

The Research on the Spread of Western Aesthetic Education Theory in China

--Taking Joseph Beuys's Social Aesthetic Education Concept as an Example

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Abstract. The Western aesthetic education theory has developed to its peak with the maturity of the German classical philosophical system. German aestheticians represented by Kant and Schiller advocated emancipation of human nature and stimulated people's free will. Their ideas have also spread to China and had a significant influence on the formation of Chinese modern aesthetic education system. Although there are similarities between Chinese and Western aesthetic education systems, there are also differences. This paper takes Joseph Beuys's social aesthetic education concept as an example to explore the characteristics of artists' aesthetic education concepts and the dissemination characteristics of Western aesthetic education theories in China. Through the research results, it is found that the spread of Western aesthetic education theories in China is related to the influence of Western social concepts on China, and this paper analyzed the current situation of the spread of Western aesthetic education theory in China, and found that for the spread of Western aesthetic education theories in China, people should integrate art education with the teaching of other disciplines, socialize art education, and cultivate an interactive mode of organic combination of professional classroom. The author hopes that through this research, it can provide some contributions to those who study this field in the future.

Keywords: Western; Aesthetic education theory; Joseph Beuys; China.

1. Introduction

Western aesthetic education theory originated from the aesthetic ideal of pursuing self-personality in ancient Greece. Aesthetic activities such as poetry, painting, and dance nourish people's inner world and cultivate people's aesthetic quality. The development of aesthetic education in this period provided rich nourishment for the development of Europe in the Middle Ages, but from a theoretical point of view, the aesthetic education at that time was just a tool for rational education, and the significance of aesthetic education to the development of individual aesthetics was often ignored [1]. After the Renaissance, the Western aesthetic education theory entered the stage of epistemological exploration and improvement, and the aesthetic education theory in this period laid the foundation for the peak period of German classical aesthetics. At the end of the 18th century, German classical aestheticians represented by Kant and Schiller pushed the systematic study of aesthetic education to the peak, advocating the freedom of art and aesthetics. The aesthetic education philosophy of this period had a profound impact on Beuys's artistic concept.

Beuys's works are always full of philosophical factors and anti-traditional ideas, and his personal life experience is as full of mystery and controversy as his artworks. Active in the second half of the 20th century, Beuys was not only a high-profile artist, but also a controversial politician who combined his political opinions with his art works. This also caused him and his art to be full of vague uncertainty, obscure thinking and indefinable complexity. Beuys put forward the concept of "expanded artistic concept" [1] and "social sculpture", he believed that art is creation, everyone can be an artist, and everyone can be creative. In artistic creation, Beuys first applied these two concepts to the breakthrough of traditional materials, expanding the range of materials, using oil, animals, felt, honey and other unconventional objects as materials for sculpture. This kind of expansion behavior gradually extended from materials to spiritual boundaries in his artistic career. In his opinion,

sculpture is no longer a material behavior. Beuys regards society as a large-scale sculpture, and human thought is a tool for sculpting, while creation gives human the ability to sculpt.

Creativity, as one of the most central parts of Beuys' artistic conception, is also crucial in his philosophy of aesthetic education. In art education, the cultivation of self-awareness is particularly important, that is, individual creativity advocated by Beuys. The cultivation of creativity is the crystallization of talent and acquired self-cultivation. Beuys established the Free International University at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1973. The establishment of this experimental teaching program is a key practice of Beuys's artistic concept in the field of aesthetic education, and it is also a breakthrough in Western aesthetic education thought. Beuys's thought of aesthetic education was deeply influenced by the philosophical thoughts of German philosophers such as Schiller and Kant, and extended on their basis, with the dual attributes of classical and contemporary.

