

Aesthetic Education in Chinese Schools

Subjects: Art

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Since the promulgation of the first school education regulations in the early 20th century, Chinese school aesthetic education has gone through its first century of history. Six stages of development have been formed in this century of vicissitudes, namely, the budding period, the starting period, the salvation movement period, the tortuous development period, the reconstruction period, and the modernization period of the new era. Aesthetic education in Chinese schools places a prominent place on “establishing, cultivating and clarifying morality”, emphasizes the role of “beauty” in “goodness”, and follows the aesthetic guideline of “unity of beauty and goodness”. Art education and its practical activities are the main content of school aesthetic education. The formation mechanism, laws, and characteristics of the sustainable development of school aesthetic education in China are summarized from the perspective of the century-old school aesthetic education policy, which is of theoretical guidance for the study of the future development of school aesthetic education in China.

Keywords: aesthetic education policy ; aesthetic education in schools ; century-old historical process

1. The Budding Period of Aesthetic Education in Schools

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the foreign affairs faction advocated for learning from Western capitalist countries to change China's poor and weak social status in order to revitalize the country and resist foreign invasion. In education, they abolished the imperial examination system and private schools and advocated for the educational reform of learning traditional Chinese culture as the main body and advanced Western technology as the auxiliary one. On 13 January 1904, the Qing government promulgated the first school education regulations formulated by the Qing dynasty. Among them, the games class was required “to make them happy and lively, and to cultivate the temperament of children to love the people and enjoy the group”; and the songs class required “the use of the throat and tongue to help them develop, and to make them happy as a quality of virtue”. The manual skills course was required to be “used for useful purposes and as a resource for the development of the mind and the will” ^[1]. However, these classes were only casual classes, and were not included in the required curriculum of the school. On 8 March 1907, the Statute of the Girls' Primary School and the Statute of the Girls' Normal School were promulgated to include music classes as a school curriculum, the main purpose of which is: “In order to make the study of easy and elegant music songs, where the lyrics are chosen or prepared, they must be selected for their relevance to the ethics of daily use and for the benefit of wind and education, so as to be sufficient to inspire their temperament and nurture their virtue” ^[2]. The Statute of the Women's Normal School made music a compulsory subject, prescribing monophonic and polyphonic songs and the use of musical instruments, while the elementary and middle school classes made music a casual subject, requiring the reading of ancient poems and their chanting to nourish their temperament and soothe their lungs ^[3].

Wang Guowei's idea of aesthetic education was an important contribution to the enlightenment period of aesthetic education in schools, and he was the first person to introduce “aesthetic education” to China. He believed that the purpose of education is to cultivate the complete. The human ability is divided into physical ability and mental ability, and the complete human being should achieve a state of harmony between physical and mental ability ^[4]. He believed that beauty was pure and based on disinterest, thus showing that he was influenced by Kant's aesthetic thought. He said, “The movement of the human heart is always bound to one's profit and loss, but beauty is the only thing that makes one forget one's profit and enter the domain of noble and pure, which is the purest pleasure” ^[5] (p. 56). He believed that aesthetic education, on the one hand, could develop human feelings to reach the domain of perfection; on the other hand, it was used for the cultivation of moral and intellectual education, so it was what the educated should pay attention to. In 1907, Wang Guowei said in his article “On the Materials of Primary School Singing Classes” that “the reason why elementary school offer singing classes is because singing can harmonize their emotions, cultivate their will, and practice their smart organs and vocal organs” ^[6] (p. 36). Wang believes that singing lessons have the effect of harmonizing people's emotions, cultivating their sentiments, and improving both their singing skills and their enlightenment. In order to achieve this goal, the melody of the song should be melodious and harmonious, and the lyrics should be effective in cultivating the will and

moral sentiment. Therefore, the music class in school cannot be an accessory to the body-building class, but must have its own independent status.

The years 1900–1911 belonged to the period of enlightenment of aesthetic education in Chinese schools. Chinese society was still in the stage of feudal rule, and the reform in education advocated for learning the advanced culture of the West as an aid, and the sprout of aesthetic education appeared in the school education policy. Wang Guowei was the first person in China to compare aesthetic education with moral education and intellectual education, and was also the scholar who made important contributions to aesthetic education in this period. During the Enlightenment period, the understanding of aesthetic education in school education remained at the level of “connoting virtue” and valued the edifying role of music education as one of the effective means of moral education. Therefore, the lack of a deep and comprehensive understanding of the art of music led to the inability to play the role and significance of aesthetic education as the cultivation of the “complete man” in the whole education.

