

The Theoretical Logic and Practical Pathways for Enhancing University Students' Aesthetic Education Literacy through Local Traditional Culture

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Abstract: This paper addresses prominent issues in current university aesthetic education: simplistic teaching methods that fail to cultivate aesthetic sensibility; underutilization of local cultural resources limiting critical aesthetic training; and constrained practical activities hindering the development of aesthetic creativity. Within the context of comprehensively strengthening aesthetic education in the new era, this study analyzes the theoretical basis and internal logic for its integration with local traditional culture, proposing a "Three-Dimensional Pathway" to enhance students' aesthetic literacy. This pathway comprises: 1) Engaging through Emotion by constructing an aesthetic education system based on local traditional culture to refine students' aesthetic perception; 2) Educating through Beauty by expanding related resources to elevate students' aesthetic judgment; and 3) Transforming through Culture by developing aesthetic practices to foster students' aesthetic creativity. The synergistic effect of these dimensions enriches pedagogical models in higher education, promoting the holistic and sustainable development of students' aesthetic literacy.

Keywords: Local Traditional Culture, University Aesthetic Education, Aesthetic Perception, Aesthetic Judgment, Aesthetic Creativity.

1. Introduction

Under the context of the new era's aesthetic education reform, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Notice on the Comprehensive Implementation of the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action," proposing new strategic requirements for universities. It emphasizes immersing students in aesthetic education to enhance their core competencies, including cultural understanding, aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and creative practice. However, in practice, university aesthetic education still faces challenges such as monotonous teaching methods, insufficient utilization of local cultural resources, and limited forms of practical activity. As an essential component of China's outstanding traditional culture, local traditional culture contains unique aesthetic value and educational functions. How to achieve its creative transformation and systematic integration into university aesthetic education has thus become an urgent issue. Based on the resource advantages of local tradition, this study explores the theoretical logic and practical pathways for integrating it into university aesthetic education. A "tripartite synergistic model" of "Aesthetic Perception, Aesthetic Judgment, and Aesthetic Creativity" is proposed to meet the new demands for aesthetic education and promote the comprehensive enhancement of university students' aesthetic literacy.

2. Current Situation and Problems in the Development of University Aesthetic Education

In the current talent cultivation system of higher education, aesthetic education is entrusted with the important mission of enhancing students' aesthetic literacy, nurturing a humanistic spirit, and stimulating creative potential. However, practical implementation reveals evident problems in curriculum

design, teaching methods, and practical pathways. These include an incomplete aesthetic education system that lacks emotional cultivation, resulting in underdeveloped aesthetic perception; insufficient utilization of local cultural resources, which hampers the training of aesthetic judgment; and constrained forms of aesthetic practice, leading to inadequate development of aesthetic creativity. These issues diminish the educational effectiveness of aesthetic education and limit the holistic development of students' aesthetic literacy.

2.1 "Perceiving without Connecting": Inadequate Emotional Cultivation and Weak Aesthetic Perception

The aesthetic education curriculum in many universities remains underdeveloped. Existing courses predominantly focus on Western art, failing to establish a systematic framework grounded in Chinese traditional and local cultures. Teaching methods, still largely lecture-based, lack effective strategies for guiding emotional engagement in aesthetic experiences. Consequently, students often remain passive recipients, able to "see the form but not feel the warmth," which inhibits the development of genuine emotional resonance. This issue stems primarily from teachers' limited understanding of the affective dimension of aesthetic education and a systemic neglect of emotional cultivation in curriculum design. As a result, aesthetic education often devolves into a formalistic and knowledge-transmission exercise, failing to achieve its fundamental aim of enriching the inner person through beauty.

2.2 "Knowing without Discriminating": Inadequate Utilization of Cultural Resources and Underdeveloped Aesthetic Judgment

In recent years, the "Refined Arts on Campus" initiative has introduced performances by national and local art troupes to

universities, providing students with high-quality artistic exposure and contributing to the inheritance of traditional culture. However, these activities remain infrequent and episodic, failing to be systematically integrated into the aesthetic education curriculum. While students may gain a fleeting appreciation for local culture, they lack sustained engagement necessary for deep reflection and critical analysis. The cultivation of aesthetic judgment requires rich and continuous cultural contexts that foster rational comparison and discernment. Merely watching a performance of Cantonese opera, lion dance, or martial arts—without critical guidance regarding its historical background, value connotations, and aesthetic principles—fails to transform these cultural resources into effective training for aesthetic thinking. This issue primarily stems from the insufficient incorporation of local cultural resources into the curriculum and a superficial understanding of traditional culture among educators, which together hinder the development of students' critical reflective capacities.