The development of aesthetic education in modern China is accompanied by the turbulent social and cultural environment. On the one hand, it extensively absorbs the trend of Western aesthetic education, and on the other hand, it also builds an aesthetic education system according to China's own cultural environment and aesthetic needs. Under the current situation of exam-oriented education, technological fetishism and ecological crisis in modern China, the improvement of art education in China can help improve people's psychological problems and stimulate people's creativity. This is beneficial for coping with the challenges of the times and society, overcoming some social drawbacks, improving people's quality of life and promoting the construction of socialist spiritual civilization. This paper is divided into four chapters, which respectively study the overview of Joseph Beuys and his ideas, the dissemination path of Western aesthetic education theories in China, the current situation of the dissemination of Western aesthetic education theories in China, and draw conclusions, hoping to be helpful for those who study this field in the future.

2. The Overview of Joseph Beuys's Ideas

Joseph Beuys was a loyal supporter of the German mystic philosopher Rudolf Steiner. Steiner's anthroposophical theory had a profound influence on Beuys's artistic creation and artistic conception. The traces of these ideas can be found in Beuys' s art work. From the use of unconventional materials such as grease and gold foil as sculptural materials to the extensive use of blackboards as a medium in teaching, Joseph Beuys is emulating and continuing Steiner's ideas. His fascination and love for these unconventional materials are inseparable from his own experience. One of the more common statements is that he had an unfortunate crash in the process of joining the army in World War II. When he was rescued, he found himself wrapped in felt and honey. The near-death experience gave him artistic inspiration. His 1965 performance art work "Explaining Painting to a Dead Rabbit" showed his groundbreaking side to the public. Holding a dead rabbit in his arms, he lowered his head and kept whispering to the dead rabbit. The whole act lasted for three hours, and the audience watched Boyce through the glass window [2]. What Joseph Beuys wants to convey is the malleability of artistic concepts. Art has no boundaries and thresholds. Beuys's artistic behavior itself is a process of remodeling.

The kinship between Nietzsche and Steiner also determines that Beuys's artistic concept is closely related to Nietzsche. Nietzsche believed that the essence of freedom lies in creation, including the creation of ideas and the creation of actions. Beuys also continued his view and highly affirmed the creativity of ideas in art [3]. Important artistic concepts such as "everyone is an artist", "social sculpture" and "expanded artistic concept" are inseparable in his art career. Beuys's aesthetic education theory also mainly originated from "Everyone is an artist", this sentence, as a widely spread slogan-style declaration, does not mean that everyone can become an artist, but wants to express that everyone has the potential to become an artist, and this potential is what Beuys values a lot in his philosophy of aesthetic education. His aesthetic education thought was also deeply influenced by German aesthetic education theorist Schiller. Schiller believes that art education should aim at

cultivating perfect personality and promoting people's all-round development. The core of art education is to cultivate creative spirit. He fully affirmed the free development of human beings and the free realm of aesthetics. Beuys was inspired by this and incorporated Schiller's aesthetic education concept into his teaching at the University of Düsseldorf, advocating the development of students' creativity, and then founded the Free International University to further put his aesthetic education concept into practice.

As an experimental new university, Free International University has multiple attributes. It is not only a self-managing and self-running educational institution, but also a long-term social participation art project with a high degree of freedom and inclusiveness. The setting of interdisciplinary courses allows people to see the new concept of Beuys's free art. Traditional art subjects such as painting and sculpture only account for a small part of the curriculum, while the rest of the courses are more about the diversity of different fields. Subjects, such as epistemology, sociology, electrical engineering, speculative science, perception theory and other majors, as well as ecology and evolution. The setting of these different disciplines makes the Free International University full of vigor and vitality, democracy and creativity. Unlike traditional universities, it has no fixed classrooms, no tests, no scoring system, and no age limit. Beuys emphasizes absolute equality with students. He and his supporters spread this experimental educational philosophy all over the world [4]. In art education, the cultivation of self-awareness is particularly important, that is, individual creativity advocated by Beuys. The cultivation of creativity is the crystallization of talent and acquired self-cultivation. Liberty International University allows each student to get the greatest possible development from multidisciplinary exploration and learning, that is to say, a student can not only study painting skills, but also study other majors and various arts without restriction at the same time. Through comprehensive experiments, students can finally find out their suitable development prospect.

