

## An Exploration on the College Aesthetic Education Construction in China

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### Abstract

The ordinary institutions of higher education should rely on their advantages of relevant disciplines and local educational resources, expand the teaching contents and forms, guide students to cultivate improved personalities, strengthen cultural innovation consciousness, improve the sense of responsibility and sense of mission to carry forward the Chinese traditional culture. College aesthetic education construction should take art courses as the basis, integrate various subjects, pay attention to basic aesthetic knowledge, promote comprehensive programs to strengthen aesthetic practices. Only based on the core of aesthetic quality cultivation, humanistic quality cultivation and innovation ability cultivation, we can build an efficient and scientific aesthetic curriculum.

**Key words:** Institutions of higher education; Art curriculum; Training objectives; Curriculum setting

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### INTRODUCTION

Aesthetic education is a complex systematic project. This thesis will put forward some opinions on the objectives, setting and evaluation of the curriculum to draw on the collective wisdom, and make a preliminary exploration on college aesthetic education construction.

## 1. THE CORE TRAINING OBJECTIVE OF AESTHETIC CURRICULUM

Training objective is the starting point and destination of educational work, and accurate positioning of training objective is the important task of education. The so-called “training objective” is a relatively vague concept, which can refer to different levels, different types, different specialties of talents to train, or various training directions, specifications and requirements. Aesthetic curriculum aims at developing aesthetic quality and humanistic quality.

### 1.1 Aesthetic Qualities

Aesthetic literacy is one of the core objectives of aesthetic curriculum. The word aesthetics comes from the Greek word Aisthetikos. The original meaning is “sensory experience”. It is a special form for human to understand the world, and a non-utilitarian, visual and emotional relationship between human and the world (social and natural). Aesthetics is a pursuit of truth and development based on the unity of reason and emotion and unity of subjectivity and objectivity. Any aesthetics departing from truth and development is unable to win universal praise in the long term. In the aesthetic courses, music training can allow students to have both hearing and emotional experience. Musical requirement on hearing is higher than conversation, and music people can differentiate high and low sounds, and even the sound is getting high or low. Music allows students to produce a substantially similar feeling but in varying degrees and individual ability to experience is also affected by the environment. An environment full of music and an environment in lack of music can cause varying degrees of ability to feel the impacts. Therefore, in order to enable students to acquire aesthetic qualities, people should possess relevant subjective conditions and psychological qualities of aesthetics. The two senses of “see and hear” are not the same for everyone in

aesthetic experience. In this regard, congenital condition and acquired training play an equally important role. Therefore, the object of aesthetic curriculum is to train students' experience on "beauty".

## 1.2 Humanistic Qualities

The concept of "humanism" has existed in China since the ancient times. "Yi. Bi" has compared "humanism" and "astronomy": "Observe the operational rule of the heaven to recognize change of seasons, pay attention to human relations and morality to promote education in the world." The Western word "humanism" was derived from the Latin word *humanitas*, meaning humanity or upbringing. Aesthetic education takes "humanistic quality" as the core of training, emphasizing the inherent virtue. "Quality" is definitely a combination of "capacity factor" and "mental factor", namely "the research capacity and knowledge level of humanities, and the people-centered spirit manifested by humanities - human inherent qualities." This is a basic "virtue," "value" and "philosophy of life" to interact with others, including the scientific spirit, artistic spirit as well as morality. Humanistic quality is the basis of talent quality. Some investigative reports in recent years show that contemporary college students lag behind in humanistic qualities. For example, college students lack knowledge and interests in aesthetics and humanities, so aesthetic work should strengthen the cultivation of humanistic qualities of contemporary students, which are another core objective of aesthetic curriculum.

## 2. SETTING OF AESTHETIC CURRICULUM

Provide a variety of high-quality aesthetic curriculum. School aesthetic curriculum mainly includes music, art, dance, drama, opera, film and television. All schools must pay attention to and strengthen classical art education, develop an aesthetic curriculum with national, regional and school characteristics according to its own advantages and features.

### 2.1 Setting Mode

#### 2.1.1 Emphasize Specific Subject, Take Into account Other Subjects

Aesthetic curriculum is not based on only one course, but includes music, art, dance, drama, opera, film and television. Firstly, we should master a specific subject to improve our abilities and accomplishments according to our interests and expertise. Secondly, we should also select four or more aesthetic courses to comprehensively understand and cultivate art accomplishment.

#### 2.1.2 Organically Integrate Multiple Subjects

Aesthetic curriculum consists of music, art, dance, drama, opera, film, television and other courses. We should play the advantage of each subject to form a high-quality aesthetic course.