2. The Initial Period of Aesthetic Education in Schools

The outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 overthrew the feudal rule of the Qing Dynasty and started a powerful ideological liberation movement for the establishment of a democratic and republican system of government. Sun Yat-sen became the Provisional President of the National Government in Nanjing, and Cai Yuanpei became the Chief of Education. In 1912, the Decree on the Purpose of Education said, “Emphasize moral education, supplemented by practical education and military national education, and complete its morality with aesthetic education” ^[7]. It was the first time aesthetic education was included as an aim of school education. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education issued the entire educational system, such as the Primary School Rules and Curriculum, the Secondary School Order, the University Order, and the Teacher Education Order, which referred to elementary school music classes as “singing” classes and secondary school music classes as “music songs” classes. In 1914, the inspectors of the Ministry of Education, based on the inspection of aesthetic education in schools, issued a consultation paper for elementary and teacher-training schools in each province, saying, “The four subjects of Chinese literature, handicrafts, drawing, and music are of the utmost importance in education and are listed as compulsory subjects in the regulations of teacher-training colleges and in the rules for the implementation of elementary and secondary schools” ^[8] (p. 15). Since then, music and other art courses have become compulsory in school education and reflect the view that school aesthetic education is centered on art education.

With the rise of the May 4 New Culture Movement, aesthetic education became increasingly important. In 1919, Wu Mengfei, Feng Zikai, and others initiated the establishment of the “Chinese Society for Aesthetic Education” in Shanghai, whose members were mainly music and art instructors in universities, secondary schools, and elementary schools. From April 1920 to April 1922, the society published seven issues of the journal “Aesthetic Education”. It published many articles on aesthetic education and music and art, which also played an active role in promoting the development of aesthetic education in schools. In 1927, when the Nationalist Government of Nanjing was established, Cai Yuanpei became the dean of the Nanjing Nationalist University to replace the Ministry of Education, and he convened famous scholars and artists such as Xiao Youmei to establish an art education committee, hoping to “raise the nation’s interest in art through the “artization” of education, so as to cultivate a noble, pure, and self-sacrificing mind” ^[9] (p. 1228). In 1928, the National Academy of Arts was founded in Hangzhou to cultivate specialized artistic talents and promote aesthetic education in society, the National Conservatory of Music was founded in Shanghai, and the Academy of Arts was established in universities, all to promote the spirit of selfless and beautiful creation.

Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940) was the first person in modern China to propose the inclusion of aesthetic education in the purpose of schools and was also the one who made essential contributions to the work of aesthetic education in schools during this period, which is of great significance in Chinese education. He said, “The purpose of education is to make everyone behave appropriately, that is, to make virtue the center”. On the one hand, one must be prepared to consider good and bad, examine the causes and effects, and judge them calmly. On the other hand, on the one hand, regardless of fortune or misfortune, regardless of life or death, with passionate feelings to run to it, all with the joy of others, the virtue of self-sacrifice for others belongs to this category, and rely on the help of aesthetic education. He believed that education should be centered on “morality”, and that the implementation of moral education required the support of aesthetic and intellectual education ^[10] (p. 34). He was deeply influenced by Kant’s aesthetics and believed that “the determination of aesthetics originates from the subjective sense of pleasure and displeasure, a combination of appearance and emotion, so it is a comprehensive determination” ^[10] (p. 507). Educators who want to lead from the phenomenal world to the viewpoint of the physical world cannot do without aesthetic education. He believes that aesthetic education is the use of aesthetic theories to implement education, the purpose of which is to cultivate human emotions ^[9] (p. 508). He believed that the love of beauty is an inherent requirement in human performance. When people are in the psychological realm of

beauty, thoughts of right and wrong in everyday life are eliminated, and thus moral cultivation can be improved. Art is the main source of cultivating human emotions, and it can nurture people to develop a pure personality and a beautiful spirit ^[11] (p. 219).

