

# The System Direction of the Practice of Aesthetic Education in Chinese Textbooks of the Republic of China

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**Abstract:** The compilation concept of teaching materials is inseparable from the macro historical background of the times. On the surface, the concept of aesthetic education belongs to the concept of education, but in essence it is far beyond the scope of education. It is the product of the modern bourgeoisie in the pursuit of ideal personality. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, with the cultivation and return of a large number of talents studying abroad, western modern aesthetics, aesthetic education and philosophy began to be introduced into China. In addition, Chinese culture has its own aesthetic education traditions such as “poetry education” and “music education”. Under this background, people of insight found the unique value of aesthetic education and affirmed the emotion. The significance and function of interest and beauty in shaping people’s value and promoting the transformation of people’s thinking. The open era and social environment at the beginning of the founding of the Republic of China provided an extremely broad platform and space for the implementation of reform in the field of education, promoted the reform of educational thought and the purpose of compiling teaching materials, and injected a new resource of aesthetic education into the compilation of Chinese teaching materials in the Republic of China.

**Keywords:** Educational Policy; Aesthetic Education; Chinese Teaching Materials

When aesthetic education was established in the form of educational policy, the aesthetic education in Chinese Textbooks of the Republic of China gained legitimacy at the institutional level. The so-called educational policy is the specific operation to guide the direction of education. Influenced by the ideological trend of the times, the educational purpose of “loyalty to the king, respect for Confucius, respect for the public, respect for martial arts and respect for reality” followed by the feudal society can no longer adapt to the modern educational concept. In view of the special historical context of the times, the system order fell into chaos. Under this background, people of insight found the unique value of western aesthetic education and affirmed the significance and role of emotion, interest and beauty in shaping people’s value and promoting the transformation of people’s thinking. Therefore, establishing the status and content of aesthetic education in the educational policy of a modern country is very key to the cultural and educational development of a country. After Cai Yuanpei was appointed as the first chief of education by the government of the Republic of China, he soon established an educational policy emphasizing moral education, focusing on aesthetic education and the cultivation of world outlook, and aiming at developing national morality. Therefore, aesthetic education, as a basic regulatory policy of the government, has been carried out.

## 1. The beginning of aesthetic education policy in the Republic of China: the appeal of education itself

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Since the spring and Autumn period, Confucianism has gradually formed and occupied a dominant position in social, political and cultural life, which constitutes an important part of the cultural tradition of the Chinese nation. At the same time, Confucianism has also become the dominant thought of Chinese educational tradition. From the perspective of social requirements, Chinese traditional Confucian education is mainly to cultivate “talents” who meet the requirements of rulers. This kind of Confucian traditional education with the educational purpose of “learning is an official, and an official is an excellent student”. It mostly takes moral education as a means, takes the improvement of a simple outlook on life as a standard, and does not care about people’s all-round development. From the perspective of individual long-term development, it stifles people’s personality and inhibits people’s creativity. After the Opium War, China’s social economy and social civilization have undergone rapid changes. The Westernization Movement and reform trend of thought in the late Qing Dynasty broadened the vision of Chinese people. Different from Chinese traditional Confucian education, western modern education aims to comprehensively improve citizens’ Ideological and moral character, scientific culture, physical, psychological and labor skills, and develop personality. This kind of eye opening basic education has gradually affected China’s science and technology, education, philosophy, literature, art and other fields, and also brought an impact on the traditional Confucian education.

With the establishment of the Republic of China, advanced intellectuals urgently demanded reform. Sun Yat Sen, the then president of the Republic of China, was soberly aware that the rise and fall of the country was closely related to the development of education. He stressed the importance of learning. “Madam can’t know by birth, she must wait for learning and then know. People can’t all like learning, but must wait for teaching and then learn.” We believe that if China wants to turn from weak to strong, it must revitalize education. Sun Yat Sen attached great importance to talent training and education, and appointed Cai Yuanpei as the first chief of education of the government of the Republic of China. With the strong contrast between Chinese and Western cultures and the research on western modern education, Cai Yuanpei systematically thought about the disadvantages of Chinese traditional education and deeply realized that “there are many problems in the traditional education system, and the fundamental way to solve these problems is to comply with the demands of the development of education itself.” Generally speaking, it is to eliminate the local dross in Chinese traditional Confucian education and abolish the educational purpose stipulated in the Qing Dynasty.

