

# *The connotation and philosophical thinking of aesthetic education*

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**Keywords:** Aesthetic Education; Emotion; Aesthetic Subject; Aesthetic Object; Aestheticism

**Abstract:** Aesthetic education is an important part of promoting the all-round development of people. Different from other four kinds of education, the mechanism of aesthetic education is based on emotion as a link, deep emotional experience, to the aesthetic subject with high taste of spiritual enjoyment, so that the aesthetic subject in the free and harmonious emotional experience, wake up to the life consciousness of beauty. Aesthetic education pays attention to the subjectivity of aesthetics, aims to stimulate the essential power of individuals, and has specific requirements for the presentation of emotion and the expression of form and content of aesthetic objects. Aesthetic education aims to cultivate the integrity of personality by enhancing students' aesthetic sensibility.

## 1. Introduction

Aesthetic education can not only enhance the moral sentiment of college students, inspire the true and the good, improve the aesthetic taste, but also promote the sound personality of students, arouse the beautiful life feeling, promote the harmony of body and mind and the growth of life. Aesthetic education is an important part of the five education, which plays a vital role in the emotional development, personality shaping and life growth. This paper uses the multi-dimensional perspectives of aesthetic education, aesthetics and philosophy to explore the connotation and the rational way of constructing the content of aesthetic education in colleges and universities, in order to give full play to the educational function of aesthetic education in colleges and universities.

## 2. Aesthetic education awakens the subject's life consciousness towards beauty by stimulating the individual's rich emotions.

Emotion is the basis for aesthetic education to develop the mechanism of educating people. Aesthetic education takes human sensibility as the starting point, takes emotion as the bridge, and achieves the meaning of cultivating individuals through the deep emotional experience of individuals. Aesthetic education uses aesthetic objects to trigger individual emotional resonance, stimulate individual rich emotions, and make individuals and aesthetic objects related. In this process, middle school students reach a common feeling through profound emotional experience and aesthetic objects, and complete the improvement of their spiritual realm and the growth of emotional life. Therefore, the development of the mechanism of aesthetic education is not to bind

students by lectures or systems with the help of external forces, but with the deepening of emotional experience, individuals can feel the pleasure and harmonious aesthetic experience brought by aesthetic objects in aesthetic perception, aesthetic imagination and aesthetic association, naturally generate beautiful emotions, obtain spiritual perception, and thus enhance their personal spiritual realm. Open a broader individual aesthetic space.

## **2.1 The emotional experience of aesthetic education points to freedom**

First of all, aesthetics can bring people free emotional experience. In his systematic demonstration of the analysis of aesthetic judgment, Kant proposed that "the pleasure of appreciating judgment has nothing at stake" <sup>[1]</sup>. The judgment of beauty is pure, not mixed with any interest, that is, beyond the utilitarian and selfish desire. In this pure aesthetic experience, "the subject achieves disinterested, harmonious freedom and pleasure" <sup>[2]</sup><sup>27</sup>. In the free and pure emotional experience, the subject is integrated with the aesthetic object, and gets rid of the bondage of material and desire. At this time, the emotional experience of aesthetic education develops the individual to pay attention to himself and personality, and moves towards a free and broad individual consciousness space, thus awakening the subject's non-utilitarian and pure life consciousness toward beauty. It is this free environment, free from material and selfish desires, that makes people relaxed and free in spirit. The subject can associate and imagine in the free aesthetic situation, experience the meaning of life in the vast space, and express the aesthetic perception freely and independently. The free emotional experience further stimulates the aesthetic creativity of the subject, and the perfect unity of aesthetic and creative beauty is realized in this process. The value of aesthetic education has also been realized.

