

# How Visual Culture Influences Current Basic Art Education

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**Abstract:** The emergence of the term “visual culture” has to do with the rapid development of technology today and the vast array of videos and images produced in the digital age. Since the 20th century, visual culture has made a repeated influence on the field of school art education, promoting the wave of art education reform. Therefore, it has a very important research value to investigate visual culture in the current basic art education.

**Keywords:** Visual culture; Visual change; Visual literacy; Art education

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The term “visual culture” has been a popular cultural concept since the 1980s. With the increasing globalization of the world economy and the rapid advancement of technology and videos, the visual stimulation and pleasure experienced by human beings has reached an unprecedented peak. In primitive societies, where writing and language were not developed, vision was dominant in people’s lives. The role of image recording and communication has been increasing, and the influence of image on people’s vision has been gradually enhanced. Vision has become the first of the five major perceptions for human beings to perceive, construct and judge the external world.

## 1. Theoretical Traceability of Visual Culture

Balazs, a Hungarian film theorist, is regarded as the first to put forward the theory of visual culture. He believed that the emergence of film marks the transition from “print culture” to visual culture. In 1963, Benjamin further enriched the concept of visual culture by discussing oral culture, print culture and mechanical reproduction culture in two essays. The Canadian scholar McLuhan further reinforced the theme of visual culture in his study of electronic media culture, and he clarified the arrival of electronic media culture.

The worldwide study of visual culture flourished in the last 20 years. The rise of vision culture research is a response to the political, economic, cultural and technological changes that have taken place in the West. Vision is the most direct way for human beings to obtain knowledge and information, and more than 70% of the knowledge and information of the human brain comes from vision. Therefore, vision is undoubtedly important. With the invention of visual machines such as photography, television and film, and the emergence of the Internet, visual information through communication media has become an integral part of people’s daily life in the form of commercial promotion and entertainment consumption. In the 1990s, Michele from the University of Chicago published “Iconography: Image, Text, Ideology” and “Image Theory.” He proposed the image turn and advocated the study of images from the perspective of mass media. Another representative of visual culture studies is Mirzoeff of the State University of New York, the author of “Introduction to Visual Culture” and “The Right to See,” who argued that emerging visual culture is the “visualizing” of things that are not visual in themselves. It means that visual culture is not entirely visual in nature, but rather is based on the depiction of what is already there, or on the transformation of what is there.

## 2. Characteristics of Visual Culture

### 2.1 The change in the way of acquiring visual experience

According to Michel’s theory, viewing is as deep and meaningful a matter as reading in all its forms. “Visual experience” and “visual literacy” cannot be interpreted in a more satisfactory way by words. This understanding is also the source of Michel’s “image theory”. Then, by reasoning from this theory, Western society’s understanding of the world relies on the pattern of images rather than the pattern of texts, and images have shown a tendency to overwhelm words. Visuality has become the dominant factor in culture. The

widespread visualization has profoundly changed the forms of people's cultural activities.

## **2.2 The change in viewing places**

Visual culture has led to a change in the places where people view images, and this is an important difference between visual culture and visual art. Formal and fully-structured viewing places are no longer the only places where our visual experience is generated, such as cinemas, museums and art galleries. People's attention is drawn to taking visual experience as the center in everyday life.

## **2.3 Diverse means of obtaining visual pleasure**

Today's world is gradually dominated by images, which have become the main medium of information transmission in the post-modern society. People are reaching the peak of visual stimulation. Therefore, with the advancement of technology and the adoption of new technologies, more and more visual devices have been introduced in people's daily life. Nowadays, we see certain things are presented through certain visual technology means. Taking watching drama such as Wu Opera as an example, in the past, people were in a fixed, formal and complete place to watch opera such as Wu Opera theater or village theater as well as cultural hall. But nowadays, people only need to hold remote control in hand to watch it in television, computer, cell phone and other equipment. These viewing mediums are realized by technology. Therefore, technical viewing is one of the important characteristics of visual culture.

