

# *University-Museum Cooperation on Aesthetic Education from the Perspective of Chinese Culture*

Ying Zhou<sup>1,a</sup>, Chunxiao Li<sup>1,b\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Shanghai University of Engineering Science, Shanghai, China

<sup>a</sup>zhyhere@126.com; <sup>b</sup>13661658668@139.com

\*Corresponding author e-mail: 13661658668@139.com

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**Abstract:** The idea of aesthetic education has long been present in pedagogical theories as an essential role in shaping the mind and character of the individual. Higher education in China is facing challenges in building students' aesthetic values with cultural self-confidence under the impact of multiculturalism and cyberculture. The purpose of this paper is to explore the mode of aesthetic education based on university-museum collaboration. Through analyzing the functions of aesthetic education of museums from a Chinese cultural perspective and the challenges universities facing in aesthetic education, it proposes that aesthetic education should take mainstream Chinese culture and traditional culture as the core, incorporate resources from museums and other cultural institutions on the basis of university-museum cooperation to build a shared platform and construct an aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics.

## 1. Introduction

Plato regarded aesthetic education as an indispensable composite part of the upbringing or education of the free man; Schiller says that it is possible to realize pedagogical goals only through aesthetic education and emphasizes the educational functions of the aesthetic in art, which enrich man, cultivate him and develop within him a sense of genuine humanity. University students are at a stage of growing mature and building their spiritual world. Colleges and universities have taken on the task of aesthetic education for university students, aiming to nurture their firm will and great ideals, and develop their ability to learn truth, goodness and beauty.

However, aesthetic education is not only the responsibility of universities. The pioneer Chinese educator Cai Yuanpei pointed out that education does not lie exclusively in schools, and that aesthetic education in society should begin with specialized institutions including art museums, art exhibitions and history museums, etc. The aesthetic education function of museums has become an

important force in modern society besides school education, and has a positive impact on the aesthetic education for university students. It is of great significance to study how to integrate museum education into university aesthetic education, so that university-museum cooperation can be carried out to build a shared platform for aesthetic education, and help students build aesthetic values with cultural self-confidence.

## **2. The Function of Aesthetic Education of Museums from the Perspective of Chinese Cultural**

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. Traditional culture is the embodiment of the material and spiritual wealth created by a nation over a long period of social practice, and the source of regeneration for all higher civilisations. Chinese traditional culture is the wealth accumulated by the nation for thousands of years. Even nowadays, the eastern civilisation with Chinese traditional culture at its core still has a unique value and charm in the world. During China's long history of humanistic education, aesthetic education played a critical role. In the Zhou Dynasty of China, there were six classical arts (rites, music, archery, riding, calligraphy and mathematics) in the education system. From the ancient education of "six arts", to painting, sculpture, literary works, architecture, and art crafts in different eras, the ideas of aesthetic education in traditional Chinese culture are ubiquitous and can be a source of excellent materials for aesthetic education.

Aesthetic education is an important function of museums. Since the Louvre Museum opened to the public at the end of the 18th century, western countries have attached great importance to the unique role of museums in social aesthetic education. Since the founding of the country, China has ushered in a period of great development of museums. Especially in the past three decades, the educational function of museums has been gradually emphasized, becoming an important classroom for student and adult education and playing a great role in public education. Based on the embodiment of its cultural essence, museums have a unique way of aesthetic presentation that allows direct contact to be established between visitors and the objects, attracting and educating people with its aesthetic connotation and pleasing form. Therefore, the educational function of museums is not equal to the traditional theoretical education in class, but with art appreciation and aesthetic experience.

From the perspective of Chinese culture, collections of museums promote traditional Chinese culture, and show the long and profound history of the entire nation to the world, which can further help the people build up cultural confidence. The museum can also play a role of traditional culture training base for higher education in art and design. It provides archives and documentary support for relevant teaching, research and creation, and is dedicated to cultivating students' vision of traditional culture, knowledge system of creation and craftsman spirit. As a complement to school education, it integrates artistic creation and design practice.

In an age of information, when multiple cultures collide, aesthetic education in China should guide university students to adhere to their own excellent traditional culture and advanced contemporary culture, and bring students correct understanding of the collision and blending of cultures from all over the world. Thus, students will be able to better develop the traditional Chinese culture by giving full play of its unique advantages. From the perspective of Chinese culture, museums has a rather significant role to play in promoting aesthetic education in universities.