2.3 “Teaching without Creating”: Deficiencies in Practical Design and Inadequate Aesthetic Creativity

Current aesthetic education practices in universities predominantly involve organized student visits to off-campus bases. These activities are often characterized by large participant numbers, brief durations, and a lack of interactive engagement, reducing them to superficial tours rather than profound experiential learning. Consequently, students remain passive observers, deprived of opportunities for active participation and personal expression. Compounding this issue, practical components typically hold minimal weight in terms of credit hours within the overall curriculum, resulting in a poor integration with theoretical instruction and consequent student apathy, or even resistance. This marginalization and simplistic design of practical activities ultimately stifle the development of aesthetic creativity. The root causes lie in the systemic undervaluation of practical training within the curriculum and a predominance of observation-based models that lack open-ended, exploratory, and innovative tasks.

3. Theoretical Basis and Internal Logic for Integrating Local Traditional Culture into University Aesthetic Education

Embodied cognition theory, which emerged in the 1990s, challenges the traditional view of cognition as abstract reasoning. It posits that cognition arises from the interaction between the body and its environment, with knowledge and meaning being constructed through bodily experiences, sensory engagement, and practical activities [1]. For aesthetic education, this theory reveals the intrinsic connection between aesthetic perception and bodily experience: the understanding of “beauty” is formed through physical action, sensory feeling, and participatory practice. Local traditional culture, particularly Lingnan art forms such as Cantonese opera, martial arts, and pottery, is characterized by physicality, skill, and experiential learning. Its aesthetic value is realized not through static contemplation but through active bodily participation in movement, rhythm, and creation. Integrating these cultural forms into university aesthetic education guides students to generate aesthetic understanding through bodily

perception and situated experience, thereby enhancing their aesthetic literacy.

Marxist philosophy asserts that “through his own activity, through his own labour, man not only changes nature, but also changes himself; through practical activity, he proves himself to be a conscious species-being, whose free and all-round development is realized precisely in this conscious practical activity” [2]. Aesthetic education, as a form of sensibility education, promotes individual self-formation and spiritual freedom by harmonizing the sensuous and the rational. Local traditional culture, imbued with a creative spirit and practical wisdom, emphasizes self-cultivation and social contribution through skill practice and aesthetic creation, embodying a three-dimensional educational value of “affect-cognition-practice.” Its integration into university aesthetic education not only activates students' bodily participation and emotional resonance but also guides them to enhance rational thinking and creative capabilities through aesthetic practice, thereby fostering the systematic development of aesthetic literacy and contributing to the all-round development of the individual.

3.1 Emotional Immersion and Cultural Affinity: The Internal Foundation for Activating Aesthetic Perception

The cultivation of aesthetic perception constitutes the most fundamental objective of aesthetic education. It transcends the mere accumulation of knowledge, representing instead a capacity to resonate with beauty, life, and culture through lived experience. Aesthetic education truly reaches the spiritual level only when students are genuinely “moved” by what they encounter. However, in contemporary university classrooms, beauty is often rendered abstract, and the warmth of emotional connection is diluted, hindering its transformation into inner resonance. The integration of local traditional culture effectively addresses this “empathy deficit” by infusing aesthetic education with vitality and immediacy.

From the perspective of aesthetic psychology, emotional immersion plays a foundational role in cultivating aesthetic perception. The organic integration of local traditional culture into the curriculum can dissolve aesthetic barriers stemming from cultural distance. Lingnan culture, for instance, is rooted in the historical and lived practices of the region, fostering a natural affinity with local students. Incorporating Lingnan traditions such as Cantonese opera, martial arts, and pottery into teaching allows students to engage with these arts through multiple sensory channels—visual, auditory, and tactile. As one scholar notes, “Lingnan intangible cultural heritage provides students with rich aesthetic experiences through its unique artistic style and exquisite craftsmanship” [3]. When the aesthetic object shares a natural congruence with students' daily lives and cultural environment, they can be deeply touched and influenced within a familiar milieu. Consequently, aesthetic education evolves from an external mandate into an internal realization and participatory experience.

