the overall framework of modern education and above the knowledge level of modern philosophy, aesthetics, psychology and pedagogy from the start. ^[3] Thereafter, studies of Liang Qichao, Feng Zikai, Wang Wang Tongzhao, Lu Xun, Zhu Guangqian et al. on aesthetic education have been followed his basic orientation to aesthetics education. For example, Wang Guowei asserted that people should have three kinds of virtues, which are the truth, the good and the beauty, and proposed arts should be used to achieve aesthetic education. Liang Qichao followed Kant's idea, considered that human mentality contains three parts, which are perception, emotion and will and when they all exist and are well developed, one can amount to have the quality to be a person. Among the three parts, he said, "The most sacred in the world is emotion"[4], and put forward "emotion education should be in the first place." [5] He gave emotional education the equal position as other education, while other scholars of his contemporaries, such as Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei et al, held the idea that moral education is the center of the purpose of education". Zhu Guangqian put forward "the function of education is in response to human's natural needs for knowledge, good, and beauty, to make a person get maximum harmonious development in these three respects, so as to achieve a perfect life." ^[6] Aesthetic class of this period gave more emphasis on aesthetics constituents in subjects, course time and aesthetic knowledge features, and the aesthetic class in primary school is composed of public art, image art and music, while the one in middle school is composed of pictures, manual and music, requiring that aesthetic education should have the "self-reliant beauty". Obviously, as an independent teaching content, aesthetic education's position of this period has improved and ensured, and knowledge about it has progressed, especially its aesthetic functioning has

been accepted by most people.

3. The status and problems in aesthetic education practice

School education in China regards art education as the carrier and means of aesthetic education. From the curriculum designing, five levels in China's current system of preschool education, primary school education, middle school education (junior middle school, high school), university education(college, undergraduate), Graduate education (MA, PhD), no one has adopted aesthetic education into their curricula, and they all use literature, music, art and other art education curriculum to replace. Among them, only a few schools have specially established aesthetic education class, but they are set under the elective class directory. That is to say, the education contents of aesthetic education in practice are realized by depending on art education. Then, can art education take the role of aesthetic education and exert its effects?

Art is indeed an important medium of aesthetic education, but when it was directly equated with aesthetic education will undoubtedly reduce the aesthetic education 's extension, and natural aesthetic content are exclude, thereby reducing the chance that the educated accept to appreciate and create the beautiful, naturally, it will impair the maximum effect that aesthetic education could achieve. Aesthetic education is not limited to regard art as the medium, artistic beauty, natural beauty, scientific beauty, social beauty, and form beauty can become the aesthetic contents. From the years of art education practice, paying attention to art skill education is far more than art appreciation education.

Art appreciation education is mainly to guide the educated appreciate the art works, thereby improving their appreciation capability such as art sense, art understanding and art evaluation, on this basis to carry out art skill education and possibly to be converted it to the artistic expression and artistic creativity. This is in fact an order reversed approach. ^[7] But even such art education, practice only in pre-school and primary school are guaranteed, which is really implemented. When entering the middle school especially high school stage, because of the entrance pressure, schools often give up art education, curriculum in music, art always are occupied by mathematics, foreign language, physics, most art curriculum in middle school exist only in name. In general, in school education, preschool and primary school education are only the one implement the aesthetic education, and even exclude that this is a kind of art education which regards skill education as the focus of aesthetic education.

In view of this, although current aesthetic education in China is specialized clearly in national education policy, the practice is not optimistic. The first is to narrow the scope of aesthetic education into art education, then is again reversed focus to make art education as skill education even such skill education is only really implemented in pre-school and primary school (Students below 12 years). In practice, aesthetic education has not been very good ensured.

Outside the school education, people recognize aesthetic education more. With the development of economy and the enrichment of materials, cities, streets, Plazas, shops, parks are designed and constructed according to aesthetic styles, beautiful environment, cars, clothes, figures have been wrapped in people's life, and people live in the society of beauty. In family education, along with cars enter common households, every weekend parents bring along their children into the forest, come into the wilderness, into the village, to experience the beauty of nature, and parents often send their children into the training institutions outside the school to study music, art, dance, to hear and feel the beauty of art. From these conditions, the idea aesthetic education is beneficial human overall development has won support among the people, who embody the pursuit of beauty and love in various ways, also want to give their children and the educated the best aesthetic education.

