



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSTRUCTION AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE OF CAI YUANPEI'S AESTHETIC EDUCATION THOUGHT

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Submission Jan., 20, 2025</p> <p>Acceptance Mar., 25, 2025</p> <p>Keywords</p> <p>Aesthetic education generation religion;</p> <p>Philosophical construction;</p> <p>Educational practice</p> <p>Corresponding Author</p> <p>1367663396@qq.com</p>	<p>This paper takes Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought as the research object, and systematically discusses the philosophical construction and educational practice of his theory of "replacing religion with aesthetic education". It is found that in the context of belief crisis and cultural transformation in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, Cai Yuanpei integrated Kant's transcendental aesthetics, Schiller's aesthetic liberation theory and Confucian tradition of "combining rites with music", and constructed a modern aesthetic education philosophy system of "unity of body and image", "moral standard" and "equal emphasis on knowledge and action". Its educational practice is embodied in the concept innovation of advocating educational freedom and equality, promoting the construction of art education specialization and curriculum integration system, practicing the method innovation of "integration of teaching and doing" and the social expansion of public art and museum education. Despite the tension between philosophical universality and limited realistic resources, aesthetic transcendence and utilitarian needs of national salvation, and the confrontation with Liang Qichao and Wang Guowei's thoughts, his theory still provides important enlightenment for solving the dilemma of spiritual governance and promoting quality education in contemporary times. Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought, as a response to civilization's transformation, established China's first modern aesthetic education system, laid the groundwork for art education and quality education, and posed the "unfinished question" of uniting individual aesthetic liberation with the collective social will.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

Origin of Problem and Research Approach

In modern times, China was deeply mired in the "double crisis" of the disintegration of the traditional order. The collapse of the imperial system led to the failure of the Confucian belief system. Western religions infiltrated strongly through unequal treaties, and the ideological circles fell into the dilemma of value vacuum and meaning nothingness. At this historical node, the trend of aesthetic education rises as a cultural redemption scheme, trying to reconstruct the national spiritual order with aesthetic rationality. By virtue of his dual identity as an educator and enlightenment thinker, Cai Yuanpei put forward the theory of "replacing religion with aesthetic education", which not only became the theoretical banner of criticizing religious ignorance and advocating freedom of thought in the New Culture Movement, but also laid the foundation of modern Chinese educational philosophy and highlighted its pivotal position in the transformation of modern thoughts. The academic research on Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought has formed three kinds of paradigms, one of which is the path of ideological history, focusing on the interaction between his theory and social thoughts in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China; Second, philosophical hermeneutics, which focuses on analyzing the theoretical origin of concepts such as "unity of body and image" and "moral standard"; Third, pedagogical investigation, sorting out the institutionalization process of its art education practice. Looking at the existing achievements, most of them are confined to the vision of a single discipline, and there is little systematic analysis of the logic of philosophical foundation and educational practice, especially the lack of answers to the core question of "how to transform aesthetic education from metaphysical construction to concrete educational mechanism". Therefore, this paper takes two-way questioning as the research framework, uses the method of conceptual history analysis to trace the cross-cultural generation of "aesthetic education replacing religion", and combines the integration of interdisciplinary theories to solve the mechanism of "transformation of knowledge and action", in order to reveal the dialectical unity of philosophical construction and educational practice in Cai Yuanpei's thought.

2. PHILOSOPHICAL CONSTRUCTION: THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION INSTEAD OF RELIGION

Cai Yuanpei's theory of "replacing religion with aesthetic education" is not an accidental thought of generate, but based on the creative integration of Chinese and western philosophical resources, forming a complete philosophical system including ontology, axiology and epistemology. This system not only provides a theoretical basis for "aesthetic education replaces religion", but also lays a logical foundation for its educational practice. By reconstructing the basic picture of world existence, establishing the core position of moral cultivation, innovating the interactive mechanism between cognition and practice, and finally shaping aesthetic education into a spiritual unification power and personality cultivation path that replaces religion.

2.1. Ontological Reconstruction: Aesthetic Transcendence of Body-Image Unity

Cai Yuanpei's ontological answer to "How can aesthetic education replace religion" is rooted in his unique understanding of "the way the world exists". Its core is to break the monopoly of religion on the transcendental field through the theoretical construction of "unity of body and

image", and endow aesthetic education with the philosophical function of connecting finite and infinite.