From 1911 to 1929, aesthetic education in China entered its initial stage. Cai Yuanpei's idea of aesthetic education provided crucial theoretical support for constructing aesthetic education in schools, and the education of aesthetic sense was listed as the purpose of school education. Art courses such as music and art were increasingly emphasized and became compulsory in school education. According to a statistic in 1929, after the promulgation of the curriculum outline for primary and secondary schools was drawn up by the National Education Union in the Republic of China, the art curriculum in elementary schools reached 18 percent of the whole and about 8 percent in secondary schools ^[12] (pp. 113–118). The implementation of the art curriculum after the inclusion of aesthetic education into the purpose of education has improved. However, the implementation of aesthetic education in this period was still centered on moral education. Although it was an improvement over the Qing government period, aesthetic education in art education was still characterized by the ideological emphasis on music to transform the national spirit in the late Qing Dynasty.

3. Aesthetic Education in Schools during the Salvation Movement

In September 1927, Chiang Kai-shek of the Kuomintang defected from the revolution and established the Nanjing National Government. In 1929, the Nationalist government issued the “Three Principles of Education for the Three People’s Principles” with nationalism, civil rights, and people’s livelihood as its core contents, none of which mentioned aesthetic education. During the period of resistance against Japan, the Ministry of Education of the Republican Government issued a series of regulations on the use of music and drama for war propaganda, which shows that art education under the National Government served the war effort and that aesthetic education in school education existed in name only.

After the failure of the Revolution in 1927 due to the mutiny of the Kuomintang, the Communist Party of China (CPC) led more than 100 counter-armed struggles against the Kuomintang reactionaries, such as the Nanchang Uprising and the Autumn Harvest at the Xiang-Gan border, opening up the road by encircling the cities in the countryside and seizing power with arms. In 1929, at the Gutian Conference, the Chinese Communist Party proposed for the first time the guideline that “literature and art are means of propaganda, and literature and art serve the revolutionary struggle”, which guided the vigorous development of literature and art ^[13]. After the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war in 1937, Mao Zedong said in his article “On the New Stage” during the period of the anti-Japanese National United Front: “Under the principle of all for the war, cultural and educational undertakings should be adapted to the needs of the war; develop popular education extensively, organize various remedial schools, literacy campaigns, drama campaigns, singing campaigns, sports, and establish various local newspapers before and after the enemy. The government should widely develop popular education, organize all kinds of remedial schools, literacy campaigns, theater campaigns, singing campaigns, sports, and create all kinds of local newspapers before and after the enemy to raise the national culture and national consciousness of the people” ^[8] (p. 22). On 18 March 1940, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the “Instruction of the Central Committee on the Development of National Education in the Anti-Japanese Ethnic Regions”, stating that “the basic content of national education should be determined as the education of new democracy, that is, the education of the national democratic revolution and the education of science with Marxist theories and methods as the starting point” ^[14]. In the area of art education, it was pointed out that emphasis should be placed on the use of teaching materials with national characteristics and “vigorously develop theatrical and singing activities in the countryside, but attention should be paid to the popularization, popularization, nationalization, and localization of theatrical and singing, with special attention to the use of old forms and the transformation of old forms”. In the Soviet and Wanchuan border area, the arts curriculum was integrated into recreation classes, including singing, dancing, drama, games, etc.; in the Shanxi-Gan Ning border area, the arts subject required “giving full play to students’ enthusiasm and creativity, so that they can fully carry out extracurricular and social activities such as wall posters, blackboards, singing, rice-song, drama, lectures, articles, solace, support for the army and resistance, and mobilization for war” ^[15] (pp. 445–446). Under such circumstances, aesthetic education could hardly be a prescribed content for wartime needs, and school art education in each base area was interrupted during the war period and was mainly carried out in the form of propaganda. It can be seen that wartime art served the war effort and was a powerful weapon of propaganda and inspiration, and songs were to carry forward the spirit of revolutionary struggle and educate future generations in the spirit of the nation.

Combining the ideological principles of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, Comrade Mao Zedong first proposed the major proposition of “the Chineseization of Marxism” at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party in 1938. In 1942, Mao Zedong pointed out in his speech “Speech at the Yan’an Literary

and Art Symposium” (“Speech”) that “literature and art should be made an integral part of the revolutionary machine as a powerful weapon to unite the people, educate them, combat the enemy, and destroy them, so as to help them fight the enemy with one heart and one mind” ^[16]. The speech points out that literature and art must serve the people as their fundamental purpose, and that the basic problem of creating artistic beauty is the relationship between literature and art and life. Since the speech, the reality of aesthetic ideology in the vision of Chinese Marxist aesthetics is based on socialist relations of production, and the emotions of the people and their expressions are the subjects of aesthetic ideology. The basis of aesthetic experience is not the free emotions of individuals, but the social and mass class emotions, the common life experience of people. The criterion of good and bad artworks is whether they can represent the emotions of the broadest masses of people. The speech is an aesthetic treatise on the localization and nationalization of Marxism in China. Its publication marked the formal establishment of the Marxist theory of aesthetics in China, a landmark programmatic document of the Communist Party of China in literary and artistic theory, guiding the development of socialist literature and art with Chinese characteristics and the development of aesthetic education in schools during the Liberation War.