3.2 Value Cultivation and Intellectual Enlightenment: The Ideational Basis for Supporting Aesthetic Judgment

The cultivation of aesthetic judgment represents a pivotal component of university aesthetic education. It extends

beyond the mere discovery of beauty, requiring students to analyze, evaluate, and form independent value stances through rational inquiry. This capacity relies not only on accumulated aesthetic sensibility but also on comparison, reflection, and discernment within specific cultural contexts.

Local traditional culture, as a repository of regional history and social values, serves not merely as an object of aesthetic appreciation but as a vital textual resource for cultivating rational thought and value discrimination. As one scholar notes, “Lingnan culture is an important component of Chinese excellent culture, possessing distinct regional characteristics. Through its long-term development, it has gradually formed distinctive features of ‘assimilating diverse elements, being pragmatic and enterprising, daring to be the first, and being open and inclusive’” [4]. This spirit of compatibility and innovation reflects the practical rationality and value wisdom forged through historical convergence and cultural interaction in the Lingnan region. As an integral part of China’s excellent traditional culture, the ideas, humanistic spirit, and moral norms it carries provide students with crucial references for value judgment. “Chinese excellent traditional culture contains abundant ideas and concepts, humanistic spirit, and moral norms, and is an important spiritual wealth of the Chinese nation” [5].

Integrating local traditional culture into aesthetic education guides students to explore the ethical, philosophical, and social logic underlying artistic forms while perceiving their beauty. For instance, they can analyze the concepts of ritual and social hierarchy embedded in the librettos and conventions of Cantonese opera; examine the value balance between “coupling hardness and softness” and “emphasizing both martial skill and virtue” in martial arts techniques; and critique the stylistic choices between realism and exaggeration in Shiwan ceramic sculpture. By discerning the value positions inherent in these arts, students establish connections between specific artistic forms and abstract value concepts, thereby systematically enhancing their aesthetic judgment.

3.3 Skill Integration and Innovative Transformation: The Mechanism for Fostering Aesthetic Creativity

Aesthetic creativity represents the highest goal of aesthetic education—the ability to transform perception into original expression. As Marx emphasized in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, humans realize their essential nature through free creative activity. Local traditional culture, with its diverse artistic forms and sophisticated craftsmanship, provides fertile ground for creative development. It encompasses performing arts, visual arts, crafts, and movement arts, offering rich resources for creative exploration. As one scholar notes, “Comprehensive aesthetic education can utilize traditional cultural resources, encouraging students to discover and create through thematic practical activities, thereby experiencing the charm of artistic creation” [6]. Integrating practices such as Shiwan pottery, Cantonese embroidery, and lion dance into university programs enables students to bridge traditional aesthetics with contemporary expression. Through participatory and experiential learning, students transition from passive appreciation to active creation, completing the cycle from

perceiving to producing beauty.

4. Practical Pathways for Enhancing University Students’ Aesthetic Literacy

The integration of local traditional culture into university aesthetic education transcends mere cultural resource utilization, representing an evolution in educational philosophy. Through systematic development across curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and practical implementation, a three-dimensional framework emerges for cultivating aesthetic literacy through emotional resonance, rational thinking, and creative expression.

4.1 Engaging through Emotion: Constructing an Aesthetic Education System to Enhance Aesthetic Perception

Aesthetic perception forms the foundational objective of university aesthetic education, serving as prerequisite for developing students’ aesthetic literacy and cultural identity. Local traditional culture, with its historical depth and formal diversity rooted in regional practices and collective memory, provides authentic cultural imagery that stimulates emotional connection. Research in aesthetic psychology confirms that aesthetic perception develops through the interaction between sensory experience and emotional resonance.

4.1.1 Developing a Local Culture Curriculum System to Strengthen Cultural Identity

Universities should systematically incorporate local traditional culture into aesthetic education, creating an integrated “theory-experience-reflection-creation” structure. For instance, courses like “Lingnan Martial Arts Culture and Aesthetics” could explore the kinetic beauty and philosophical principles of Wing Chun, while “Ceramic Art and Craft Aesthetics” workshops enable students to understand formal harmony through hands-on creation. This systematic approach deepens aesthetic experience through practice while fostering enduring cultural identification.

