

## Cai Yuanpei's Thought of Promoting Moral Education through Aesthetic Education and Its Contemporary Value

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**Keywords:** Cai Yuanpei, The thought of aesthetic education promoting moral education, The contemporary value

**Abstract:** Cai Yuanpei is the pioneer and practitioner of the thought of aesthetic education in China. His thought of “promoting moral education through aesthetic education” breaks the disciplinary boundary between aesthetic education and moral education, and achieves harmonious unification of rationality and sensibility, which is of great significance for the formation of moral education system in China. This paper starts from the theory basis of the formation of his thought, by combing, summing up its target, characteristics and methods and combining with the reality to learn the revelation of time value. Cai Yuanpei, the founder of China's capitalist education system at the beginning of the 20th century, was honored as “the leader of the academic circle and the model of the world” by later generations. His thought of “promoting moral education through aesthetic education” breaks the disciplinary boundary between aesthetic education and moral education, and plays an important role in the development of moral education in China.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Historical Background

After the opium war of 1840, China was invaded by western powers and became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Some people of insight began to see the world and started to learn from the west. From learning western instruments to learning western systems, all of them ended in failure. However, social contradictions became more and more intense, and the social order was destroyed unprecedentedly. The old moral order, behavioral norms and social rules began to lose their effectiveness. After the failure of the reform, Cai Yuanpei, on the basis of summing up the experience and lessons, pointed out that the lack of social morality, the weak public consciousness and the ignorance and corruption of the government were the fundamental reasons for the failure of the reform. Only through the reform and education, cultivating innovative talents, can we awaken the public consciousness, form social morality that suits the development of the times, and transform the society. Among the education that arouses people, moral education and aesthetic education are the most respected. From this, we can also find that the aesthetic education advocated by Cai Yuanpei has a strong moral education color, which is also the basis for the formation of Cai Yuanpei's thought of aesthetic education and moral education.

#### 1.2 Accumulation of Traditional Chinese Culture

Since Cai Yuanpei was a child, he was educated and influenced by Chinese traditional culture and gradually transformed into his own internal culture. Therefore, his thoughts were inevitably influenced by Chinese traditional culture. Cai Yuanpei thinks that the education of rites and music is the historical origin of the thought of etiquette and morality and aesthetic education in our country. He believed that rites were the hierarchical norms formulated by the ruling class, whose purpose was to restrict people's thoughts and behaviors and maintain social order. And music is to use beauty to touch people's emotions, affect their hearts, coordinate contradictions, can make people actively accept ideological and moral edification, and then improve the inner culture. If there are rules of fun and disrespect, the phenomenon of disorder and disorder will appear, and even harm

the ruling class's rule; if the harmony is polite and not happy, it will make the social contradictions become sharp. There is music in rites and politeness in music. Only by combining the education methods of rites and music can we realize a complete moral education. Therefore, the aesthetic education thought of Cai Yuanpei always contains a strong connotation of moral education thought, advocating that there is virtue in beauty and virtue in beauty.

### **1.3 Accumulation of Western Culture**

Cai Yuanpei has rich experience of studying abroad. During the study tour, Cai Yuanpei often received the edification of music, fine arts and other environments, and learned courses related to music, fine arts, literature, history and philosophy, which laid a solid foundation for his aesthetic education and moral education. In addition, Cai Yuanpei was deeply influenced by the aesthetic thoughts of Kant and Schiller, and divided the world into phenomena and entities. People should not only pursue the transient value of the phenomenon, but also look through the phenomenon to see the essence and pursue the transcendental value, from the phenomenon to the entity. The ability to transcend the physical world and the physical world can only be relied on aesthetic education. "The aesthete, as beauty and dignity are concerned, lies between the phenomenal world and the physical world. Cai Yuanpei's understanding of western aesthetic thought laid a solid foundation for the formation of his aesthetic thought.

## **2. The Content of Cai Yuanpei's Thought of Promoting Moral Education through Aesthetic Education**

### **2.1 Goal of Aesthetic Education to Promote the Moral Education Thought**

The aesthetic education advocated by Cai Yuanpei is a wide range of aesthetic education. He thinks that aesthetic education is "applying the theory of aesthetics to education and aiming at cultivating emotion. Life is nothing more than the will, interpersonal relations, great behavior, so the purpose of education, in order to make everyone have appropriate behavior, that is to take moral education as the center." [1] He expressed a similar view in his 1917 article "the religion of aesthetic education": "pure aesthetic education, therefore, cultivates one's feelings, makes one have noble and pure habits, and makes one lose one's sight and one's mind at the expense of others." [1] Thus, Cai Yuanpei is the direct purpose of aesthetic education edify sentiment, and the deeper purpose is to cultivate people's noble emotion and moral character, purify the soul, break a person I see, eliminate the concerns, cultivate noble purity of personality, to implement aesthetic education function of moral education.

### **2.2 The Characteristics of Aesthetic Education Promoting Moral Education**

#### **2.2.1 Universal Feature**

Cai Yuanpei believes that aesthetic education promotes moral education to be universal, it will not show different characteristics because of different people, and beauty can be shared. As he pointed out in his 1917 article "religion in the generation of aesthetic education", "beauty is the universality, and there is no difference between us... If I look at the western mountains near Beijing, others also look at them. I am nothing less than man, and man is nothing less than me... Then know that aesthetic universality" [1] universality of aesthetic characteristics, make the person I see no longer exists, naturally there would be no interested, not interested, don't be a contemptible desire the temptation to keep continue, edify sentiment, lead to the noble human date, achieve the goal of moral education.

