

Mencius' Thought of "Beauty" and Aesthetic Education of Fine Arts in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract—With the rapid development of art education in colleges and universities, the existence of diversified and individualized factors in education has prompted the author to rethink the aesthetic education in colleges and universities. This paper puts forward Mencius' thought of "beauty" to present the importance of the healthy development of art education in colleges and universities, expounds the inspiration of Mencius' thought of "beauty" to the aesthetic education in art major in colleges and universities, their consistency of educational purpose unity of aesthetic experience, and the conformity of teaching path, and demonstrates the inseparability of Mencius' thought of "beauty" and art aesthetic education in colleges and universities.

Keywords—Mencius' thought of "beauty"; fine arts in colleges and universities; aesthetic education

I. INTRODUCTION

In the pre-Qin period, the establishment of Confucian thoughts — "rite" and "music", "harmony" and "unity", "beauty" and "kindness" formed the rudiment of early Chinese aesthetic education. Among those thoughts, the spirit in Mencius' thought of "beauty" is still in a unique style in the current art aesthetic education in colleges and universities. Aesthetic education is an educational activity aimed at cultivating people's aesthetic intuition and cultivating people's moral sentiment through the perception of the existence form of object beauty through people's physiological organs, according to the aesthetic standard. It can be said that this kind of aesthetic education is consistent with Mencius' idea of "beauty". From the perspective of perceptual "beauty", the author expounds the choice of teaching content, teaching form, teaching means and teaching purpose of college art aesthetic education. This paper discusses the aesthetic essence connotation, aesthetic experience process and aesthetic value significance of Mencius' thought of "beauty" in art education in colleges and universities, and demonstrates the inspiration and importance of Mencius' thought of "four virtues" in art education in colleges and universities.

II. THE IDEOLOGICAL CONNOTATION OF MENCIOUS' "BEAUTY"

In the history of Chinese aesthetics, Mencius put forward for the first time the universality of sensory aesthetics and

the individuality of spiritual understanding, and summarized the significance of physiological experience and psychological understanding in the issue of beauty. Mencius said, "Mouths all have the same taste for food. The ear has the same sense of hearing for sound. Eyes have same aesthetic feeling for color. So when it comes to hearts, isn't there anything in common? What do people have in common in their heart? It is truth and righteousness." (*Mengzi · Gaozi I*) He believed that people have common, similar sensory experiences like pleasant taste for the mouth, beautiful voice for the ear and delightful colors for the eye, thus getting great pleasure. If the heart can have righteousness and morality, people will obtain the supreme happiness. In Mencius' view, human's sensory experience and spiritual perception all have the tendency to beauty. It can be seen that Mencius stressed that beauty should not only be experienced by the senses, but also be perceived by virtue, morality and inner character.

At the same time, Mencius used the example of the mouth being pleased by nice taste, the ear being pleased by beautiful voice and the eye being pleased by delightful color as metaphors for "the heart being pleased by the truth and righteousness", by which he pointed out that taste, voice and color can please the sense organs of mouth, ear and eye, while people's heart can be pleased by the truth and righteousness likewise. The mouth, the ear, and the eye are the physiological basis for the mind to experience pleasure so that "the truth and righteousness" can be universally accepted deeply into the heart of everyone, and thus give vitality and soul for the soul to create beauty. However, everyone has the same physiological basis and similar aesthetic habits. That is, taste, color and voice are objective existence. Does it mean everyone can have the realm of moral cultivation of benevolence and righteousness through aesthetic activities? Mencius: of course not. The mind's love for virtue and morality cannot be developed without effort. Instead, only through the process of arduous practice can the character rise to the realm of ethical beauty freely and the love for virtue and morality can be developed." Thus, Mencius' "four origins" education is an experience of spiritual and emotional beauty generated by visual, perceptual and auditory stimulation of object beauty.

III. ENLIGHTENMENT OF MENCIUS' THOUGHT OF "BEAUTY" ON THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF FINE ARTS

Art education is a kind of practical teaching activity with physiological function as the medium. It is always accompanied by the process of understanding the perception of beauty and obtaining the pleasure of the heart for artistic aesthetic creation. "Aesthetics can never be separated from the perceptual world that stimulates the sense of beauty", which states people's perception of beauty, which is exactly the cognitive process of perception. [1] It is generally believed that perception is a simple activity. It is the instinctive activity of human beings and occurs naturally all the time. Although the perception seems simple, in fact, the perception of watching and listening contains very different aesthetic thinking modes, because the nature of aesthetic activities, after all, belongs to the category of human spiritual consciousness activities, and it will be different due to the different forms of human existence. For example, individuals of different ages and classes have totally different aesthetic views on the same aesthetic object. Or for the same aesthetic object, different individuals of the same era and class have different aesthetic feelings due to their different education, professional quality and aesthetic taste. Even individuals of different ages and classes may sometimes have the same or similar aesthetic feelings towards the same aesthetic object under certain conditions. This is as what Mencius said, "When it comes to hearts, isn't there anything in common?" It can be seen that art aesthetic education in colleges and universities is a complicated process of psychological education, rather than a general and simple process of physiological experience education. It must be guided by Mencius' aesthetic education and realize the integrity of college art education effect through scientific and effective education.