## **2.2 The emotional experience of aesthetic education points to harmony**

The aesthetic process can make people's body and mind develop harmoniously, so that the essence of the individual can be harmonious. "Man cannot, as a pure natural man, dominate principles by feeling and become a savage, nor can he, as a pure rational man, destroy emotions by principle and become a savage." <sup>[3]</sup><sup>40</sup> Under the influence of Kant's aesthetic thought, Schiller proposed "aesthetic education" for the first time under the historical background of the split of human nature caused by the rapid development of industry and the advocating of industrial technology and rationality during the bourgeois revolution, which was a historical transformation of the previous aesthetic thought. He believed that the transition between sensibility and rationality should be carried out by aesthetic appreciation, and beauty could enable individuals to achieve the harmonious unity of sensibility and rationality. Aesthetics can make people's personality complete, achieve the essential harmony of individuals, and also make the country and individuals reach the harmony and unity, which provides guidance for the current exploration of aesthetic education to play the role of educating people. Aesthetic education promotes the harmonious development of people's body and mind, which is mainly reflected in the unity of sensibility and reason. It requires both emotional participation and internal reason that reveals universality and regularity. Only by the harmonious and unified aesthetic emotion can students' spirit and life grow together. At the same time, the freedom brought by aesthetic experience is built on the basis of emotional harmony. Aesthetic education promotes physical and mental harmony. This harmony is also reflected that the free aesthetic experience brought by aesthetic education is based on emotional harmony. The free aesthetic experience is not unlimited self-play and unrestrained venting. But in the unity of truth, kindness and beauty to carry on the emotional experience, realize the aesthetic object of the true and sincere, realize the beauty of the good and selfless love to bring people, let the emotional experience of truth, kindness and beauty run through the body and mind, purify the mind, water the emotional

life, and make the individual rise from the inside out to the pure and beautiful life consciousness.

### **3. Aesthetic education pays attention to aesthetic subjectivity, aiming at stimulating the essential power of aesthetic subject.**

From the function of aesthetic education, it aims to cultivate the beauty of human nature, cultivate the growth of students' emotional life, open people's life consciousness to beauty, and cast the national gene of beauty. Therefore, the focus of aesthetic education activities is to stimulate the power of people toward beauty, and the core is people. From the perspective of the production of aesthetic feeling, people use their wisdom and power in the process of labor practice to achieve results in the objective world, achieve the harmonious freedom of subject and object, practice satisfies the desire and demand of the subject, and triggers the spiritual pleasure of freedom, thus people produce aesthetic feeling. From the perspective of the law of beauty, Fanren Zeng quoted Marx's "internal scale" mentioned in the 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscript to elaborate the law of beauty, "the" internal scale "refers to the desire, interest and purpose of the subject in labor practice. The harmonious and free unity of subject and object formed through labor practice and resulting in human emotional pleasure is the "law of beauty" <sup>[4]55</sup>. From the point of view of the production of the value of beauty, "beauty is not some special natural law or natural attribute that has existed since ancient times before the emergence of human beings." Only when natural attributes or laws are recognized, controlled and utilized by human beings through human social practice, and become the affirmation and objectification of human freedom, can they produce beautiful meaning and have beautiful value for human beings. <sup>[5]32</sup> Based on the above explanation of aesthetic feeling, the law of beauty and the generation of beauty, we can clearly see the important significance of human in aesthetic activities, and human is the core and foundation of aesthetic activities. Therefore, the implementation of aesthetic education should grasp two points, one is to give full play to the subjective initiative in social practice to transform the objective world, and people take the initiative to change the world in social practice. Therefore, aesthetic education should pay attention to aesthetic subjectivity, stimulate students' subjective consciousness of beauty and inner life consciousness, and mobilize students' subjective initiative. Only when students take the initiative to accept and resonate with aesthetic objects, find beauty and tend to beauty, can the teaching goal of aesthetic education be realized. Second, the subject's wishes, interests and purposes are realized in the object world, and people see that they have the power to dominate the objective world and "find their essential power in the object world" <sup>[6]24</sup>. Therefore, aesthetic education should stimulate the essential power of the aesthetic subject, let the subject discover the power and wisdom of transforming the objective world and creating beauty in the aesthetic activities, and form aesthetic judgment independently under the influence of aesthetic experience and emotion, so as to promote the development of students' personality and the cultivation of creativity.

### **4. Aesthetic education takes aesthetic object as the medium to realize the value of educating people.**

Aesthetic object is the medium of aesthetic education teaching and plays a key role in the whole teaching activity. The aesthetic object must be beautiful and can reflect the essence of beauty, so as to have a positive educational effect on the aesthetic subject. So, what kind of aesthetic object can embody the essence of beauty?