### 2.1.3 Set Two Levels of Compulsory and Elective Courses

Two-level curriculum is a mode combining required courses and elective courses. It sets required courses in the first level and elective courses in the second level. Their relationship is that required courses are the core and elective courses complement, required courses are the basis and elective courses are the extension. Two levels of the curriculum with a solid foundation and wide coverage can then be established.

### 2.2 Teaching Principles

To improve the overall teaching level of aesthetic education, we should correctly handle four relationships: the relationship between elective course and compulsory course; the relationship between theory and practice; the relationship between tradition and modernity; the relationship between popularization and improvement. The coordination among the four relationships directly affects the teaching effects of aesthetic courses. Compulsory courses and elective constitutes constitute the framework of the two-level college aesthetic curriculum. Although there is a priority between the two and elective courses also have differences in categories and courses, they have a wide range of internal relations in knowledge and theory, and act as a coordinated whole in aesthetic education. Therefore, in the teaching process, it is necessary to play the advantages of both compulsory courses and elective courses, and pay special attention to the intrinsic links between them. The intrinsic links should be reflected in curriculum, teaching content, and the relationship between theory and practice. College aesthetic curriculum requires to be both theoretical and practical. On the setting of curriculum, compulsory courses focus on theory teaching, and elective courses focus on practical teaching. Therefore, in the teaching process we must integrate theory with practice, and learn in order to practice.

On teaching content, the well-rounded teaching method in the past should be changed to highlight "essential" and "application". The so-called "essential" is to teach the key points of basic theories, pay attention to important and difficult points in accordance with the nature of the courses and actual situation of the students. As per the purpose of teaching, we should classify the teaching contents into three levels: must master, emphasized understanding and general understanding. The so-called "application" refers to the combination of learning and application, emphasizing the practice under theoretical guidance. In order to closely combine theory and practice of college aesthetic education, we must pay attention to three combinations: Firstly, as mentioned above, pay attention to the combination of required courses and elective courses; the second is the combination of internal theory and aesthetic practice; the third is the combination of aesthetic teaching, arts festivals, cultural festivals, student associations and other aesthetic activities.

## 2.3 Teaching Methods

In to be effective, college aesthetic education must adopt a teaching method which is in line with the characteristics of aesthetic education, can stimulate students' aesthetic emotion, and can mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative. The teaching method should be free, pleasant and lively.

### 2.3.1 Aesthetic Education Is Characterized by Freedom

Hegel once said: "Liberation is one of the natures of aesthetics." The purpose of aesthetic education is to create a man of comprehensive development, namely, a free man; the teaching means and ways should also be free. Therefore, aesthetic teaching cannot be indoctrination like politics and morality, but should adopt more open teaching methods. For example, in addition to teachers' lecturing, discussion, debate, dialogue, questioning can also be used to arouse students' interest in aesthetic course. They will change from being forced to learn to learn consciously. Thus, teaching and learning will reach a consensus based on democratic teaching, teachers will take the initiative to teach, students will learn flexibly, classroom atmosphere will be active and good teaching results can be achieved. Teaching practices show that, solely relying on aesthetic courses to achieve such results is not easy, which not only requires to overcome students' dependency formed by the long-term exam-oriented education, but also requires to create inspirations. Such a teaching method has certain difficulty, but it will get some harvest if we continue to explore.

### 2.3.2 Aesthetic Education Should Pay Attention to Stimulate Students' Emotions

Cai Yuanpei said, "Aesthetics adjoins to emotion", and "its purpose is to cultivate people's sentiments." Aesthetic education is characterized by touching and impressing people with beauty. We cannot take aesthetic education as a tool of moralization, and cannot rely on indoctrination to implement aesthetic education. It is a self-motivated education, and emotional appeal is the key to open the door of self-education. Therefore, teachers should not be indifferent or detached towards teaching, but should pay attention to stimulate students' aesthetic feeling. Theoretical courses should be taught plainly with lively and moving examples, and practical courses should create an immersive atmosphere, bringing students with some insights and inspirations of life. Therefore, aesthetic education should start with emotion in purpose of cultivating pure and noble sentiments and personalities.

### 2.3.3 Use Modern Teaching Methods to Improve Teaching Visualizability and Figurativeness

Aesthetic emotional activity is to stimulate students' emotions in teaching, so it is necessary to improve the aesthetic appeals; To improve the aesthetic appeals of the course, relying only on a piece of chalk or a mouth is not enough, it is necessary to increase teaching visualizability

and figurativeness. The best way is to make good use of modern teaching equipment, which can be divided into some steps: The first step is to purchase various materials related to aesthetic courses, such as slides, video, etc., and play them in teaching based on the required contents, which will achieve a certain visual and figurative effects; The second step, based on the relatively stable teaching contents and experience accumulation, taking into account the specific circumstance of each aesthetic course, we should produce multimedia teaching CD-ROMs to promote the visual and figurative teaching into a deeper level.