On the one hand, in the localization transformation of Kant's transcendental aesthetics, Cai Yuanpei absorbed the binary division of "phenomenal world" and "substantial world" in Critique of Judgment, but did not stay at the purely speculative level. In the Outline of Philosophy, he clearly defined the "phenomenal world" as the material world accessible by experience, which is restricted by time, space and causal laws, and is the field of "relative truth" that people can grasp through senses and scientific cognition; The "physical world", as a transcendental absolute existence, transcends the limitation of time and space and logical deduction, and points to freedom of will and ultimate meaning. Similar to Kant's "thing itself", it has a more practical dimension. The key point is that Cai Yuanpei creatively put forward the "intermediary theory of will" and regarded free will as a bridge connecting the two worlds. This kind of will is neither pure material nor abstract spirit, but a transcendental spiritual force, which can transcend from phenomenon to entity through aesthetic experience. As he said in "Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education", the "universality" characteristic of aesthetic education corresponds to the transcendence of the physical world, while the "transcendence" characteristic points to the realization of freedom of will, which finally enables individuals to break through the limitations of the experience world in aesthetics and reach the realization of the ultimate meaning, which is the substitute for the function of religion's "other world".

On the other hand, Cai Yuanpei made a modern transformation of the Confucian tradition of "combining rites with music", and injected local philosophical resources into "integration of body and image". He deeply studied the concept of "sound enters the heart" in Music Ji, and believed that the aesthetic appeal of music could directly act on people's hearts, realizing the social effect of "peace in music leads to harmony among the people" (Xunzi Music Theory). In the Speech of China-France Education Association, he emphasized that "music has the great power to integrate the national spirit", which is the inheritance of the function of traditional music education of "harmonizing people's hearts". However, instead of being confined to tradition, he broke through the shackles of "sanctification of Confucian classics" and transformed "rites and music" from the vassal of feudal ethics into the carrier of modern aesthetic education. For example, his interpretation of Xunzi's "musician is what the holy king enjoys, but can be kind to the people's hearts" is no longer limited to the hierarchical framework of "holy king education", but endows it with the modern connotation of "cultivating public emotions through aesthetics". This transformation not only retains the practical character of traditional aesthetic education, but also makes it gain a philosophical height beyond religious ignorance.

2.2. Foundation of Axiology: Moral-based Aesthetic Education Ethics

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought always takes "personality self-cultivation" as the core, and moral cultivation is the foundation of personality perfection. By constructing a "moral-based" value system, he endowed aesthetic education with an ethical foundation to replace religious ethical functions, and made clear the core position of aesthetic education in value guidance.

Its "double moral structure theory" constitutes the basic framework of moral cultivation. In "Opinions on Educational Policy", Cai Yuanpei divides morality into "negative morality" and

"positive morality". The former is the bottom line ethics of "don't do evil for small things", just like a "embankment", which demarcates behavior boundaries through normative constraints to prevent individuals from falling into moral anomie; The latter points to the moral perfection of "one's desire to stand up for others", just like the "source", and realizes personality sublimation through active practice. The two form a step-by-step evolution relationship, from "heteronomy" to "self-discipline" and then to "freedom", which constitutes a complete path of moral development. This division not only absorbs the core of Zhu Xi's self-cultivation theory of "preserving natural principles and destroying human desires", but also incorporates Bentham's utilitarianism's concern for "behavioral consequences", realizing the integration of traditional ethics and modern moral philosophy. In this structure, aesthetic education is endowed with the key function of "cultivating virtue", forming a practical path of "storing goodness with beauty". Cai Yuanpei believes that the drawback of religious ethics lies in the realization of moral restraint through "reward and punishment mechanism" or "theocratic deterrence", while aesthetic education cultivates "uninterested" moral emotions through aesthetic experience. For example, the aesthetic characteristics such as sublimity and harmony contained in works of art can make individuals naturally accept moral edification in emotional resonance, instead of passively obeying external authority. He mentioned in the Lecture Notes of China Polytechnic School that conveying the concepts of "mutual assistance" and "hard work" to the labor groups through painting, music and other art forms is precisely to cultivate moral consciousness by using the "moistening things silently" characteristics of aesthetic education. This logic of "reserving goodness with beauty" breaks the compulsion of religious ethics, and makes morality a value that individuals actively pursue in aesthetic experience, thus replacing religion's monopoly right to interpret morality.

2.3. Epistemological Innovation: A Practical Philosophy That Pays Equal Attention to Knowledge and Action

The monopoly of religious belief is often manifested in the separation of "knowledge" and "action", or the emphasis that "belief precedes cognition", or the addiction to "empty talk and thinking" and the divorce from practice. By constructing the epistemology of "paying equal attention to knowledge and action", Cai Yuanpei endowed aesthetic education with the function of connecting cognition and practice, making it an effective way to replace religious "belief practice".