School aesthetic education, both under the Kuomintang and under the Communist Party, became an integral part of the overall revolutionary apparatus. During the revolutionary period under Communist leadership, singing became a significant component of music classes, the subjects of which were centered on revolutionary, anti-war, and vernacular music ^[17] in order to cultivate students’ patriotism and national consciousness of collectivism, to carry forward the spirit of revolutionary struggle, and to educate future generations with the national spirit. Although this period lacked qualified art education teachers, teaching materials, and teaching equipment, it still contributed to the war’s victory. The Marxist theory of Chinese aesthetics guided the development of literature, art, and school aesthetic education during this period. As researchers have said, “During this period, aesthetic education was of positive significance in expanding the spread of Marxism, awakening and raising the consciousness of the people, and mobilizing their revolutionary enthusiasm and initiative” ^[18].

4. The Tortuous Development Period of School Aesthetic Education

After the founding of New China in 1949, the first generation of the central leadership collective, with Comrade Mao Zedong as the core, was formally established. In March 1951, the Ministry of Education held the First National Conference on Secondary Education. It proposed that “the purpose and educational goal of general secondary schools is to enable the young generation to achieve comprehensive development in all aspects of intellectual, moral, physical and aesthetic education so that they can become conscious and active members of the new democratic society” (edited by the Central Institute of Educational Sciences; *Chronology of Educational Events in the People’s Republic of China* ^[19] (p. 38). On 18 March 1952, the Provisional Regulations for Primary Schools (Draft) issued by the Central Ministry of Education stated that the goal of aesthetic education was “to give children the concept of love of beauty and the initial ability to appreciate art”. In the Provisional Regulations for Secondary Schools (Draft), the goal of aesthetic education was to cultivate students’ aesthetic concepts and inspire their creative abilities in art; and to implement the educational policy of comprehensive development of moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education. In May 1955, the State Council proposed in the National Conference on Culture and Education that “to improve the quality of primary and secondary education, researchers must implement the policy of all-round development, pay attention to the intellectual, moral, physical and aesthetic education of students, and at the same time implement basic production technology education in a step-by-step manner” ^[20] (pp. 219–227). Production technology education is labor education, which is the first time that labor education is mentioned in education in China. In the same year, the Ministry of Education specified the general function of aesthetic education in its report on the policy of comprehensive development of education: “Aesthetic education cannot only cultivate students’ love for beauty, but also their hatred of the bad and ugly” ^[21] (p. 11). In 1956, when the socialist transformation of New China was completed, the nature of society was gradually transformed from new democracy to socialism. At the same time, the education sector focused on the issues of “three education”, “four education”, “five education”, “teaching according to ability”, and “all-round development”. The issues of “all-round development” have been hotly debated. Some educators believe that aesthetic education should be included in moral education ^[22], and that aesthetic education “is included in the category of “moral education” and is a method and means of implementing moral education” ^[23] (p. 28). In February 1957, Mao Zedong clearly put forward the “three education policies”, i.e., “moral education, intellectual education and physical education”, in his speech on “the correct handling of the internal contradictions of the people”, and aesthetic education faded out of the state policy of education. In July 1963, Zhou Enlai delivered a speech on “All-round development, to be educated workers with socialist consciousness” at the conference for fresh graduates of Beijing colleges and universities, reiterating that moral education, intellectual education, and physical education were the three specific aspects of “all-round development” and proposing the study of “revolutionary literature such as drama, film, music and art” ^[24] (p. 1200). Aesthetic education faded out of the state policy

of education, but art, as revolutionary literature and art, played a role in enhancing Communist moral cultivation. During the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, education became extremely politicized and a tool for class struggle due to the serious leftist ideology, and literary and artistic works retained their political and moral training functions. The nurturing function of aesthetic education was gradually lost ^[25]. Aesthetic education became a no-go area during this period. It was called a product of the “cattle and ghosts” and the “exploiting class”, a situation that lasted until the eve of reform and opening up in 1978.