4.1.2 Innovating Teaching Methodology to Deepen Emotional Engagement

Aesthetic education should transition from lecture-based instruction to experiential, situated, and interactive learning in authentic cultural contexts. Examples include organizing dragon boat racing during relevant festivals to experience collective coordination, or offering “Southern Lion Art and Visual Aesthetics” with demonstrations by heritage practitioners. Such immersive experiences transform students from passive recipients to active participants, enhancing perception through multi-sensory engagement.

4.1.3 Curating Campus Cultural Activities to Create an Aesthetic Environment

Universities should embed local traditional culture into campus life through cultural festivals, art weeks, and intangible heritage exhibitions. A “Lingnan Food Culture Festival” featuring culinary competitions, lectures, and etiquette demonstrations enables students to appreciate

regional aesthetics through gastronomic experience. These activities strengthen emotional connections to local culture while providing continuous environmental support for perceptual development.

4.2 Educating Through Beauty: Expanding Aesthetic Resources to Develop Aesthetic Judgment

Aesthetic judgment represents the rational dimension of aesthetic education—the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and form independent assessments. Universities should enhance this competency through optimized curricula, technological integration, and institutional partnerships, as its development requires both accumulated experience and guided reflection within meaningful cultural contexts.

4.2.1 Integrate local art resources and optimize aesthetic education content

Local universities should fully integrate regional arts like Cantonese opera, ceramics, and paper-cutting into academic programs. A seminar on “Cantonese Opera and Contemporary Stage Aesthetics” could examine traditional performance conventions alongside modern production techniques, while “Shiwan Ceramic Culture Salons” might analyze the ethical and social dimensions embodied in material culture. Such approaches develop critical analytical capabilities through cultural interrogation.

4.2.2 Implementing “Local Culture + Technology” Models to Enrich Understanding

Digital technologies offer innovative approaches to traditional culture learning. Virtual reality platforms can visualize the aesthetic principles of martial arts movements, while digital heritage archives provide interactive research environments. This technological integration not only enhances engagement but also supplies concrete evidence for aesthetic analysis and judgment formation.

4.2.3 Establishing University-Community Partnerships for Resource Sharing

Following national guidelines for aesthetic education enhancement, universities should collaborate with cultural institutions like the Museum, Cantonese Opera theaters, and Dragon Boat Culture Center to establish off-campus practice bases. Student involvement in exhibition curation, critical writing, and cultural research fosters both social responsibility and evidence-based judgment through direct experience.

4.3 Transforming Through Culture: Develop the Practice to Foster Creativity

Aesthetic creativity constitutes the highest objective of aesthetic education—the capacity to transform perception and skill into original expression. As Marx recognized, creative labor manifests essential human nature. In aesthetic education, creativity encompasses not only technical innovation but also cultural reimagination, for which local traditions provide diverse inspiration.

4.3.1 Creating Innovation Platforms to Activate Creative

Potential

Universities should establish dedicated spaces like art labs, pottery studios, and performance groups to support sustained creative practice. During traditional festivals like the Qiuse Parade, students might design contemporary interpretations of traditional floats using modern materials and technologies, thus revitalizing cultural expressions through creative engagement.

4.3.2 Promoting Project-Based Learning for Interdisciplinary Creativity

Cross-disciplinary initiatives expand creative possibilities. A “Digital Intangible Heritage Museum” project could involve students from art, technology, and humanities disciplines in reconstructing cultural artifacts through 3D modeling and interactive design. Similarly, integrating traditional Lingnan patterns into contemporary product design merges aesthetic tradition with functional innovation.

4.3.3 Deepening Industry-Academia Collaboration to Drive Cultural Innovation

Aesthetic education should connect with cultural enterprises and heritage workshops to co-develop products that reinterpret traditional culture—from ceramic accessories to Lingnan-inspired stationery. Communication students might design immersive cultural tourism experiences, testing creative concepts in public contexts and achieving the social transformation of aesthetic creativity.

The three pathways—educating through emotion, beauty, and culture—are interrelated and progressive, collectively guiding the development of aesthetic education from emotional experience to rational judgment, from value cultivation to creative expression, and from classroom learning to societal practice. The integration of local traditional culture not only enhances the appeal and effectiveness of aesthetic education in universities but also fosters the cultivation of students’ aesthetic perception, criticism, and creativity. Ultimately, it contributes to the construction of cultural confidence in the new era and to the creative transformation and innovative development of China’s outstanding local cultural heritage.

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