This epistemological innovation is first embodied in the integration of Wang Yangming's "unity of knowledge and action" and Schiller's "aesthetic liberation". Wang Yangming emphasized that "knowing is the beginning of doing, and doing is the accomplishment of knowing", and regarded cognition and practice as an inseparable whole; Schiller put forward "aesthetic state as the third kingdom" in Letters of Aesthetic Education, and believed that aesthetics can break through the opposition between "perceptual impulse" and "rational impulse" and realize human freedom. Cai Yuanpei combines the two, and points out that the completion of cognition requires not only "rational judgment", but also "emotional experience" and "practical verification", and aesthetic education is the intermediary connecting the three. In the Outline of Simple Philosophy, he pointed out that real cognition should be "following reason", neither empty talk of theory nor blind practice, but balancing sensibility and rationality through aesthetic experience, and then transforming cognition into action. This kind of thinking transcends the religious belief mode of

"knowing but not doing", and makes cognition and practice unify in aesthetics.

As the media mechanism of "transformation of knowledge and action", art education plays a central role in this process. Cai Yuanpei believes that the "non-interest" of artistic activities can dispel utilitarian calculation, and enable individuals to naturally realize the transformation from cognition to practice in the creation and appreciation of "doing nothing". For example, he promoted the "integration of teaching and doing" in Xiaozhuang Normal University, and set up courses such as handicrafts and gardening, so that students can not only gain aesthetic cognition (such as grasping form and color), but also deepen their understanding through practice (such as cooperative spirit in labor) in the process of making works of art and cultivating plants; In the Peking University Painting Research Association, he encouraged students to "learn both theory and creation", understand aesthetic principles through sketching practice, and then test their cognitive depth with their creative achievements. This path of "artistic practice-cognitive deepening-behavior cultivation" makes aesthetic education break through the simple "knowledge transfer" or "skill training" and become a vivid carrier of "paying equal attention to knowledge and action". It also replaces the function of religion to strengthen belief through ritual practice, forming a more open and practical cognitive model.

3. PRACTICE TRANSFORMATION: EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION THOUGHT

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought does not stay at the level of abstract philosophical speculation, but is transformed into a concrete system through systematic educational practice. Its core is to integrate the theoretical conception of "replacing religion with aesthetic education" into all dimensions of the educational system, so as to realize the landing from concept to action. This transformation is not only reflected in the innovation of educational concept, but also includes the reconstruction of curriculum system and the innovation of teaching methods, and extends to the expansion of social aesthetic education, ultimately promoting the institutionalization of modern aesthetic education in China.

3.1. Innovation of educational concept: reconstructing educational value with freedom and equality

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education practice first broke through the shackles of traditional education from the conceptual level, reshaped the value orientation of education with "freedom" and "equality" as the core, and laid the ideological foundation for the institutionalization of aesthetic education.

In the dimension of freedom, its core is to break the monopoly of religion on education and defend the independence of education and the openness of thought. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, western missionary schools expanded rapidly by virtue of unequal treaties, not only spreading religious teachings, but also trying to infiltrate cultural hegemony through education. The domestic Confucian movement also tried to religionize Confucianism to maintain traditional authority. In this regard, Cai Yuanpei clearly put forward the idea of "breaking away from religious education", and emphasized in *Opinions on New Education* that "religion is a rigid stale doctrine", and its "bizarre ceremony" and "blind obedience to belief" are essentially infringements on individual spiritual freedom, while the

"disinterested" and "universality" of aesthetic education can achieve real spiritual liberation. During his tenure as president of Peking University, he abolished theology courses, replaced them with aesthetic lectures and art societies, and advocated the school-running policy of "freedom of thought and inclusiveness", which made aesthetic education a platform for the collision of different ideas, and institutionally guaranteed the free character of education without religious interference.

In the dimension of equality, Cai Yuanpei is committed to building a civilian aesthetic education system and breaking the class and gender barriers of traditional education. In view of the current situation that educational resources are monopolized by a few elites, he promoted the China Education Improvement Society to launch a civic education campaign, and extended aesthetic education to working groups by setting up workers' night schools and farmers' literacy classes, such as adding painting, singing and other courses in workers' night schools, and spreading aesthetic concepts with popular art forms; At the same time, it advocates the reform of vernacular, promotes the popularization of language with the "Please Promulgate New Punctuation Proposal", lowers the learning threshold of the people at the bottom, and enables more people to contact aesthetic carriers such as poetry and prose through words. In terms of gender equality, he took the lead in implementing the co-education system in Peking University, breaking through the tradition of "women's schools attached to boys' schools". He even advocated women's property inheritance right and marriage autonomy by revising Zhejiang's Recent Political Platform, and eliminated the obstacles to women's study from the economic and legal levels, so that aesthetic education was no longer a male privilege, but an equal right enjoyed by all members of society. This practice of "teaching without class" makes aesthetic education an important lever to promote social equality.