## **3. The Current State and Challenges of Aesthetic Education in Universities**

The era of globalization and informationization has completely changed people's life style, providing unlimited possibilities for the aesthetic pursuit of students. However, many undesirable values in consuming culture have also led to the disorder of aesthetic values and the lack of

aesthetic standards among college students. Under the impact of cultural collision, many college students also lack of cultural self-confidence. As the majority users of Internet, college students are deeply influenced by the aesthetic experience and aesthetic values brought by the cyberculture. Aesthetic education in higher education is facing an unprecedented challenge.

Although aesthetic education in schools has achieved a fast development in the last decade, generally it is still a weak part in the whole education cause. It is urgent to deepen the reform in order to build a sound system of aesthetic education in colleges and universities and realize the education value of laying stress on the all-round development of students. The current situation and challenges of aesthetic education in colleges and universities are as follows.

### **3.1 More Importance to Be Given in Aesthetic Education and Learning**

Traditionally, most colleges and universities focus on knowledge-oriented education, and the education objectives are still based on students' professional knowledge and skills. Aesthetic education in the development of students' all-around quality is not given the importance it deserves. Students therefore have little ideas of improving their aesthetic literacy, putting more effort on courses to learn specialized skills. In terms of the overall education environment, the status of aesthetic education needs to be improved.

In addition, there has been insufficient investment in relevant venues, necessary facilities and equipment for teaching and practical activities. Universities should integrate aesthetic education into specialized education and create a good aesthetic atmosphere on campus, both in terms of software and hardware, to ensure the smooth development of aesthetic education.

### **3.2 Curriculum Credit System to Be Innovated**

Aesthetic education has not been carried out for long in China. Take Peking University and Tsinghua University as example, which are the representatives of higher education institutions in China. Peking University has basically followed Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought. Although aesthetic education courses account for a small proportion of the curriculum, it has been given attention to a certain degree. And as a compulsory part of the general elective curriculum, it provides aesthetic education for all the undergraduates. In contrast, the aesthetic education courses at Tsinghua University are entirely optional. At present, the cases of most universities are similar to that of Tsinghua University. In recent years, many universities have begun to actively develop elective modules for aesthetic courses and encourage students to attend, but haven't improved a lot due to the lack of relevant mechanisms. Some art major courses will integrate practical session such as museum visits in their required specialized courses, but other majors usually only offer elective courses without the requirement of compulsory credits. Universities should promote the practice of Peking University in the curriculum of aesthetic education and innovate the credit system by setting compulsory credits in elective courses to greatly improve the popularity of aesthetic education courses.

### **3.3 Aesthetic Teaching Mode to Be Diversified**

The courses of aesthetic education offered in colleges and universities are generally not of high quality and large quantity. Some of the courses are based on obscure aesthetic theories, which are too specialized, and students just take notes without any effective improvement in their aesthetic awareness and ability. The venue for the courses is limited to the classroom, and the only teaching

aids that can be used are multimedia presentations of pictures and videos. Some universities have their own galleries or museums, but haven't made full use of the resources for aesthetic education.

The improvement of aesthetic literacy and ability is different from the learning of knowledge or skills. If students lack immersive experience of appreciation and creation, it is difficult to fully develop their aesthetic ability. And only through aesthetic education combined with aesthetic practice can aesthetic creativity be improved.

### **3.4 Specific Qualified Teaching Force to Be Developed**

Most universities don't have enough specific qualified teaching force necessary for aesthetic education courses. In those colleges that do offer aesthetic education courses, the teachers have varying levels of aesthetic ability. Most teachers of aesthetic education are mainly teachers of art or humanities courses, and some of them may take aesthetic classes in order to make up teaching hours. Some universities offer general elective courses related to aesthetic education for the whole university, but the number of attending students is limited due to the campus space and the teachers offering the courses. The aesthetic education requires teachers with aesthetic literacy who can build their own aesthetic standards in combination with practice on the basis of theoretical knowledge.

## **4. Exploring the University-Museum Cooperative Mode of Aesthetic Education**

Facing the current challenges of university aesthetic education, there is an urgent need to deepen the reform of aesthetic education. College aesthetic education should be complemented by social aesthetic education. In China, the educational function of domestic museums has already been integrated into people's life and become a social education system from preschool children to adults. And they do play a role in college aesthetic education, but it's not systematic on the whole. Therefore, it is of positive significance to enhance university-museum cooperation, diversify the college aesthetic education mode, and carrying forward the spirit of Chinese culture as well.

### **4.1 Extending the Classroom to Museums, Expanding the Space for Aesthetic Education**

Museum education, different from school education, has the advantages of being diverse, immersive, flexible and interactive. Aesthetic education in museums is not only about moving the courses from the classroom to the museum, but also about changing the mode of learning. Students learn theoretically in the classroom, while on-site museum teaching allows them to experience the charm and value of folk culture and artworks visually and physically. Through the immersive experience of historical and cultural environment, students will shift their focus of study from books to real objects, which will make the excellent Chinese traditional culture close to their daily lives and rooted in their mind so as to better establish its core position in their aesthetic literacy.