Mencius' "beauty" education not only pays attention to people's perception of the beauty of things, but also attaches great importance to people's cultivation of mind, inner and outer cultivation and harmonious beauty of mind. Therefore, in the art education in colleges and universities, only when students master the knowledge of beauty and realize the value of beauty, can they realize the greatest spiritual beauty of humanity. Therefore, Mencius' idea of "beauty" has always occupied the core position in the Confucian education and plays a decisive role in the aesthetic education of fine arts in colleges and universities. Therefore, art education in colleges and universities should consider the aesthetic education of Mencius' "beauty" from the spiritual dimension, and let students feel the beauty through the perception of specific, vivid and typical images, receive the understanding of beauty and get enlightenment in the heart and emotion. From aesthetic education to the "regeneration" of human ethics, the independence and identity of beauty and aesthetics, education and morality in a specific era and in different classes has been reflected. Therefore, the primary task of college art education is not how to draw, but to have the ideological education of beauty first. This is to cultivate and improve students' understanding and judgment of the beauty and ugliness of things, to cultivate students' personality, to sublimate their spiritual realm, and to achieve

the purpose of aesthetic education that uniting of art and character.

IV. CONSISTENCE BETWEEN MENCIUS' THOUGHT OF "BEAUTY" WITH ART AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Art education is a practical aesthetic activity. In the process of discovering, perceiving and accepting beauty of students, whether they can get effective education, promote their own aesthetic accomplishment and get more aesthetic experience in concrete practice, are all closely related to whether the art education in colleges and universities can put Mencius' "beauty" education in the first place. Therefore, art education in colleges and universities should be based on Mencius' thought of "beauty", which is the most suitable teaching form combining aesthetic rules and educational characteristics, and cultivate students' qualities of mind, intelligence, personality and creativity.

A. *The Homogeneity of Aesthetic Education*

Art education is a learning process of discovering, expressing and creating beauty. It requires aesthetic subject to make a concrete observation of the beauty of an object through physical perception, feel and grasp the existence form of object beauty with heart to arouse the inner potential aesthetic consciousness, and transform beauty into a beautiful spiritual conception in the form of experience. In this way can beauty be elevated to a spiritual level and the essential beauty of things is in accord with the spiritual beauty of human nature. How teachers inspire students' aesthetic wisdom through teaching of the image of beauty, cultivating students' mind and sentiment, and integrating aesthetic artistic conception and moral realm is very crucial for the success of art education in colleges and universities. Therefore, art education in colleges and universities should take the ideological connotation of Mencius' "beauty" as the essence of education, seek corresponding education methods or methods, pay attention to the scientific cultivation of students' physiology and psychology behind their way of thinking, and be based on going beyond skill training. In doing so, every educational link, educational step and educational means can reflect the ideological education of beauty. In the end, art education in colleges and universities will transform from skill training to aesthetic education, so as to improve students' aesthetic quality and cultivate moral accomplishment.

B. *The Commonness of the Educational Process from "Perception" to "Spiritual Morality"*

Perception is a kind of experience artistic expression that is most moving and can embody beauty most. The beauty of things not only lies in the external beauty of the original things, but also exists in people's mind. Therefore, students can only feel the existence of the essential value of beauty through the perception of beauty. As Schiller said, "there is no other way to make the sensible man a rational man than to make him an aesthetic man in the first place." [2] That is to say, only the perception of beauty can lead to the understanding of the essence of beauty. Therefore, art aesthetic education in colleges and universities should take

Mencius' "beauty" education as the criterion and pay attention to the excavation, cultivation of aesthetic ability and the cultivation of moral spirit. In this way students can get the moral edification of benevolence and righteousness in the vivid, joyful and interesting aesthetic education activities, in the aesthetic quality training and ideological and moral education level to build a real college art education in line with the needs of the mechanism, so as to get rid of the current situation that art education in colleges and universities is mainly based on skill and skill training.

At present, art teachers in colleges and universities are blindly pursuing norms, systems and forms for the teaching of art knowledge, both in terms of teaching content and teaching form, which goes beyond students' real aesthetic understanding and hinders their acceptance of beauty. For example, the content of teaching materials is arranged in a single, fragmented state of segmentation, therefore students are only exposed to the perception of isolated aesthetic knowledge, rather than the complete composition of their own aesthetic experience. Or they just focus on demonstration and pay attention to the training process of knowledge and skills, which is difficult to achieve the goal of art education in colleges and universities, and also contrary to Mencius' educational thought of "beauty". In particular, the teaching oriented by multimedia, a great progress as it is in the teaching of the times, has greatly weakened the intuitive feelings of students, failing to make them truly experience the existence of the beauty of things so their perception of beauty can only stay in the superficial understanding. Therefore, the primary task of art education in colleges and universities is not only limited to the practice of professional skills. More importantly, teachers should clearly know how to guide students from the cultivation of perceptual aesthetic understanding to the education of personality and moral beauty, so that students can fall in love with fine arts and have art classes effectively, so as to obtain real, good and healthy aesthetic education, and realize the significance and social value of fine arts education in colleges and universities.

