

Development Dilemmas and Countermeasures of Educational Modes from the Perspective of the History of Aesthetic Education Development

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Abstract: Aesthetic education constitutes a core component of the comprehensive talent-cultivation system. It runs through the century-long reform process of China's education development, and the iterative upgrading of its educational modes always resonates synchronously with educational reform and social development. From the perspective of the history of aesthetic-education development, multiple practical dilemmas exist in the connection between inheritance and innovation of China's current aesthetic-education modes, which are mainly reflected in rigid talent-cultivation systems, imbalanced resource allocation, backward teaching concepts and deficient evaluation mechanisms. These problems restrict the exertion of the core function of aesthetic education in fostering virtue through education. Based on the century-long development context of aesthetic education, this paper systematically analyzes the development bottlenecks of aesthetic-education modes in the new era. Combined with the requirements for quality-oriented education reform, targeted optimization countermeasures are put forward from four dimensions: concept innovation, system construction, resource integration and evaluation improvement. It aims to promote the standardized, scientific and diversified development of aesthetic-education modes and facilitate the high-quality development of aesthetic education in the new era.

Keywords: History of aesthetic education development; Educational mode; Talent-cultivation dilemma; Aesthetic-education reform; Quality-oriented education

Online publication: October 27, 2026

1. Introduction

As an important educational form for cultivating sentiments, shaping personalities and fostering aesthetic literacy, aesthetic education serves as a key link in the talent-cultivation system integrating morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetic education and labor education. The development of aesthetic education in China has gone through four stages: modern germination, contemporary exploration, present-day improvement and innovation in the new era. It has gradually evolved from initial artistic enlightenment education into an all-staff, whole-process and all-round comprehensive talent-cultivation system. With the

accelerated process of educational modernization, traditional aesthetic-education modes can hardly adapt to talent-cultivation requirements of the new era. There is a sharp contradiction between historically accumulated shortcomings in talent cultivation and the development demands of the new era ^[1]. Reviewing the evolution rules of educational modes from the perspective of the history of aesthetic-education development, clarifying core dilemmas of current aesthetic-education talent cultivation, and constructing new-type aesthetic-education modes adapted to the development of the times are important subjects for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and promoting the implementation of quality-oriented education, which bears important theoretical value and practical significance.

2. Development dilemmas of educational modes from the perspective of the history of aesthetic education development

2.1. Inherited traditional educational concepts and hard-to-eliminate historically-formed deviations

Looking back on the century-long development of aesthetic education in China, aesthetic-education concepts have long been attached to art education and moral education, giving rise to deep-rooted cognitive deviations in talent cultivation. Such historically-formed conceptual rigidities still restrict the upgrading of aesthetic-education modes up to now. In the germination stage of modern aesthetic education, Cai Yuanpei put forward the core proposition of “substituting religion with aesthetic education”, which laid the core value of aesthetic education in nurturing the mind. Nevertheless, limited by the historical background, aesthetic education at that time only functioned as an auxiliary educational means without forming an independent talent-cultivation system. In the early days after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, aesthetic education was categorized as an affiliate of moral education and physical education. Education mainly focused on the imparting of artistic skills, emphasizing professional skill training in painting, music, dance and other fields, while neglecting the cultivation of comprehensive literacy including aesthetic perception, aesthetic judgment and aesthetic creation ^[2]. After the reform and opening-up, the independent educational status of aesthetic education was gradually established. However, long-term historical cognitive inertia has popularized the one-sided notion that “aesthetic education equals art education”. In current educational practice, most schools and parents still cling to traditional perceptions of aesthetic education, equating aesthetic education with talent training, and one-sidedly pursuing students’ artistic grade-examination results and competition achievements, while ignoring the personality-shaping function of aesthetic education through subtle influence. Judging from the evolutionary logic of the history of aesthetic-education development, the core value of aesthetic education lies in realizing people’s all-round development rather than cultivating single skills. Such historically-formed conceptual deviations keep aesthetic-education modes at a superficial talent-cultivation stage, making it hard to penetrate the whole educational process and departing from the essential original intention of aesthetic-education development.