4. Research and reform in aesthetic education

In the face of aesthetic education, such a long and new topic, researchers have different studies and explanations from different perspectives, and it exhibits strong regional characteristics.

Northern China region (Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong) is traditionally Chinese political economic and cultural center and developed region. Researchers here attached great importance to aesthetic education practice, combining moral education and aesthetic education, science education and aesthetic education, insisting on that " aesthetic

education not only should be infiltrated into the moral, physical and knowledge education, and should become an independent or specialized area, with its main task to use certain specialized teaching means to build up aesthetic psychological structure.

What is aesthetic psychological structure? This is a unique structure that every psychological capability arrives to a high degree of active in people's appreciating and creating the beauty. The construction of this structure the mainly includes three aspects: one is fostering keen perception; second is to cultivate full imagination; third is to cultivate a thorough understanding." [8] Teng Chun put forward the "big education concept", namely "full playing the function of aesthetic education to promote students' all-round harmonious development in morality, wisdom, beauty, body and labor quality, which is qualitatively different with long existed narrow-minded understanding about aesthetic education, so it is called 'Big Aesthetic education'." Tan Chuanbao believe that moral education and aesthetic education can achieve a deep cross, and put forward "aesthetic outlook of moral education", which means it is the essential theory result from the intertwining of moral education and aesthetic education against utilitarian moral education. It is to realize the highest pursuit to beyond the moral education, make the spiritual freedom of moral activities and its shaping, against moral relativism as his essence." [10]

The main way to implement aesthetic education in Eastern China (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui) is art education. Many schools set Chinese traditional arts in curriculum, such as Qin (piano), chess, books, paintings, music and dance. They believe "to strengthen aesthetic education theory's practice, first we must turn the focus on art education, because it is the main channel, the basic realization way and the most effective way for aesthetic education especially school aesthetic education. We should strengthen researches on art education's aesthetic education function, nature, task, method and aim, strengthen studies on literature, music, painting, calligraphy, television, and other types of art education." [11]

Besides, enterprise aesthetic education was proposed and advocated. It is an applicable aesthetic theory in the enterprise production and management activities, which means according to the enterprise's own characteristics, the enterprise implements aesthetic education to their own workers, cultivating people's emotion, improving people's quality and the quality of the enterprise, and making them change the world in accordance with the law of beauty. [12] Researchers not only assign the aesthetic education in advance to the preschool education, also the research object extends to social life, family life education and aesthetic education. [13]

In Southwest China(Chongqing, Sichuan), Liu Zhaoji paid special attention to the influence and role that aesthetic activities plays in human psychological development and put forward two education psychology discipline concepts of "aesthetic education psychology" and "psychology of aesthetic education". Now, aesthetic education psychology researches have begun to take shape, the definition, nature, task, structure, system, preliminary already came to be formalized, and there have been a large number of discussion in its effect. [14]

Aesthetic education theory and practice system are systematically studied in Southwest China, after the basic concept became explicit and unified, a set of aesthetic education system has been established, from the target to content, textbooks, teaching mode, methods and evaluation, and comprehensive and systematical theoretical researches on the school aesthetic education, from preschool, primary school to middle school, have been conducted. Meantime, the construction in aesthetic education practice has been strengthened, researches using the experiment method and other empirical methods have come out. [15] In addition, Northeast region (Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Jilin) have been paid great attention to the development of aesthetic education, thought relying only on art education can't fully exert the effect of aesthetic education, advocating and implementing "aesthetic teaching"; Central China (Hunan, Hubei Province, Jiangxi) and Southern China (Guangdong, Fujian) also have their own characteristics.

Researches on aesthetic education of scholars from every region also promote the related education policy and the reform and practice school aesthetic education. In primary and middle schools, aesthetic education not only acts making arts as the main carrier, aesthetic guidance in the teaching activities of other disciplines can be seen everywhere. Beauty is more integrated into each comprehensive course. In University, aesthetic education is advocated to be integrated into the whole process of school education and exert its effect in the development of cross disciplines. But the key in the implementation of research findings, educational policy, class, faculty should get ensured, which is not enough in China.

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