#### **4.1 The aesthetic object is the harmonious unity of the form and content of beauty**

Schiller uses "living image" to explain how to produce beauty, "he is only a living image when

his form is alive in our sense, and his life takes form in our understanding" <sup>[3]127</sup>, the production of beauty lies in the mutual unity of form and content. Truth must be reflected through concrete and sensible images with external forms, and the production of beauty depends not only on content, but also on living images, which must have both form and content of beauty. Schiller explained the connotation of "beauty" through the unification of form and content, which inspired the definition of the aesthetic object of aesthetic education. Confucius once put forward the aesthetic ideal of "perfection", which has something in common with Schiller's elaboration of "unity of form and content", that is, it is clear that the object of beauty must have the unity of form and content to produce aesthetic feeling. The difference is that the proposition of "perfection" further indicates the characteristics of the form and content of the aesthetic object, that is, "the unity of beauty and goodness". "' Beauty 'refers to the external form that can cause mental and emotional pleasure" <sup>[7]62</sup>, and ' goodness 'refers to the humanistic moral connotation with moral cultivation as the core. This provides the direction and thinking for the theoretical construction of characteristic aesthetic education in colleges and universities. Based on the above analysis, from a formal point of view, the aesthetic object induces the subject's strong feelings through the aesthetic appearance, color, sound and other perceptual external images, so that the aesthetic subject can obtain the enjoyment of beauty as well as emotional and spiritual pleasure. In terms of content, the aesthetic object should carry the profound humanistic education content, and the moral and ethical connotation expressed by it should have a certain nurturing effect on the realization of moral cultivation, personality improvement, and personal moral cultivation and spiritual realm. The content of aesthetic objects should be based on the construction of individual aesthetic quality and moral cultivation, and fill the inner world of the subject and perfect the personality through profound humanistic connotations, so as to realize the shaping of individual personality, the construction of the spiritual world and the all-round development and growth of human life. Therefore, the aesthetic object should be the harmonious unity of the external form and the content of beauty.

#### **4.2 The aesthetic object should have the emotional expression of truth, kindness and beauty, and present the harmonious unity of emotion and reason**

As the intermediary of aesthetic education teaching, aesthetic objects play an important role in stimulating the emotions of aesthetic subjects. Therefore, in the process of emotional interaction between aesthetic subjects and objects, the inner meaning of aesthetic objects should be able to highlight the beauty of human nature and have the emotional expression of truth, kindness and beauty, which is also the essential requirement of aesthetic education in colleges and universities. The truth, goodness and beauty of aesthetic objects are first reflected in the harmonious unity of emotion and reason. The educational function of aesthetic objects mainly internalizes ethics and morality through its perceptual image to stimulate the inner emotions of aesthetic subjects to be good and beautiful. This process is to transform the external "reason" into the internal "emotion". The emotion expression of the aesthetic object should be in the reason, not extreme, not cathartic, the balance and harmony between the emotion and the reason, and moderate is the basis of the aesthetic object to promote the aesthetic subject to the good and the beauty to realize the positive educational significance. Secondly, the aesthetic activity is to bring the aesthetic subject a positive aesthetic emotional experience, the aesthetic object should have to convey to the aesthetic subject noble and pure, benevolence and sincerity of the value concept, that is, to convey the concept of "good", so that the subject's inner enrichment, the formation of conscious personality strength. Thirdly, aesthetic objects should be able to express the "truth" of emotions. "Chinese aesthetics has always believed that real art is the true and unfalse expression of good emotions concentrated in individual personality" <sup>[5]47</sup>. The "truth" of emotion can directly touch the sense and perception of

the aesthetic subject, go straight to the heart, through the body and mind, so as to purify the soul, enrich the emotion, and arouse the pure and flawless life consciousness of the subject to the United States with the truth. Therefore, the "truth, goodness and beauty" of aesthetic objects are interpenetrating and intermerging, and the aesthetic education and educational significance of aesthetic subject emotion, soul, personality and spiritual civilization construction is thus realized.