## 2.4 Teaching Contents

### 2.4.1 The Required Course

The required course is *College Aesthetic Education*, which is a public foundation course to carry out aesthetic education for college students. It presents the basic knowledge and principles of Marxist aesthetics, the significances, tasks and methods, etc. of aesthetic education, but these are not the purpose of this course; The ultimate goal of *College Aesthetic Education* is, through the popularization of Marxist aesthetics and its basic principles, in cooperation with other aesthetic courses, to promote the completion of aesthetic tasks of higher education.

### 2.4.2 Four and More Elective Courses

Required course is important, but it is only a foundation rather than all of aesthetic courses. We must also set different types of elective courses to complete and improve college aesthetic education. Elective courses cannot be set arbitrarily, but should be designed cautiously based on the nature of the educational institution, professional needs, teachers, equipment, and most importantly, on the needs to meet students' aesthetic and cultural qualities. In addition to the restrained elective courses of art appreciation, colleges and universities should also set optional elective courses in the fields of artistic practice, art history and art criticism, etc. Colleges and universities at different levels must pay attention to and strengthen classical art education, according to their own advantages and characteristics, develop school-based art curriculums with the national, local and regional characteristics. Elective courses can be classified into the following four categories:

The first is the category of basic theory, such as "Introduction to Aesthetic Culture", "Introduction to Literature", "Introduction to Fiction," "Introduction to Poetry", "Introduction to Music," "Introduction to Dance", "Introduction to Art", "Introduction to Calligraphy", "Introduction to Drama", "Technological Aesthetics", "Architectural Aesthetics", "Literary Aesthetics", "Life Aesthetics", "Environmental Aesthetics" and so on.

The second is the category of art history, such as "Western Aesthetic History", "History of Chinese

Literature”, “History of Foreign Literature”, “Art Histories of China and Western Countries”, “Music Histories of China and Western Countries” and so on.

The third is the category of art appreciation, such as “novel”, “poetry”, “music”, “calligraphy”, “painting”, “drama”, “film” appreciation and so on.

The fourth is the category of practical skills, such as “calligraphy”, “painting”, “photography”, “dance”, “music theory”, “vocal music”, “tea”, “theater performance” and so on.

Elective courses in college aesthetic education have a wide range of contents, and how many categories and courses to be set should be based on the specific conditions of a college. However, the number of elective aesthetic courses that students should learn must be clearly provided: In general, it is appropriate to learn 1-2 elective courses per year, and 4-6 elective courses in total. Rational and standardized elective courses are an indispensable important part of college aesthetic education, and are a supplementation and extension to compulsory curriculum and theories. The real purpose of aesthetic education is to develop students’ awareness and abilities through education of knowledge and theories, to make them gradually establish and improve a correct aesthetic standard, and to improve their abilities of perceiving, appreciating and creating beauty.

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### 3. MANAGE AESTHETIC PRACTICAL CURRICULUM

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Although aesthetic education is not a separate subject, as a comprehensive curriculum, it can achieve the purpose of cultivating people with beauty and culture only by emphasizing courses. Aesthetic practice is an important part of college aesthetic curriculum. It should be included in the teaching plan and build four modules of management, content, activity and evaluation. Among them, management is the guarantee, content is the foundation, activity is the core, and evaluation is the key. These four modules complement and connect each other, forming a whole to ensure the curriculum management of aesthetic practices.

#### 3.1 Module of Management

##### 3.1.1 Implement a Three-Level Management and Establish a Vertical Leadership System

In order to strengthen the management of aesthetic practical curriculum, our university has established a three-level leadership system composed of university leadership team, faculty leadership teams and class assessment teams. The university aesthetic curriculum leadership team is generally responsible for the development and implementation of the overall aesthetic practical programs. The faculty leadership teams are

responsible for the implementation of professional practical courses.

##### 3.1.2 Strengthen Team Building, Establish an Interlaced Institutional System

The performing carrier of aesthetic practical courses is the student organization. In order to give full play to the role of student organization in implementing aesthetic practical curriculum, the university has established and improved the university and faculty student associations to strengthen the construction of student cadre team, fully mobilized the enthusiasm and initiative of department (faculty) clubs and student associations, encouraged departments (faculties) to explore a mode of club construction with their own characteristics.