The course of "Chinese Culture" at the City University of Hong Kong advocates experiential learning and takes students on cultural and artistic field trips, giving them the opportunity to experience the relationship between Chinese culture and real life. Tsinghua University's National Excellence Course "Cultural Relics and Cultural China" by Professor Peng Lin organizes field trips to Chinese History Museum to give students a first-hand experience of the profound cultural heritage and great national spirit of the Chinese people. In addition to incorporating field trips into the curriculum, colleges and universities can arrange a week of hands-on aesthetic activities like crafts making or skills learning in museums to provide further in-depth learning opportunities for art-related majors or students interested in aesthetic education.

Colleges and universities should also make good use of the art museums of their own on campus to support aesthetic education. Harvard University has 17 museums, each serving a discipline, and specialized courses in that discipline take place in these museums in a variety of interesting ways. The museums are obligated to make appropriate arrangements for the courses like the exhibits to present and the opening schedule. Domestic universities should learn from good international practices and make full use of the college museums for their unique strengths in aesthetic education.

#### **4.2 Inviting Museums to Campus, Diversifying the Teaching Mode**

Colleges and universities can incorporate museums into the education system, integrates museum resources, and creates a diversified teaching model of aesthetic education. One of the most popular programs of the Metropolitan Museum of Art - “The Met Goes to School”, is about sending museum professionals to campus to teach art by offering courses, lectures, artist workshops, etc. Domestic colleges and universities can set up series of museum-based practical sessions or lectures in the aesthetic education curriculum, in which museum professionals bring relevant resources and lead students to take on autonomous learning and researching from the perspective of researchers. Students can deepen their understanding of Chinese history by learning the stories behind cultural relics from the perspective of professionals, and consider the preservation and inheritance of traditional arts from the perspective of researchers. After class, professionals and artists are invited to hold workshops where students can listen to the thoughts of experts, express their opinions in discussions, and learn to understand art from different angles by active thinking.

#### **4.3 Building a Collaborative and Innovative Aesthetic Education Mechanism**

University-museum cooperation will build a shared platform for aesthetic education not only in the diversified teaching mode and the extension of classroom space, but also in the integration of museum resources to build a collaborative and innovative aesthetic education mechanism. With the development of China's museums, some provide short-term internship and part-time positions for undergraduates and postgraduates, and recruit student volunteers. These are all ways for college students to explore deeply in aesthetic learning. Students majoring in art can also give full play to their professional strengths, improve their social practice skills, and also contribute to the social aesthetic education of museums.

Museums provide excellent Chinese cultural and artistic resources to college students, and universities can encourage students to participate in the development or promotion of cultural and creative products by attending design competitions or college students' innovation projects etc., so as to have a deeper understanding of cultural connotations and carry forward the spirit of innovation. On the other hand, it is also an effective way to realize the creative development of Chinese traditional art and culture.

#### **4.4 Specific Teacher Training for Aesthetic Education**

Faced with the shortage of highly qualified aesthetic teachers, museum resources can be used to provide online and offline teacher training. The Yorkshire Sculpture Park in the United Kingdom cooperate with schools in aesthetic education, providing tailor-made aesthetic training courses and training programs for school art teachers, according to the needs of the curriculum every semester. A series of training courses help teachers develop creative teaching ideas and how to use sculpture park resources for teaching. The Cosmic Science Center in Bremen, Germany, has established a project team consisting of university course design experts and museum staff to create a program for

instructors to teach with museum resources. A number of museums in China also have sections on their websites to provide learning resources for the public; the services can be further developed for school education and teaching training, such as providing lesson plans, interactive projects and so on. Drawing on the international experience, Chinese universities can work collaboratively on the training of highly qualified aesthetic educators, and develop diversified cooperative mode to establish a good aesthetic education system for the educators and the educated.

## 5. Summary

The core of aesthetic education is to nurture the mind with the beauty of art, which is a long and gentle influence like breeze and rain in spring. Aesthetic education for colleges students should make full use of social resources, actively explore diversified modes of interaction and sharing with museums and other cultural institutions, and carry out practice for the aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics. The education mechanism incorporating university-museum cooperation will have a long-term and positive impact on the aesthetic education of college students as well as the social aesthetic education for the public, and will be more conducive to the inheritance and promotion of the Chinese aesthetic spirit.

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