2.2. Fragmented curriculum system and disconnection between ancient-modern inheritance

Throughout the development history of aesthetic education, the construction of China’s aesthetic-education curriculum system has always remained fragmented. Discontinuity in historical inheritance and imperfect curriculum frameworks have become core pain points for the development of educational modes. In the

modern-exploration stage of aesthetic education, China initially built the framework of art courses for primary and secondary schools, yet prominent problems such as monotonous course contents and broken connections between learning stages emerged. In the contemporary development stage of aesthetic education, course categories were gradually enriched, but no systematic and progressive talent-cultivation system was formed. Since the new era, quality-oriented-education policies have continuously promoted the reform of aesthetic-education courses. However, problems including insufficient historical accumulation and incomplete iterative optimization of the curriculum system have not been fundamentally resolved. At present, aesthetic-education courses in schools at all levels are generally fragmented. Contents of aesthetic-education courses in primary schools, middle schools and universities overlap without progressive gradients. Basic aesthetic enlightenment is insufficient in lower grades, while advanced aesthetic cultivation is absent in higher grades. Progressive talent-cultivation chains cannot be formed across learning stages. The interdisciplinary integration of aesthetic education is inadequate. It has long been confined within art disciplines, and its integration with Chinese language, history, science, moral education and other disciplines remains formalistic, failing to build all-round aesthetic-education scenarios ^[3]. Fragmentation and inheritance discontinuity of the curriculum system render aesthetic-education modes unsystematic and incoherent, which prevents the progressive upgrading from knowledge imparting to literacy cultivation and severely undermines the actual effects of aesthetic-education talent cultivation.

2.3. Imbalanced allocation of teachers and resources and persistently solidified regional development gaps

From the perspective of aesthetic-education history, teacher shortages and uneven resources are fundamental problems running through the whole process of aesthetic-education development. They have not been thoroughly solved despite years of reform and constitute key bottlenecks restricting the optimization of aesthetic-education modes. In the early stage of aesthetic-education development, China suffered an extreme shortage of professional aesthetic-education teachers. Teachers from other disciplines taught most aesthetic-education courses with insufficient professional teaching capabilities. With the development of education, the contingent of professional aesthetic-education teachers has gradually expanded, yet structural imbalance has become increasingly prominent. At present, the allocation of aesthetic-education teachers shows obvious gaps among urban and rural areas, different regions, and various schools. First-tier cities and key schools are equipped with sufficient and professionally competent aesthetic-education teachers, while county-level and township schools generally face large vacancies of aesthetic-education teachers, a high proportion of part-time teachers, and high teacher mobility. Most aesthetic-education teachers in remote areas have not received systematic professional training for aesthetic education. They can only finish basic classroom teaching and are incapable of conducting high-level teaching activities such as aesthetic guidance, artistic creation and aesthetic-education practice ^[4]. Imbalanced allocation of educational resources is equally prominent. Throughout the century-long development of aesthetic education, high-quality aesthetic-education resources have long tilted toward key urban schools. Rural schools are seriously short of aesthetic-education equipment, teaching venues and practical platforms, with inadequate infrastructure such as painting-calligraphy tools, musical instruments and art exhibition halls, which cannot support regular aesthetic-education teaching. Meanwhile, the construction of digital aesthetic-education resources lags. The coverage rate of high-quality online aesthetic-education courses and virtual practical resources is low, and mechanisms for regional resource sharing are imperfect.