From the founding of New China to the eve of reform and opening up, the Communist Party of China led the people to complete the socialist revolution, eliminating all systems of exploitation and achieving the most extensive and profound social change in the history of the Chinese nation. In the early years of the founding of New China, the importance of aesthetic education as the all-round development of human beings was included in the national education policy. After the completion of the socialist transformation of New China in 1956, aesthetic education began to fade out of the national policy, and art education as the main position of aesthetic education in schools was classified as the cultivation of revised Communist moral codes. In the 20 years after 1957, aesthetic education was not seen in any of the educational decrees and policies issued by the government, and it was completely removed from educational policy and educational practice.

5. The Reconstruction Period of School Aesthetic Education

In December 1978, the third meeting of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China elected Deng Xiaoping as the core of the collective leadership of the second generation of the Central Committee. The meeting insisted on a factual approach to the “Cultural Revolution” and proposed reform and opening up to achieve the four modernizations. In 1979, Zhang Chengxian, then Vice Minister of Education, said, “Music, like art, is an important means of aesthetic education. Aesthetic education is an important part of fostering the all-round development of students’ morality, intellect, and physique” and proposed that “all three aspects of morality, intellect, and physique contain components of aesthetic education, and that aesthetic education runs through moral, intellectual, and physical education” ^[24] (p. 1695). This was the first time since the reform and opening up that the role of aesthetic education in the overall development of students was affirmed, and the development of aesthetic education began to take a turn for the better. In 1980, Zhu Guangqian, a famous Chinese aesthetician, and others jointly wrote to the Ministry of Education, and in 1985, 37 famous musicians from all over the country, including Lu Ji and He Luting, issued a joint “Initiative Letter” in the common hope that the Party and the state would build up the capacity to restore aesthetic education to its rightful place and task in education. Finally came the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China and the Development Outline of the Seventh Five-Year Plan in 1986, which stated that schools should implement the policy of all-round development of morality, intellect, physique, and aesthetics. In November 1989, the National Master Plan for School Art Education (1989–2000) again emphasized that the fundamental task of school education in China is to adhere to the direction of serving socialist construction, to cultivate a new generation with comprehensive development of morality, intellect, physique, aesthetics, and labor, and to improve the quality of all people. Art education is the main content and way of implementing aesthetic education in schools, and is a powerful means to subconsciously improve students’ moral level, cultivate noble sentiments, and promote healthy intellectual, physical, and mental development. This marks the path of healthy development of school aesthetic education in China.

In February 1993, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the Outline of China’s Education Reform and Development, which listed aesthetic education as a strategic goal of national education reform and suggested that aesthetic education plays an important role in cultivating students’ healthy aesthetic concepts and aesthetic abilities, cultivating noble moral sentiments, and fostering all-round development of talents. This is the first time that the Party Central Committee affirmed the role of aesthetic education in school education in the form of independent regulations promulgated by the state, which created a new situation for the construction of aesthetic education in China’s schools. In August 1994, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China promulgated the Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education in Schools, which proposed to further implement the curriculum of music, physical education, and aesthetics in the nine-year compulsory education stage and actively offer art elective courses in general colleges and high schools to cultivate sentiment and improve students’ artistic cultivation and appreciation. It can be seen that the state has put aesthetic education in a very important position in quality education, and higher education has also begun to pay attention to the quality of aesthetic education and play a good role in moral education. In June 1999, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China pointed out in the Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Quality Education that “The implementation of quality education, to improve the quality of the nation as the fundamental purpose, to cultivate the innovative spirit and practical ability of students as the focus of school education, intellectual education, moral education, physical education, aesthetic education, labor and technical education and social practice education interpenetration, coordinated development, to promote the overall

development and healthy growth of students". "Aesthetic education can not only cultivate sentiment and improve literacy but also help develop the intellect. The weakness of aesthetic education in schools should be changed as soon as possible, and aesthetic education should be integrated into the whole school education process. Primary and secondary schools should strengthen classroom teaching of music and art, and higher education schools should require students to take a certain number of hours of humanities courses, including art, and carry out rich and colorful extracurricular cultural and artistic activities to enhance students' experience of beauty and cultivate their ability to appreciate and create beauty" ^[26] (p. 155.) This is the first time the state has included aesthetic education in higher education in the specific national policy and proposed including aesthetic education in the whole school education process. Aesthetic education became one of the essential contents of implementing quality education, and aesthetic and art education will become a critical development object in the following education stage.