# **3. The Influence of Visual Culture on Current Basic Art Education**

## **3.1 The challenge between classical art and popular images**

With the continuous technological realization of the viewing medium, artworks are moving into people's daily lives. Life patterns, modes of thinking and cultural behaviors such as values and aesthetics are constantly changing due to visual changes. With its simplicity and accessibility to the masses, the influence of this visual technology on young people lies in its strong visual stimulation. In a sense, this visual stimulation surpasses that of classical art, which still generally meets the public through the kind of formal and well-structured venues, such as museums and art galleries. In this context, art education has to pay attention to the influence of culture on a wide range of young people.

Nowadays, teenagers are generally uninterested in classic culture and prefer popular ones. We should be clear that what is popular is not necessarily reasonable. The visual experience of teenagers is mostly related to popular fashion culture, which is easy to be accepted by the public because of its strong visual stimulation and the simple and straightforward content form. Coupled with the rapid development of the times, the expansion of desire and the brittle foundation of reason, teenagers are likely to fall into it and suffer from it, thus producing blindness and impetuous mentality. In particular, the undesirable culture is a poisonous tumor for young people's moral growth. Classical art works are the valuable heritage of human culture, and they contain some deep spiritual connotation and aesthetic value.

## **3.2 The challenge between foreign culture and traditional culture**

With the close connection of the global economic system and the rapid development of video technology, people have more and more means of accessing information. In the era of "big data", people can easily access an incalculable amount of information, which is so large and diverse. Through visual media, people can easily understand foreign culture and be influenced by them in a subtle way.

## **3.3 The challenge between visual culture and traditional Art discipline**

In the era of visual culture, art is a way of learning with methodological significance, with a rich variety of types and styles, as well as a dizzying variety of modern art as well as post-modern art and the ever-emerging commercial and new media art. This new context of art generation is very different from the traditional single concept of Art discipline teaching in China, so visual culture and traditional Art discipline are bound to produce contradictions. Contradictions are the source and driving force of things. The development of Art discipline in China needs to constantly find contradictions and solve them in the process of conforming to the era of visual culture in order to promote the development of art education in the new era.

# **4. Thinking about China's Basic Art Education Based on Visual Culture**

## **4.1 The seen and the unseen, and developing the critical "visual literacy"**

Visual literacy is an emerging field of study, first conceptualized by John Debes, founder of the International Association for Visual Literacy, in 1969. He stated that visual literacy is the quality of a set of visual abilities that humans develop through viewing and integrating other visual experiences. The development of this set of abilities is fundamental to normal human learning. When these abilities are developed, they enable visually literate people to distinguish and interpret visual actions, visual objects, and natural or artificial visual symbols. Visual literacy is the basic literacy of the general public in the age of map reading. The ability to see

is innate to people, while the ability to understand needs to be exercised and cultivated later in life. Seeing is only the appearance of things, while understanding is the inner and essential nature of things. “Visual literacy” is the ability to read and understand the visual information that has been seen, a kind of basic visual literacy ability to remove the fog of appearances and establish the inner connection between things. Therefore, Art educators cultivate students’ creative use of this ability, so that they can independently identify, select and discard popular images. They have the ability to distinguish between the seen and the unseen, so that they can better absorb the cultural connotations contained in classical culture and draw nutrients from it, and consciously resist the undesirable culture inundated by popular images.

#### **4.2 Cross-major and interdisciplinary integration**

Traditional art education has been relatively homogeneous, with realistic drawing and sketching being the main task of teaching. In today’s world where art is gradually becoming more lifelike and art carriers and artistic expressions are gradually diversifying, we can draw from many aspects within the discipline such as architecture, sculpture, commercial art as well as art history and art criticism. At the same time, we can make links with other disciplines, build an interdisciplinary knowledge structure network, and establish links between art education and humanistic nature, mathematics, philosophy, computer technology, aesthetics, sociology, etc., thus turning from technical education of aesthetics to humanistic and cultural education of aesthetics.

#### **4.3 Diversification of art education through inclusion**

Visual culture is produced due to a change in the place where people watch videos and images. For art education under the influence of visual culture, we can try to expand the field and scope of art education. It is the traditional classical art-based art education that can be transformed. The use of visual media and technology to visualize classical art can be adapted to the current forms of expression of visual culture, and the ways of art education can be enriched and expanded. We should also focus on the value of everyday visual images and expand the ways and methods of education through multimedia digital.

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