Following Boyce's death in 1986, Liberty International University also closed in 1988, but its philosophy remains to this day. Boyce's educational philosophy expands people's definition of aesthetic education, elevates art education from the teaching of techniques and knowledge to the cultivation of value and self-awareness, and proposes a thinking path that transcends disciplines. This spiritual legacy left by Beuys has always inspired us to think about the social value of aesthetic education and the meaning of art in society.

3. The Dissemination Path of Western Aesthetic Education Theories in China

3.1 The Influence of Western Social Concepts on China

The construction of modern Chinese aesthetic education theory is closely related to the dissemination of Western aesthetic education theory in China, especially the dissemination of modern German aesthetics in China. Under the influence of modern German aesthetics and the reality of modern China, Chinese modern thinkers have absorbed and transformed German aesthetics and injected new connotations into them.

German classical aesthetician Schiller, in his aesthetics book "Aesthetic Letters", believes that aesthetic education should go ahead of freedom, and change from a perceptual person to a truly free person mainly depends on art and aesthetics, so art and aesthetics are important for human progress. The perfection of human nature plays a key role. The representative German artist Beuys was also influenced by his aesthetic education theory and applied the concept of social aesthetic education in the practice of the Free International University. His artistic concept originated from modern German aesthetics and injected new innovative concepts into it. His concept has had an important impact on Chinese public art today, and at the same time it has affected the development of Chinese modern aesthetic education.

In the process of implementing social aesthetic education, public art plays an important role. Public art is a modern art that emphasizes the participation of the public, which is also the difference between public art and other arts. It is a comprehensive art that combines architecture, landscape, painting, sculpture and other disciplines. Diversity and synthesis are exactly in line with Beuys' artistic

conception [5]. Since the 20th century, the culture and art of Western society have undergone earth-shaking changes, and the criticism of traditional bourgeois ideology and morality has swept the entire cultural field. Beuys, as a leader in the new artistic trend, created art through public performances such as "7000 Oaks", which further expanded the concept of contemporary art [6]. This influence has spread far and wide to China, affecting a large number of Chinese artists. Beuys emphasized the expansibility, extension and involvement of education in society, and taught Chinese contemporary artists to have a dialogue with society. This idea was also spread by Chinese contemporary artists to the field of art education.

China's contemporary education has developed rapidly, and the teaching based on the STEAM education model is highly respected. Among them, the function and practice of A (ART) emphasizes interdisciplinary learning that integrates science and art, skills and aesthetics, which focuses on creativity and multiple learning. The educational model of STEAM is also a continuation of the educational experiment of Boyce's "Free International University". However, the audience of this educational model is not wide. As a branch of public art education, social aesthetic education is serve for the public, research for society, and art for life. It is a new attempt of aesthetic education innovation in China.

3.2 The Current Situation of the Spread of Western Aesthetic Education Theory in China

The concept of aesthetic education in China was enlightened by the trend of aesthetic education in the West, but the introduction of aesthetic education in modern China was not blind, but selectively absorbed and adopted the Western ideas represented by Schiller based on the different environments of China and the West. The theory of modern Chinese aesthetic education does not blindly seek more or pursue newness and difference. Thoughts on aesthetic education in both China and the West have existed since ancient times, but the concept and terminology of "aesthetic education" has arisen late. It was first proposed by German aesthetician Schiller in 1793. At the beginning of the 20th century, Guowei Wang, Yuanpei Cai and others introduced Schiller's thought of aesthetic education into China. In the "aesthetic letters", Schiller put forward the proposition of aesthetic education in the sense of modernity and in view of the current situation of the split of personality caused by enlightenment rationality. Guowei Wang, Yuanpei Cai, Qichao Ran, Guangqian Zhu, etc. are the scholars who really promote the Sinicization of aesthetic education thought. They established the modern concept of aesthetic education in China on the basis of Kant's aesthetics and Schiller's aesthetic education thought [7]. In the midst of the turbulent social contradictions and changes, modern China attached great importance to the communicative rational function of aesthetic education, hoping to resolve some social contradictions with the help of aesthetic education, trying to build an ideal modern society through aesthetic education.