In 2000, the National School Arts Education Development Plan (2001–2010) was promulgated and implemented, which, for the first time, set aesthetic education in schools as "cultivating the spirit of patriotism and collectivism, cultivating the spirit of innovation and practical ability, and improving aesthetic ability and cultural literacy" ^[27]. In 2010, the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) emphasized the need to insist on moral education first, establish moral education, and integrate the core socialist value system into national education. Researchers will strengthen education on the excellent cultural traditions of the Chinese nation and revolutionary traditions and cultivate students' good aesthetic interests and humanistic qualities ^[28].

Since the reform and opening up, the three generations of the central leadership, with Comrade Deng Xiaoping, Comrade Jiang Zemin, and Comrade Hu Jintao as the core, have put education in an important position in national development, and school aesthetic education has been rebuilt. As the pioneer of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics, Comrade Deng Xiaoping vindicated the unjust and false cases during the Cultural Revolution and restored the excellent order of education development. In the field of education, he proposed the "three orientations", i.e., "orientation to modernization, orientation to the world, and orientation to the future", and the principle of cultivating the "four new men", i.e., new socialist men with ideals, morals, culture, and discipline. In the area of aesthetic education, it is pointed out that the mission of literature and art is to meet the needs of the people in many aspects of spiritual life and, at the same time, to contribute to the cultivation of new socialist men and raise the ideological, moral, and cultural level of the whole society. The central leadership collective, with Comrade Jiang Zemin as the core, positioned the basic state policy of "developing the country through science and education" in education, insisted on the combination of education and social practice, implemented quality education with the fundamental purpose of improving the quality of the nation, focused on cultivating the innovative spirit and practical ability of students, and promoted the comprehensive and accessible development of students. Jiang Zemin made it clear that aesthetic education serves the people and the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and that while studying and learning from the best achievements of the world, the construction of aesthetic education should also reflect the excellent spirit of the Chinese nation and the new life of the Chinese people themselves ^[29]. Comrade Hu Jintao proposed "implementing the strategy of strengthening the country with talents" in education, and for the first time proposed that the socialist core value system should be integrated into national education. He said, "We must adhere to the education of people, moral education as the first, the establishment of moral education as the fundamental task of education, aesthetic education can not only cultivate sentiment, improve literacy, and help develop the intellect, for promoting the overall development of students has an irreplaceable role". ^[30] In the three decades since the reform and opening up, China's education has changed from "exam-oriented education" to "quality education", aesthetic education has become an essential grasp of people-oriented and quality education implementation, the implementation of aesthetic education has gradually moved from primary and secondary education to higher education, the Party, the state, and the education administrative departments have paid more attention to the construction of aesthetic education in schools, and some achievements have been made in the implementation of aesthetic education, such as: the number of urban teachers has been significantly enhanced, the construction of teaching materials has been steadily carried out, and teaching research and scientific research activities have led to the in-depth development of teaching reform ^[31]. However, there are still some shortcomings, such as: in remote rural areas, there is a lack of teachers for aesthetic education, the professional level of teachers needs to be improved, the opening rate of aesthetic education courses in the third grade of urban junior high schools and public high schools is low, the general curriculum of aesthetic education in universities needs to be implemented, the scientific research of aesthetic education needs to be strengthened, the teaching facilities of aesthetic education need to be improved, and a mutual articulation between elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities. There is a need to establish an articulated relationship between elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities in the cultivation of aesthetic education. These defects and shortcomings are the following stages of the Party, and state and education authorities in the construction of school aesthetic education should pay attention to solve the problem; school aesthetic education is on the

road to the successful development of the posture, for the next new era of the development of aesthetic education laid a sure foundation.

6. Construction of Modern School Aesthetic Education System in the New Era

In November 2012, Comrade Xi Jinping was elected as the core of the Party's new generation of leaders at the First Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, and since then China has opened a page of a new era of socialism with special characteristics.

In November 2013, the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform made "aesthetic education" the central content for the first time and proposed "improving the teaching of aesthetic education and enhancing students' aesthetic and humanistic qualities", which is the goal of aesthetic education in the new era and also the goal of the Party and the state since the founding of China. It is the first time since the founding of New China that the Party and the State have included the specific issue of aesthetic education in the major reform matters at the highest level, which is a milestone in the history of China's aesthetic education policy.