## **5. Create the vast space aesthetic education content, form the beautiful life attitude**

From the perspective of space concept, aesthetic education is not limited to campus and classroom. It is necessary to break through the limitation of space, realize the diversification of aesthetic education field, capture the aesthetic education elements in nature and life, and create a broader aesthetic education space. The beautiful life attitude means respecting nature, loving life, affirming self-value and the beauty of life. Therefore, college teaching workers should break down the space barrier, let the students walk into the dynamic, real and open environment, fully feel the beauty of nature and life, let the teaching content have life form, let the students realize the interaction between the subject and object in the real scene, open their own life consciousness, form a beautiful life attitude, and emerge to the beautiful mental state.

The first is to introduce the cultural landscape with regional characteristics, which has a strong historical and cultural atmosphere, regional characteristics, and high aesthetic value, which has positive significance for students to understand the cultural customs, history and culture in the location of universities, and is an indispensable resource for aesthetic education teaching. Human landscape is the crystallization of human labor practice and creation, is the object of condensed human subject power, not only contains the beauty of traditional skills, but also its unique beauty of form, and transmits profound humanistic connotation, philosophical thoughts and ecological aesthetic wisdom to the aesthetic subject. For example, Leshan Giant Buddha and the surrounding natural environment together form the overall landscape, and the borrowed scenery of Suzhou gardens, etc. The ancient Chinese cultural landscape not only gives people beautiful visual enjoyment, but also reflects the philosophical thought and ecological view of harmony and unity between man and nature. Art originates from nature, but also beyond nature, the subject gives full play to creativity, takes advantage of the spiritual beauty of nature, collects the essence of all things, blends the subject with the geographical environment, and integrates the mind with the matter, thus establishing a two-way aesthetic relationship between man and nature, and constructing a magnificent and beautiful scene. In this way, the aesthetic subject perceives the beauty of the movement of heaven and earth, places himself in the aesthetic realm of the integration of things and myself, feels the beauty of humanities and arts, realizes the mutual harmony between the man and nature, realizes the value of human beings and the importance of conforming to nature, and understands the philosophical thought of "the unity of heaven and man", so as to train college students to uphold the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

Secondly, nature is the material of aesthetic education, so that students can walk into nature, train them to look at all creatures between heaven and earth with love and care, respect life, love life, and feel the beauty of life. From the 24 solar terms to the four seasons, time is like a key that opens the change of all things in nature. Ancient people explored nature from the law of the operation of heaven and time, and carried out agricultural production according to the change of seasons, which not only reflected the wisdom of ancient people, but also demonstrated their psychological characteristics of connecting individual life with the rhythm of nature and their attitude of respecting nature and advocating life. The vibrant and thriving rhythm of life is also the source of artistic creation. Students are encouraged to walk into nature, to extend the classroom to off-campus, fully mobilize students' senses, helping students observe and feel the sound of nature from the angle

of art, color, smell and shape change, feeling of different season natural phenomena as well as the transformation of all things, enrich students' aesthetic experience in the real natural environment. Students continue to think deeply about nature and life, integrate individual life with nature, and have a deeper understanding of the beauty of nature and the beauty of life, so as to establish a beautiful life attitude.

## 6. Conclusion

Aesthetic education lies in the stimulation of emotion, arousing aesthetic impulse, awakening the life consciousness of the subject to beauty, and making the individual show a vibrant life state. Aesthetic activity is not one-dimensional, but the result of the joint action of subject and object, which is established in the two-way communication between aesthetic subject and aesthetic object. Therefore, aesthetic education should stimulate the essential power of the aesthetic subject, pay attention to the harmonious unity of the form and content of the aesthetic object, the feeling and reason, so that the subject can obtain high-quality aesthetic feelings in the aesthetic activities, so as to purify the soul, enrich the spirit and shape the noble aesthetic pursuit.

## Acknowledgements

Fund project: This paper is a scientific research project of Shaanxi Provincial Department of Education, project approval number: 21JK0128, project name: Research on the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into aesthetic education in universities; 2021 Shaanxi Provincial Education Science "14th Five-Year Plan" project, project approval number: SGH21Q040, project name: "Inheritance and innovation, three integration and one collaboration" in the new era of local universities labor education system research.

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