##### 3.1.3 Achieve Institutional Management, Establish Scientific Regulations

The development of a scientific *Management Measures of Aesthetic Activity Curriculums* plays a crucial role in regulating activity curriculums. The measures should clearly define the setting, forms and contents of activity curriculums, requirements and evaluation on instructors, implementation and management of activities. It should start with a single course and extend to the construction of a series of activity courses, forming a rule-based management system for activity curriculums.

#### 3.2 Module of Content

Aesthetic activity curriculum system is composed of two modules: “comprehensive” module and “traditional” module, which constitutes a whole to achieve the training objectives of the university. The modules designed by the university are not the all content of students’ aesthetic activities, but are the basic requirement that every student needs to achieve in accordance with the university’s cultivation objective.

(a) The module of comprehensive activity curriculum has been designed in accordance with the contents of music, art, dance, drama, opera, film and other art courses, and can be classified into the module of compulsory courses and module of elective courses. The module of compulsory courses consist of college aesthetic courses which every student must attend; the module of elective courses consist of activity courses emphasizing practical skills, such as art appreciation, dance, chorus, calligraphy, painting, opera, drama and performance, etc.. Students can select to learn at least four courses according to their own interests.

(b) The module of traditional activity curriculum has been designed based on different nationalities and different regions, which include traditional Chinese cultural courses closely linked to students’ real lives. Students can select to learn according to their own interests. The traditional activities of nations and regions are able to remain and inherit through students’ continual participation.

### 3.3 Module of Teaching

#### 3.3.1 Systematic Guidance

In order to strengthen the guidance of aesthetic practical courses, our university has established a lateral guiding system composed of “university steering committee - university student club association”, “faculty steering committee - faculty student club association” and “instructor - student club”. The university steering committee should guide, inspect and manage the work of the university student club association, help it solve problems encountered in the work, and ensure its healthy development. The faculty steering committees should instruct the faculty student club associations to carry out curriculum management, inspect and supervise whether the work is implemented in an orderly manner. Instructors should directly guide the work of student clubs.

#### 3.3.2 Networked Teaching

In order to improve teaching efficiency, make up for limited space, lack of time and single form, etc., the university has fully played the role of computer management system to realize online course selection, online learning, online evaluation, performance record and other functions. Through the establishment of the key course website, our university has achieved independent learning, collaborative learning, mutual discussion, explorative learning and other teaching activities of interactive modes.

#### 3.3.3 Credit System of Management

The introduction of credit system has realized the scientific management of aesthetic activities, solved the problem in evaluating the quantity and quality of students' participation in activities. The university has set clear activity purposes, plans, forms and evaluation methods in accordance with the characteristics of aesthetic activity courses. Students are able to acquire corresponding credits when participate in aesthetic practical courses and pass the exams. The university has clearly stated that every undergraduate must complete 6 credits, including 4 credits of comprehensive activity courses (2 for required activity course, and 2 for elective activity courses), and 2 credits of traditional activity courses.

#### 3.3.4 Module of Evaluation

Aesthetic practical curriculum has established a diversified system to evaluate activity effects, which not only meet

the needs of students' personality development, but also meet the needs of the development of modern higher education. The evaluation methods of aesthetic activities should be diversified, such as certificate management and evaluation of conformity, etc. carried out by student clubs or classes. Credit should be identified and recorded every semester, and be put into student file according to the status of “pass” or “fail”; the effectiveness of guidance should be linked with instructor's workload, and serve as an evaluation to the instructor; The university should include the faculties' implementation of aesthetic activity courses into the objective assessment of their student work. Evaluations from different subjects and different perspectives will be more beneficial to provide a wealth of information on evaluation, and beneficiary to the progress of the evaluated people and effective implementation of curriculums. Students' evaluation on aesthetic activities can help improve the contents and forms of activity curriculums and promote effectiveness; Students' evaluation on teachers can help benefit teaching and learning. Therefore, the evaluation of activity curriculums should not only focus on results, but also pay attention to process, which can give full play to orient diagnosis, feedback stimulus, development, management and other evaluation functions, achieve people first, and promote the overall improvement of students' qualities.

The exploration of the curriculum management mode of aesthetic activities has drawn a high attention from the state, and has become an important manifestation of the running characteristics of colleges. The construction of curriculum management of aesthetic activities is conducive to developing students' aesthetic and humanistic qualities, improving the comprehensive qualities of college students, and promoting the training of high-quality skilled personnel. Curriculum of aesthetic activities can play a leading role and serve as a representative of the typical, characteristic and personalized construction of college curriculum system.

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