In January 2014, the Ministry of Education issued "Several opinions on promoting the development of arts education in schools", which emphasized that art education has a unique and important role in establishing moral education, and that school art education is the most important way and content for implementing aesthetic education. On 15 October 2014, Comrade Xi Jinping hosted a symposium on the work of literature and art in Beijing and delivered an important speech, in which he pointed out that "the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty is the eternal value of literature and art", "the highest level of art is to move people's hearts and souls to be baptized, so that people can discover the beauty of nature, life and the soul", "the people should be the connoisseurs and judges of literature and art", "contemporary literature and art should take patriotism as the main theme of literary creation", "the people should be the connoisseurs and judges of literature and art. Beauty of nature, Beauty of life, Beauty of the soul", "the people should be the connoisseurs and judges of the aesthetics of literature and art", "contemporary literature and art should take patriotism as the main theme of literature and art creation", "combine the new conditions of the times to inherit and promote the excellent Chinese traditional culture and to inherit and promote the spirit of Chinese aesthetics", and "to preserve righteousness for history and to promote virtue for the world" [32]. These important discourses on literature and art point out the path for aesthetic education. In September 2015, the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools, which clearly defines aesthetic education as "aesthetic education", "education of sentiment" and "education of personality", and clearly pointed out that it "not only can improve people's aesthetic quality, but also can implicitly affect people's emotions, temperament, broad-mindedness, fun, inspire people's spirit, warming people's hearts", and also clarified that "aesthetic education and moral education, intellectual education, sports complement each other, and The relationship between aesthetic education and moral education, intellectual education and physical education is complementary and mutually reinforcing" [33]. To form a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics in which large, medium, and small schools articulate with each other, curriculum teaching and extracurricular activities are integrated with each other, popular education and professional education are promoted with each other, and school aesthetic education and social and family aesthetic education are connected with each other.

Since the 19th Party Congress, how to meet the needs and aspirations of the people for a better life has become an important issue in the new era. Comrade Xi Jinping clearly emphasized in a letter to veteran professors of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2018 that to do a good job in aesthetic education, "we must adhere to the establishment of moral education", "rooted in the life of the times, follow the characteristics of aesthetic education", and "carry forward the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education Chinese aesthetic education, carry forward the fine tradition of patriotism for the people, virtue and art". In April 2019, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Effectively Strengthening the Work of Aesthetic Education in Higher Education in the New Era, stating that improving and strengthening the work of aesthetic education is an important task for higher education at present and in the future period. The focus of aesthetic education in colleges and universities is to "strengthen popular art education", "improve professional art education", and "improve art teacher education" [34]. On 15 October 2020, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era, which is another special project on school aesthetic education after the Opinions issued in 2015, emphasizing that school aesthetic education should be "guided by Xi Jinping's Socialist Thought with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era, with the foundation of moral education as the root, with The core values of socialism as a guide, to improve students' aesthetic and humanistic qualities as the goal, to carry forward the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, to educate people with beauty, to beautify people, to beauty cultivation, to integrate aesthetic education into the whole process of talent training at all levels and

types of schools, throughout all segments of school education”, “Fully explore and use the rich aesthetic education resources such as beauty of mind, beauty of manners and music, beauty of language, beauty of behavior, beauty of science, beauty of order, beauty of health, beauty of hard work, beauty of art, etc., contained in various disciplines that embody the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education and the aesthetic qualities of the nation”, “The preparation of teaching materials should adhere to the guiding position of Marxism, be rooted in China, integrate Chinese and foreign countries, reflect the basic values of the country and the nation, be elegant in tone, highlight the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, and fully reflect ideology, nationality, innovation and practice”, “School aesthetic education curriculum with art curriculum as the main body, build a system of aesthetic education curriculum that connects large, medium and small children, and clarify the objectives of aesthetic education curriculum at all levels and in all types of schools”, “Integrate the resources of disciplines such as aesthetics, art, and education, strengthen the construction of basic theories of aesthetic education, and build a number of high-end think tanks on aesthetic education”, gradually improve the teaching model of “basic art knowledge and skills + art and aesthetic experience + art specialties”, “Focusing on improving core literacies such as cultural understanding, aesthetic perception, artistic expression and creative practice”, “Selecting outstanding student art troupes to participate in major national performance activities, with a view to promoting excellent Chinese traditional culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, and playing an exemplary and leading role”, and “Take the work of aesthetic education and its effect as an important index for the evaluation of university operation. It will be included in the evaluation index system of undergraduate teaching work of universities and the evaluation of the effectiveness of “double first-class” construction” [35].