3.2. Construction of curriculum system: integration of science and aesthetic education and institutionalization of art education

Curriculum system is the core carrier of aesthetic education thought. Cai Yuanpei truly integrates aesthetic education into the national education system by promoting the integration of science education and aesthetic education and the systematic construction of art education.

In terms of discipline integration, he drew lessons from Comte's positivist "scientific hierarchy theory" and constructed a curriculum model of "symbiosis of science education and aesthetic education", among which the practice of Comte's school is the most representative. The school takes "symbiosis of scientific spirit and aesthetic education" as its school-running philosophy. The curriculum not only includes empirical disciplines such as physics and chemistry to cultivate scientific thinking, but also retains traditional aesthetic education courses such as music education and painting to cultivate aesthetic ability, and realizes the organic unity of the two through interdisciplinary courses of "combining science with art" (such as analyzing painting composition with geometric principles). Cai Yuanpei believes that "seeking truth" in science and "seeking beauty" in aesthetic education are not opposite, but two dimensions of personality perfection. Scientific training makes people get rid of ignorance, and aesthetic education makes people transcend utilitarianism. Both of them serve the cultivation of "sound personality" together. This concept of curriculum integration provides an early model for the integration of aesthetic education in modern general education.

The institutionalization of art education is reflected in the evolution from scattered practice to systematic system. In 1918, Cai Yuanpei founded the Painting Research Association and the Music Research Association in Peking University, which marked the official entry of art education into the higher education system: with the aim of "studying painting and developing aesthetic education", the Painting Research Association invited Xu Beihong and other artists to give lectures, teaching both techniques and aesthetic principles; The Music Research Association put forward "emphasizing music education and advocating aesthetic education", which not only teaches Chinese and western music theories, but also cultivates "aesthetic commonality" through collective performance. Although these two associations are non-governmental organizations, they have the embryonic form of professional art education. In 1927, Cai Yuanpei put forward the Proposal for Establishing a National Art University at the meeting of the Art Education Committee of the University, explicitly advocating the establishment of professional art colleges covering painting, music, drama and sculpture, and upgrading art education from a "sideline" to an independent discipline. Although this proposal was not fully realized due to the current situation, it laid the foundation for the later establishment of a national art college. In addition, the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (now the predecessor of Shanghai Conservatory of Music), which he promoted, combined music education with "shaping national spirit". By creating music with national characteristics, music became a link to condense national feelings, which embodied the institutionalized goal of art education serving national construction.

3.3. Teaching method experiment: the practice of "integration of teaching and doing" and the practical orientation of aesthetic education

Cai Yuanpei opposes the drawbacks of "emphasizing knowledge over doing" in traditional education, emphasizing that aesthetic education can only be internalized into personality accomplishment through practical experience. The method experiment of "combining teaching with doing" is the concentrated embodiment of this idea. His practice in Xiaozhuang Normal University is very representative: the curriculum of this school breaks the boundary between "theoretical course and practical course", and integrates handicrafts, gardening, drama, etc. into daily teaching. Students experience the beauty of form and color when making handicrafts, feel the beauty of natural vitality when cultivating plants, and realize the beauty of human nature and society when arranging dramas, making the process of "doing" itself the content of "learning" and the method of "teaching". In Cai Yuanpei's *Opinions on New Education*, it is emphasized that aesthetic education should not be "knowledge in books", but the experience of "hard work". Through the combination of physical labor and mental labor, students' dual abilities of "loving labor" and "aesthetic creation" can be cultivated. This method breaks through the religious practice mode of "meditation", makes aesthetic education change from passive acceptance to active creation, and extends from classroom to life, so that students can not only master skills, but also cultivate their aesthetic sense in practice, and form a sound labor concept, thus realizing the teaching transformation of the philosophical concept of "paying equal attention to knowledge and action".