3. Countermeasures for the development of educational modes from the perspective of the history of aesthetic education development

3.1. Innovate aesthetic-education concepts and eliminate historically-formed cognitive deviations

Based on historical experience accumulated in the century-long development of aesthetic education, the primary task for breaking development dilemmas of educational modes is to innovate traditional talent-cultivation concepts, remove historically-inherited cognitive deviations and return to the essential talent-cultivation value of aesthetic education. Deviations in aesthetic-education concepts since modern times essentially stem from cognitive limitations regarding the core connotation of aesthetic education. The reform of aesthetic education in the new era shall draw on the developmental context of aesthetic-education history, clarify the boundaries and correlations between aesthetic education, art education and moral education, and establish a modern aesthetic-education concept of “all-staff education, whole-process education and all-round education”. First of all, educational competent departments shall strengthen top-level conceptual guidance. Drawing on research achievements of aesthetic-education history, they shall define the core positioning of aesthetic education in the new era, introduce targeted policies for concept popularization and promotion, correct one-sided perceptions such as “aesthetic education equals talent training” and “aesthetic education is a minor subject”, and emphasize the core value of aesthetic education in nurturing the mind, shaping personalities and improving comprehensive literacy^[5].

Secondly, carry out regular training on aesthetic-education concepts covering school administrators, front-line teachers and parents. Sort out core ideas and talent-cultivation logics from the century-long development of aesthetic education, so that the whole society understands the indispensability of aesthetic education within the comprehensive talent-cultivation system. For teachers, organize special seminars on aesthetic-education concepts on a regular basis, guide teachers to abandon skill-oriented and formalistic teaching mindsets, establish a literacy-oriented aesthetic-education teaching philosophy, and focus on the all-round cultivation of students’ aesthetic perception, aesthetic understanding, aesthetic creation and aesthetic sentiments. For parents, popularize the core values of aesthetic education through parent-teacher meetings, official school WeChat accounts and public-welfare lectures, guide them to get rid of utilitarian perceptions of aesthetic education, and attach importance to the long-term cultivation of children’s aesthetic literacy and spiritual character^[6]. Finally, inherit the historical development of aesthetic education, explore the essence of excellent aesthetic-education thoughts at home and abroad, integrate Cai Yuanpei’s aesthetic-education ideas and traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts with the requirements for aesthetic education in the new era, and construct aesthetic-education talent-cultivation ideas with both historical heritage and characteristics of the times, laying an ideological foundation for the optimization of educational modes.

3.2. Build a systematic curriculum system and unblock the inheritance chain of ancient-modern talent cultivation

Targeting the historical problems of fragmented curricula and inheritance discontinuity in the century-long development of aesthetic education, it is necessary to construct a progressive, systematic and integrated aesthetic-education curriculum system, realize the organic connection between traditional aesthetic-education resources and modern talent-cultivation demands, and improve the core framework of aesthetic-education modes. First, build a progressive curriculum system connecting different learning stages. Combined with students’ physical-mental development rules and aesthetic-education cognitive laws, sort out

talent-cultivation objectives of aesthetic education for primary-school, junior-high-school, senior-high-school and university stages, and construct a progressive curriculum system. The primary-school stage focuses on aesthetic enlightenment, offering courses on basic art appreciation, natural aesthetic education and traditional-culture-oriented aesthetic education to foster students' aesthetic interests. The middle-school stage focuses on improving aesthetic cognition, systematically teaching art knowledge, aesthetic principles and traditional aesthetic-education culture. The university stage emphasizes aesthetic innovation and literacy sublimation, offering general aesthetic-education courses and artistic-creation practical courses to realize whole-process implementation of aesthetic-education talent cultivation ^[7].

Second, enrich course contents and make up for shortcomings in historical inheritance. Deeply tap excellent traditional Chinese aesthetic-education resources, systematically integrate classical poetry, traditional painting-calligraphy, intangible-cultural-heritage art, traditional architectural aesthetics, folk-custom-oriented aesthetic education and other contents into the curriculum system, inherit excellent cultural genes accumulated in the century-long development of aesthetic education, and resolve the discontinuity between ancient and modern aesthetic-education inheritance. Meanwhile, appropriately absorb outstanding foreign aesthetic-education achievements and carry out localization transformation combined with local educational characteristics to form aesthetic-education course contents with both national features and contemporary characteristics. Third, promote the interdisciplinary integrated development of aesthetic education. Break disciplinary barriers, build integrated curriculum modes of "aesthetic education + moral education", "aesthetic education + Chinese language", "aesthetic education + science" and "aesthetic education + labor education", tap aesthetic-education elements contained in various disciplines, and realize in-depth integration of knowledge teaching and aesthetic cultivation ^[8]. At the same time, add aesthetic-education practical courses, carry out campus art activities, social-practice-based aesthetic education and natural-research-oriented aesthetic-education courses, make up for historical shortcomings of traditional aesthetic education that stresses theory while ignoring practice, and build an all-round and systematic aesthetic-education curriculum talent-cultivation system.