#### **2.2.2 Beyond Utilitarian Characteristics**

Cai Yuanpei believes that aesthetic education has the characteristics of super utility, which can integrate people's own views, eliminate people's despicable desires, maintain a state of mind, and thus enter the realm of truth, goodness and beauty. He once said in an article that "beauty must not have a stake... To be attached to the tragedy of the magnificent, to be attached to the comedy of the

capital, are enough to break my view, to dispute the gain and loss of interests, then it is enough to cultivate the spirit of nature, so that the day is close to the noble, solid enough [2]. Professor Tan Chuanbao once pointed out in an interview that “one of the defects of moral education in China lies in the prevalence of utilitarianism”. To make up for this shortcoming, “we should treat others with something that is not utilitarian”. The non-utilitarian characteristics of aesthetic education can just make up for the deficiency of moral education and achieve the unity of utilitarianism and non-utilitarianism, as well as the unity of beauty and kindness.

## **2.3 Methods of Aesthetic Education Promoting Moral Education**

### **2.3.1 Family Aesthetic Education**

Family is the starting point of life. Cai Yuanpei pointed out in the method of aesthetic education implementation that “if we want to make thorough education, we should focus on the earliest step... But at least we should start from fetal education.”[1] All crude, obscene, tragic, grotesque works can not appear. Cai Yuanpei also believes that parents need to demonstrate with the body, elegant clothes, all the ugly language and rude behavior can not appear in front of the child, in a subtle way to promote the child to develop a good virtue.

### **2.3.2 School Aesthetic Education**

School learning is the first step for a person to step into the society from the family. People's outlook on life, world view and values are mostly formed in this period. Therefore, Cai Yuanpei attaches great importance to the moral function of aesthetic education in school. He thinks that aesthetic education is not equal to the fine arts, “all the school subjects did not have nothing to do with aesthetic education [1]”, pay attention to the aesthetic education factor, each subject completed osmosis of human nature baptism, edify sentiment, unknowingly went to cultivate the personality of teenagers purity. In addition to the school curriculum, Cai Yuanpei also attaches great importance to the construction of the beautiful environment of the school, the construction of the school buildings, the placement of utensils, modeling photography and even the display of students' achievements have put forward the requirements of beauty, so as to cultivate morality in the embellishment of things in silent.

### **2.3.3 Social Aesthetic Education**

According to Cai Yuanpei, students' study time in school is only a few decades, and the time and content of aesthetic education in school are limited. Therefore, Cai Yuanpei also put forward social aesthetic education, and advocated that social aesthetic education should start with special organs, art galleries, concerts, theaters, historical museums and so on are very good places for aesthetic education. In addition to the special institutions, Cai Yuanpei also believes that the social aesthetic education should take the city and township as the foothold to ensure that the streets are beautiful and tidy, and the citizens' behavior is civilized and harmonious, so as to realize the goal of aesthetic education and aesthetic ethics.

## **3. The Contemporary Value of Aesthetic Education Promoting Moral Education**

### **3.1 Based on the Background of the Times, Create an Aesthetic Education System with Chinese Characteristics**

Cai Yuanpei always believed that the reason why Chinese people failed to learn from the west was that they failed to learn with their own minds, rather than unwilling to learn. Blind self-conceit or blind westernization are undesirable and will eventually lead to failure.” Therefore, although Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought was deeply influenced by the western Kant and Schiller .it was inclusive and deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese culture. Compared with western countries, the study of aesthetic education in China has a relatively short history. However, in the research, we must pay attention not to adopt doctrines, blindly imitate the west and directly copy the views or practices of the west. We should base on the actual national conditions of our country and the

excellent traditional Chinese culture, take its essence and create an aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics.

### **3.2 Explore Factors of Aesthetic Education of School Curriculum and Promote the Construction of All-Round Education**

From Cai Yuanpei's thought of aesthetic education, we can know that all the courses of the school contain rich aesthetic education factors, fully explore the aesthetic factors of each course, and permeate aesthetic education into the whole process of education, that is, all the courses of the school should play the role of moral education, and all the teachers should assume the responsibility of educating people. To permeate moral education into the whole process of education and teaching is to promote the effective development of all-round education. Under the guidance of the concept of moral education, each course should explore the moral goodness of the meaning and purpose of beauty, presuppose the regular content of moral education, and create the moral situation in line with the aesthetic feeling, so as to edify the moral sentiment of the educational objects.

### **3.3 Create a Beautiful Educational Environment, Pay Attention to the Role of Film and Television**

Environment is a necessary condition for the formation of a person's moral personality and character. Therefore, we can also say that building a beautiful education environment is the only way to cultivate noble and pure personality. In addition to the establishment of theaters, museums and other special organs, should also attach great importance to the role of film and television. Actors have to be specially educated." "The films must be censored, and all silly burlesque, sinister detective cases, and obscene love dramas must be removed. Only landscapes and literary works." With the change of human living habits, watching plays and listening to songs on the Internet has become an important way of life for people. In the construction of educational environment, we must pay attention to the power of film and television. The production of music films should be close to the reality of life, close to the masses, with strong artistic and ornamental value. More films popular with the masses should be developed, and films that are vulgar, entertaining and kitsch should be rejected, so that people can get aesthetic pleasure and purify their hearts.

## **4. Conclusion**

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education promotes the ideological content and forms of moral education, which is still very important for the formation and development of the moral education system in contemporary China. In the 21st century, we should combine Cai Yuanpei's thought with reality, fully exploit the aesthetic resources, form the form of moral education in the linkage of family, school and society, and promote the construction of all-round education.

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