In the process of innovation and formulation of educational policy, he integrated the excellent elements of traditional education and dialectically used western educational ideas and resources. Cai Yuanpei published the programmatic document “opinions on new education” for the establishment of a new education system in February 1912. In order to meet the needs of current education development and emphasize the significance and value of education, Cai Yuanpei emphasizes the transition from traditional education to “Five Education”, emphasizes the irreplaceable role of aesthetic education in the value and significance of education, and advocates comprehensive and future oriented education. This kind of education concept of super utility and politics fundamentally abolished the traditional educational concept of “loyalty to the monarch, respecting Confucius, respecting the public, martial arts and being realistic”, which made aesthetic education established in the history of Chinese education for the first time in the way of educational purpose. Although some old people in the education circles did not know what aesthetic education was, Cai Yuanpei’s educational policy was still adopted at the temporary education conference held in July 1912. At this point, the policy of aesthetic education in the Republic of China was established under the guidance of certain legislative ideology.

There is no doubt that the aesthetic education policy established by the state expresses the national will, and in this category, the most important function is the reconstruction of value. This is different from Nietzsche’s “God is dead”. What collapsed in the late Qing Dynasty was not the belief of Chinese people, but a complete way of thinking and social value system. Based on the demand of reshaping the national values education itself, aesthetic education was explicitly included in the national education policy for the first time. During this period, the Ministry of education of the Republic of China repeatedly stressed that aesthetic education was an essential educational concept in many documents issued by the Ministry of education of the Republic of China. For example, the Ministry of education of the Republic of China promulgated the educational purpose, that is, “pay attention to moral education, supplemented by practical education and military and national education, and complete its moral education with aesthetic education.” At the same time, the Ministry of education of the Republic of China also promulgated the regulations of normal schools, that is, “cultivating temperament and exercising will is an important task of education, so it is appropriate to make students rich in beauty and courage in virtue” “physical education, intellectual education, emotional education and ambition education should be paid equal attention to in order to exercise children’s ability” and so on. In addition to further emphasizing the importance of aesthetic education in the documents of the Ministry of education, clear requirements were made for the

curriculum arrangement of the Ministry of education during this period. All schools must have aesthetic education courses and design education and teaching rules and norms, emphasizing that in the process of school education, we must pay great attention to sexual cultivation and emotional education; In the process of teaching each subject, carry forward the national cultural characteristics, inspire children's consciousness and patriotism, and guide children to establish aesthetic concepts. On the one hand, it is the result of educational reform promoted by social development; On the other hand, it is the self appeal of the profound and comprehensive reform of educational thought, educational content, educational method and educational mode in the context of the times. As a product of a specific social and historical background, aesthetic education, as a new educational paradigm, naturally has its own purpose and content, which is also the fundamental reason for the distinction between the new educational paradigm and the traditional educational paradigm.

## **2. The perfection of aesthetic education policy in the Republic of China: the desire for a better life**

During the May 4th movement, the democratic and scientific social thoughts have strongly impacted the feudal tradition and all "idols". The pursuit of individual liberation and spiritual freedom has become the life yearning of intellectuals in cultural circles, which shows that the Chinese people who are trying to get rid of the double shackles of feudalism and imperialism are eager for beauty and new life. However, the intense contradiction between the desire for freedom, happiness and creation of life and real life has formed a great conflict and pain in the spiritual pursuit of human inner world. In view of the great role played by the founding of the aesthetic education policy in the Republic of China for the education of Reshaping National value, we hope to comfort people's mind and cultivate sentiment by means of aesthetic education, and finally realize the pursuit of a better life. The necessity of aesthetic education has been widely recognized in the ideological and educational circles. As Cai Yuanpei said, "in fact, education initially had only three parts: physical education, intellectual education and moral education. Since then, it has gradually integrated into aesthetic education, and now it has become a general consensus in the educational circles." With the "May 4th" new culture movement, a large number of returned students have joined the promotion of aesthetic education, which injected fresh blood into the development of aesthetic education in the period of the Republic of China. The team is growing, the vision is expanding and the thought is changing. Not only in the educational field, but also in all sectors of society, great attention has been paid to aesthetic education. Many experts and scholars talk about aesthetic education in their works, and various theories about aesthetic education have also entered a period of intense discussion. Various aesthetic education works have been published one after another, aesthetics and aesthetic education thought have developed fully, and there has been an unprecedented grand occasion. People even think that aesthetic education is an indispensable part both in cultural learning and in daily life.