3.3. Optimize the allocation of resources and teachers and narrow regional development gaps in aesthetic education

Based on the long-standing historical pain points of uneven resources and weak teachers in aesthetic-education development, optimize the allocation of aesthetic-education resources and teachers through policy empowerment, resource integration and targeted assistance, and promote the balanced and high-quality development of aesthetic-education modes. In terms of teacher construction, build a "cultivation + training + assistance" trinity teacher-training system. Universities shall optimize talent-cultivation programs for aesthetic-education majors, expand enrollment scales of aesthetic-education majors, focus on teaching demands for grassroots aesthetic education, cultivate high-quality and professional aesthetic-education teachers, and enrich grassroots teaching teams ^[9]. Meanwhile, establish a regular on-the-job training mechanism, carry out systematic professional training for part-time aesthetic-education teachers in towns and remote areas, make up for shortcomings in professional teaching capabilities, and improve teachers' competencies in aesthetic teaching, curriculum design and practical guidance. Build a paired-assistance mechanism for urban-rural aesthetic-education teachers, organize high-quality urban aesthetic-education teachers to provide grassroots support such as supporting education, class observation, lesson evaluation and teaching-research guidance, and boost the flow and sharing of high-quality teacher resources.

In terms of resource allocation, strengthen policy inclination and capital investment, focus on making up for infrastructure shortcomings of aesthetic education in county-level and rural schools, improve hardware facilities such as art classrooms, exhibition halls, musical-instrument equipment and painting-calligraphy supplies, and guarantee regular implementation of basic aesthetic-education teaching. Keep pace with the development trend of digital education, build regional aesthetic-education resource-sharing platforms, integrate high-quality online aesthetic-education courses, teaching courseware, art resources and practical cases, realize interconnection, co-construction and sharing of urban-rural aesthetic-education resources, and resolve the historical problem of regional resource imbalance via digital means ^[10]. In addition, actively integrate social aesthetic-education resources, cooperate with social platforms such as art galleries, museums, art museums and intangible-cultural-heritage experience halls, build off-campus aesthetic-education practical bases, expand aesthetic-education teaching scenarios and enrich the supply of aesthetic-education teaching resources. Through improving on-campus resources, extending off-campus resources and empowering digital resources, comprehensively optimize the allocation of aesthetic-education resources, resolve the long-standing predicament of unbalanced aesthetic-education development, and promote the synchronous upgrading of aesthetic-education modes across various regions.

4. Conclusion

Looking back on the century-long development of aesthetic education in China, the iterative upgrading of aesthetic-education modes represents a dynamic process featuring continuous error correction, constant improvement and gradual advancement. Historically-inherited problems including rigid talent-cultivation concepts, fragmented curriculum systems, imbalanced resources and teachers, and backward evaluation mechanisms constitute core obstacles for the high-quality development of current aesthetic education. The reform of aesthetic education in the new era shall adopt the perspective of developmental history, face up to development dilemmas accumulated in history, stick to the original mission of educating people with aesthetics, comprehensively reconstruct modern aesthetic-education modes through three paths: concept innovation, curriculum optimization and resource balancing, promote the transformation of aesthetic education from “formal popularization” to “connotative quality improvement”, truly realize cultivating the mind via aesthetic education and nurturing new-generation talents through culture, and facilitate the implementation of the talent-cultivation system integrating morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetic education and labor education.

Funding

This paper is a phased achievement of the 2026 General Project of the Educational Science "15th Five-Year Plan" of Liaoning Province, China (Project No. JG26DB114).

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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