C. Convergence of the Purpose of "Teaching" and "Learning"

In the process of art teaching, teachers are the leading force in teaching and students are the main body of teaching, both sides having a role that cannot be ignored. From the perspective of leading force, teachers should lead by example. With the teaching consciousness of "love comes first in teaching", teachers must educate and influence students by being learned with humble manner, and give subtle education demonstration to students in vision and mood. This will let the students realize the inner value of Mencius' "beauty" education, so as to improve the perception and understanding of the beauty of human spirit, and realize the improvement of self-comprehensive quality from the outside to the inside. From the perspective of the subject, only from the perception of the beauty of things to the sublimation of the moral cultivation of human nature, can students truly perceive and understand the value of Mencius' "beauty" education. Therefore, in the process of art education,

teachers must understand each student's understanding and mastery of Mencius' spirit of "beauty", correctly guide students' understanding of the beauty of things, fully mobilize their enthusiasm for aesthetic experience, and give play to the education that combines the experience of beauty of things with moral cultivation. As for students, it is necessary to obtain the intuitive experience of the beauty of the object's appearance on the premise of physiology, so as to achieve the complete display of both internal and external aesthetic sense of human morality. Only in this way, both teachers and students can achieve the goal of common progress from different perspectives and starting points, and achieve the comprehensive improvement of aesthetic quality and self-improvement of human moral cultivation.

Art education is a specific and individualized aesthetic education practice. Every student is different in physical quality, psychological quality, cultural quality and ideological quality, and teachers are often unable to use limited and specific artistic language to explain it. Only through students' intuitive feeling of image beauty stimulates and purifies students' aesthetic emotion can they be taught to use Mencius' thought of "beauty" to perceive and realize beauty. Therefore, teachers should develop different teaching methods according to the characteristics of different students. That is, to carry out the aesthetic education according to the characteristics of each student's age, aesthetic ability, psychological characteristics, thinking state and other conditions, so as to make the students' aesthetic consciousness sublimate from the initial perceptual aesthetic to the rational aesthetic through "teaching" and "instructing". Therefore, the teaching method of "teaching students according to their aptitude" is still extremely important for students' aesthetic education. Featured by exerting advantages and avoiding disadvantages, this method adopts different aesthetic teaching methods according to students' individual characteristics based on the objective reality, to inspire and induce students to actively perceive and experience the beauty of things. Teachers' actions and facial expressions inspire teachers' enthusiasm in "teaching" and motivate students' initiative in "learning" and the running-in of "teaching" and "learning" enables teachers and students to establish a tacit understanding of beauty, so as to improve the comprehensive quality and educational function of fine arts education in colleges and universities. Thus, Mencius' idea of "beauty" is the main spirit of art education in colleges and universities, which is an educational practice that unifies the objective existence form and essential connotation of beauty, and the embodiment of students' ideal, sentiment, character and creation of beauty.

V. CONCLUSION

Aesthetics, as a spiritual activity of recognizing beauty, experiencing beauty and judging beauty, is an artistic form of expressing people's thoughts and feelings through the judgment of beauty through physiological perception. Its aesthetic process and results must conform to the specific aesthetic standards of natural beauty and social beauty. Therefore, aesthetic education is to improve students' feeling, hobby and evaluation ability of natural beauty, social beauty

and artistic beauty, and cultivate civilized behavior and moral quality as the educational purpose. Pre-Qin Confucianism believed that only through aesthetic education could the feelings, reason and will of the educated be coordinated, the spirit be liberated, the human nature be perfected, the personality be developed, and the life realm of the unity of truth, goodness and beauty and freedom be realized, which is also the value meaning and ultimate goal of art education in colleges and universities. [3] Therefore, art education is not only the cultivation of aesthetic taste and creativity, but also a means of moral education. It can be said that the healthy development of art education in colleges and universities is inseparable from Mencius' thought of "beauty", the neglect of which in art education in colleges and universities will make students' professional quality and moral accomplishment out of the question.

Mencius' idea of beauty is irreplaceable in art education in colleges and universities, with the characteristics of image education, emotional education as well as "using beauty to enlighten wisdom and accumulate goodness". It recognizes and embodies beauty through aesthetic activities, stimulates sensuous response to beauty under the infection of beauty and forms the perception, appreciation, understanding, imagination and creation of beauty, so as to make the student's aesthetic ability and the cultivation of human moral character obtains the comprehensive healthy development. Therefore, how college art teachers use the form of beauty to infect and edify students' personality beauty through scientific method and how do they correctly cultivate students' aesthetic sense, healthy aesthetic sentiment and aesthetic creativity, and so on, are the top priority of art education in colleges and universities, which is inseparable from the guidance of Mencius' thought of "beauty".

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