Since China entered the new era of socialism with special characteristics, the central leadership collective with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core has attached great importance to the work of aesthetic education in schools. Comrade Xi Jinping said, “The living soul of Mao Zedong Thought is the position, viewpoint and method that permeate the various components, embodied in the three basic aspects of seeking truth from facts, the mass line and independence. This has had a profound impact on our Party’s theoretical and practical innovations” [36]. These three points are the essence of Mao Zedong thought summarized by Comrade Xi Jinping, and the roots of Xi Jinping’s socialist thought with Chinese characteristics in the new era, which he established after borrowing and absorbing. Based on the current difficulties and problems in the construction of aesthetic education in China, Xi Jinping put forward Xi Jinping’s concept of socialist aesthetic education with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and he emphasized that “China should adhere to the development path of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics” [37], “Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics originates from the excellent Chinese traditional culture nurtured by the 5000-year civilization history of the Chinese nation” [38], and “Excellent Chinese traditional culture is the spiritual lifeblood of the Chinese nation, an important source for nurturing the core values of socialism, and a solid foundation for us to stand firm in the world’s cultural stirrings” [39]. Therefore, the first item proposed in his view of aesthetic education is to carry the core socialist values through the whole process of aesthetic education and to adhere to the inheritance of China’s excellent traditional culture, carry forward the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education, and show the Chinese aesthetic style in the work of aesthetic education in schools. Second, Xi Jinping has always stressed that the people are the main body of literary and artistic creation, the creation of literature and art is taken from the people and used by the people, literary and artistic works are to meet the spiritual needs of the people and enhance the spiritual power of the people, and therefore, the new era of school aesthetic education pays more attention to the impact and role of the good life. Third, Xi Jinping emphasized that in the face of the excellent achievements of aesthetic education in the world, China should adhere to the attitude of “taking the long and making up for the short, choosing the good and following the good, removing the rough and extracting the fine, removing the false and preserving the true” [40]; from the actuality of the country’s own nation, shape the idea of socialist aesthetic education with Chinese characteristics and manifest socialist cultural confidence of Chinese characteristics in the new era.

After the 18th Party Congress, China opened a page of a new era, and the central leadership, with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, attached great importance to the work of school aesthetic education. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued two critical guidelines, “Opinions” on constructing aesthetic education. Since their promulgation and implementation, according to statistics from the Ministry of Education, “93.5% of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government at the compulsory education level have a total music and art curriculum of 9% of the national requirement; at the high school education level, 92.1% of schools nationwide can offer six credits of compulsory art courses; 75.7% of secondary vocational education schools nationwide have included art courses in their compulsory public foundation courses; 84.6% of the nation’s colleges and universities offer public art courses for all students” [41]. The Ministry of Education has established 126 rural arts education experimental counties in 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) nationwide, narrowing the development gap in art education between urban and rural areas. It has created 1885 schools in primary and secondary schools nationwide that pass on excellent Chinese culture and art. In terms of teachers for aesthetic education, the number of art teachers (music, art, and art curriculum

teachers) in compulsory education nationwide reached 830,000 by 2021, an increase of 52.3% compared to ten years ago, and nearly 87% of students received art education in primary and secondary schools. In terms of school facilities for aesthetic education, 96.48% of elementary schools nationwide are equipped with standard music equipment, 96.45% of schools are equipped with standard art equipment, 97.51% of junior high schools nationwide are equipped with standard music equipment, and 97.49% of schools are equipped with standard art equipment. In scientific research on aesthetic education, 17 projects related to “aesthetic education” have been established in the past three years, which is still on the rise year by year. Individual provinces and municipalities have established the integration of aesthetic education in schools and universities and the pattern of “one school with one product” and “one school with multiple products” [42]. From these data, researchers can see that in the new era, under the leadership of the Party and the State, and with the full cooperation of government departments at all levels, China’s school aesthetic education has flourished. Schools at all levels nationwide have made historic breakthroughs and progress in constructing aesthetic education teachers, aesthetic education curricula, and aesthetic education facilities and conditions. It is the latest achievement in constructing aesthetic education with “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” as the theoretical guide. However, it will take a long time to strengthen and improve the work of school aesthetic education; the utilitarian of educational values, the narrow perception of the value of aesthetic education, and the uneven distribution of resources for aesthetic education are all root problems in the development of aesthetic education. China will surely make more progress in building a modern school aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

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