The construction of the modern aesthetic education system is a process of inquiry into the fundamental theory and practice of Chinese and Western, ancient and modern aesthetic educational thoughts. Aesthetic educators use Western theoretical systems to transform traditional Chinese aesthetics, so that Western aesthetic education theory has formed a localized expression in China, compatible with Western aesthetics and traditional Chinese aesthetics, so that China's aesthetic education system is in line with China's development trend.

Entering the modern society, the development of technology has transformed aesthetic education, and the purpose of aesthetic education has changed. With the continuous deepening of the research on beauty, people find that in the process of pursuing beauty and researching beauty, beauty, as an appeal, influence and educate, is subtly shaping and optimizing people's psychological structure and improving people's personality [8].

3.3 Suggestions for the Spread of Western Aesthetic Education Theories in China

The development of Western aesthetic education has gone beyond the training of artistic skills and the teaching of artistic theoretical knowledge to the improvement of aesthetic literacy, personality cultivation and thinking creativity. Art education is not limited to the field of pure art disciplines, but

turned to interdisciplinary development and gradually popularized to the general public. In 2006, at the first World Congress on Arts Education: "Building Innovative Capacities for the 21st Century" in Lisbon, Portugal, UNESCO developed the Road Map for Arts Education. The program proposes four major goals of arts education: 1. Support human rights to education and cultural participation. 2. Develop individual abilities. 3. Improve the quality of education. 4. Promote the expression of cultural diversity [9]. The sound development of people in society has become the consensus of aesthetic education educators.

From the development and dissemination of Western modern aesthetic education, the Chinese aesthetic education system can be absorbed based on the aesthetic level and needs of the public in modern Chinese society. Throughout the development of Western art education, the layout of art education in three levels: professional classrooms, interdisciplinary, and community-based training, as well as two links for educated and educators. The comprehensive development of social education provides a concrete and effective way of thinking [10]. The Chinese aesthetic education system can refer to the following suggestions: 1. Integrate art education with the teaching of other disciplines. Interdisciplinary teaching has already had initial practice in Beuys's Liberty International University, but people still need to explore how art disciplines are balanced with other disciplines with Chinese characteristics and how to support the teaching of other disciplines in the form of art education. 2. Socialize art education. The fundamental purpose of aesthetic education is to improve the personality of citizens, so aesthetic education should not be limited to school education, but should be popularized to the community and promote lifelong education. 3. Cultivate an interactive mode of organic combination of professional classroom, interdisciplinary and community. The aesthetic education system should be flexible. With the continuous development of the field, the content and methods of education should also be constantly innovated. At the same time, it promotes the continuous development of art education in the direction of lifelong education.

4. Conclusion

From the aesthetic thoughts of Schiller and Kant to the creativity theory of Beuys, the ideological system of aesthetic education was first put forward and practiced in the West, and then spread to China and exerted an important influence on the enlightenment of Chinese aesthetic education. German classical aesthetics has influenced a group of artists successively, and this paper taking the aesthetic education theory and educational practice of the Western artist Joseph Beuys as the breakthrough point, specifically analyzes the influence of his experimental teaching practice in the founding of the Free International University in Germany on him. At the same time, this paper analyzes the comparison of Chinese and Western aesthetic education concepts and their performance in different environments. Through the research results, it is found that the dissemination of Western aesthetic education theories in China should integrate art education with other disciplines, and socialize art education.

Western aesthetic education theory was introduced into China with Western learning, and realized the localization of China. The Chinese aesthetic education system has developed into modern times, constantly learning and absorbing Western aesthetic education experience. This paper studies the dissemination paths of Western aesthetic education theories in China, and hopes that future scholars can pay more attention to the aesthetic concepts of different artists and the innovative ways of dissemination of aesthetic education theories.

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