During this period, aesthetic educators were active in all sectors of society. For example, Lu Xun in the literary circle made a lot of incisive discussions on aesthetic education, from exploring the content of aesthetic education to how to use literature and art to give full play to the function of aesthetic education and children's aesthetic education. It not only issued the cry of "saving children" in pain and anger, but also strongly explained the importance of aesthetic education to national spiritual education in many essays, and integrated the profound insights of aesthetic education theory into specific literary and artistic thoughts or literary criticism. The aesthetic education advocated by Cai Yuanpei is the core content of modern education. The implementation of aesthetic education should be based on art education and integrate the aesthetic appreciation and creative knowledge of beauty, which has brought the influence of aesthetic thought to the whole society. Many artists and musicians in the art circle respond one after another and promote aesthetic education with practical actions. For example, Peking University has established art research associations such as painting, music and calligraphy; Shanghai is also unwilling to lag behind. Groups such as the Chinese Academy of aesthetic education hold various artistic performances from time to time, and art educators and artists such as Xiao Hai you and Xu Beihong have made contributions to aesthetic education. At the same time, the Chinese Academy of aesthetic education was established in Shanghai, and the monthly journal of aesthetic education was founded. The hosts are teachers. They have deep experience in aesthetic education. Most of the articles published are based on social reality and teaching practice, with specific and vivid content, which has played a good role in popularizing aesthetic education. In addition to publications such as dawn and aesthetic education, other well-known newspapers and periodicals, such as new youth and new trend, have also published articles that contribute to aesthetic education. When people with lofty ideals in the academic circles were eager for a better life and had a strong interest in issues related to aesthetic education, they continued to move forward along the path of aesthetic education explorers, and then expressed their views, it also

marked the gradual improvement of the aesthetic education policy of the Republic of China.

### **3. The implementation of aesthetic education policy in the Republic of China: the internal needs of life**

The occurrence of human activities is driven by a certain purpose. Abraham H. Maslow, an American humanistic psychologist, believes that human needs from low to high include five levels: physiological needs, security needs, social needs, respect needs and self realization needs. The higher the degree of human development, the stronger the desire and demand for beauty. Although the theory of aesthetic education has made such brilliant achievements through the pursuit and conception of these learned people from the late Qing Dynasty to the beginning of the Republic of China, from the internal yearning and pursuit of beauty in human life, the aesthetic life of moral freedom expounded by aesthetic education is the ultimate destination of human soul, the highest state in line with the internal needs of life, and the need to deepen the exploration of beauty in life. It is urgent to expand from basic theoretical research to practice.

With the establishment of the aesthetic education policy of the Republic of China under the guidance of certain legislation, the setting of school curriculum and the compilation of textbooks gradually began to implement the aesthetic education policy. The Ministry of education of the Republic of China has repeatedly pointed out the important role of aesthetic education in relevant documents and promulgated relevant detailed rules for the implementation of aesthetic education, requiring schools to create Mandarin courses, music courses and image art courses based on the new education program to implement aesthetic education; Schools at all levels are required to pay attention to the teaching of art, pictures, music and physical education, transform aesthetic education from the level of research objects and problems to the practice of educating people, and introduce the specific form and relevant content of theory into teaching practice. This is because the purpose of the Mandarin course is to enable children to understand and make good use of the ability of the Mandarin language necessary for people's life, so that they can freely convey their thoughts and feelings and understand the needs of the thoughts and feelings conveyed by others; The purpose of music class is to develop children's happy and lively nature, cultivate children's interest in courage and diligence, forge their energy to struggle with all evil forces at home and abroad, and cultivate their sense of love and sociability, so as to train them to meet the needs of the habit of waiting for our nation in the world.

The selection of the text content of the Chinese Textbooks in the Republic of China pays more attention to the aesthetic needs of shaping the inner character of students' life. Taking the new Chinese textbook, which was approved by the Ministry of education of the Republic of China, taking the benefit of students and nourishing the people's hearts and minds as the main purpose, is taken as an example. The text in the textbook is presented with rich and vivid aesthetic feeling, which plays a role of aesthetic education in the perfection of students' personality and the shaping of the mind and harmony. In shaping students' moral cultivation, the textbooks mostly integrate the text into a thoughtful little story, stimulate students' interest in learning, and at the same time, they can cultivate the students' beauty, guide their healthy life and inspire excellent morality, so as to achieve the effect of good storage with beauty. Compared with traditional Mongolian reading materials, the teaching materials are less preaching, more enlightening and knowledge-based. In a lively and interesting way, abstract scientific knowledge and historical knowledge are connected with daily life, making boring knowledge articles lively and interesting, easy to understand, "in the function of intellectual education, it contains the original elements of aesthetic education, and scholars have infinite interest in themselves", which can enlighten the students' mind. Promote the balanced development of students' morality, wisdom and beauty.

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