3.4. Expansion of Social Aesthetic Education: Promotion of Public Art Movement and Museum Education

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education practice is not limited to school education, but also makes

aesthetic education a cultural project covering the whole people by expanding the space of social aesthetic education, which is also his institutionalized attempt of "replacing religion with aesthetic education" at a broader social level. In terms of public art movement, he believes that "aesthetic education should not be limited to the campus, but should be integrated into social life". Therefore, he actively organizes groups such as Painting Research Society and Drama Improvement Society to promote art to the public. For example, by adapting traditional operas and incorporating modern concepts such as " " and "science", the Drama Improvement Society has changed operas from "entertainment form" to "aesthetic education carrier"; He also advocated setting up public works of art such as sculptures and murals in city squares and parks, so that citizens can contact and feel beauty in their daily lives. In terms of museum education, Cai Yuanpei is well aware that "museums are three-dimensional textbooks", actively promotes the preparation and opening of the Palace Museum, and advocates that "museums should not only serve scholars, but also face the common people". By holding popular exhibitions and offering explanation courses, the aesthetic value and historical spirit contained in cultural relics and historical sites can be understood by the public. This expansion of social aesthetic education has broken the monopoly of religious places on "spiritual edification", built a more open and inclusive aesthetic space, made aesthetic education a spiritual resource shared by all members of society, and reflected its institutionalized pursuit of "socialization of aesthetic education and social aesthetic education".

4. HISTORICAL ECHO: THEORETICAL TENSION AND PRACTICAL DILEMMA

During the practice of Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought in the Republic of China, he always faced the complex tension between ideal and reality. This tension not only originated from the gap between the philosophical height of the theory itself and the social conditions, but also reflected in the confrontation with contemporary thoughts, and finally constituted an important dimension of his ideological historical value.

4.1. The conflict between ideal and reality: the gap between theoretical presupposition and practical conditions

The philosophical construction of Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education theory takes "universality" and "transcendence" as the core, but the social reality in the Republic of China made it face double dilemmas, exposing the profound tension between theory and practice.

First, the contradiction between the universality of philosophy and the limitation of educational resources. The aesthetic education conceived by Cai Yuanpei is a "universal" education covering the whole people. Whether it is the equal idea of "education without class" or the ideal of "social aesthetic education", it needs sufficient educational resources as its support. However, during the Republic of China, wars were frequent, the economy was depressed, and education funds were seriously scarce. High-quality teachers and aesthetic education facilities (such as libraries, art galleries and concert halls) were mostly concentrated in a few big cities, and there was almost no contact between the vast villages and the people at the bottom. For example, although the "night school for workers" and "literacy class for farmers" advocated by him were tried out in some areas, it was difficult to form scale effect due to the lack of continuous funds and teachers; The "symbiosis of science and aesthetic education" model of Comte School can't be popularized nationwide because of the high resource threshold. This class monopoly and regional

imbalance of educational resources make it difficult for the philosophical ideal of "popularizing aesthetic education" to break through the shackles of realistic conditions, and finally leads to the great reduction of the universality of its theory in practice.

Second, the conflict between aesthetic transcendence and utilitarian education needs. Cai Yuanpei emphasized the "non-utilitarianism" and "transcendence" of aesthetic education, and advocated cultivating the spiritual realm of "no interest" through aesthetics. However, the theme of the times of "saving the nation for survival" in the Republic of China inevitably made education utilitarian. Under the background of the increasingly serious national crisis, the society's expectation of education focuses more on the cultivation of "practical talents", such as military affairs, science and technology, industry and other fields that directly serve the country's prosperity, while aesthetic education that emphasizes "personality self-cultivation" is regarded as a "luxury goods". For example, after the 1930s, with the rise of the anti-Japanese national salvation movement, many schools reduced art courses and added military training and industrial subjects. This realistic demand of "national salvation overwhelms enlightenment" is in sharp contrast with Cai Yuanpei's theoretical proposition of "aesthetic transcendence", which makes his aesthetic education practice constantly marginalized in the wave of utilitarian education.

4.2. Confrontation of contemporary ideas: establishing theoretical boundaries in pluralistic debates

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought does not exist in isolation, but gradually clarifies his own position in the dialogue and debate with contemporary thinkers. This confrontation not only reflects the richness of his thought, but also highlights the uniqueness of his theory. Compared with Liang Qichao's "emotional education theory" and Wang Guowei's "aesthetic no interest theory", although they jointly promote the development of modern aesthetic education thoughts, their core has its own emphasis. Liang Qichao emphasized the role of "emotional education" in "group governance", regarded aesthetic education as a tool to condense national feelings, and paid more attention to its social mobilization function; Wang Guowei inherited Kant's "aesthetic irinterest", advocated that aesthetic education is a "pure spiritual activity", and focused on the individual's pursuit of "realm"; Cai Yuanpei's "replacing religion with aesthetic education" has both characteristics, which not only absorbs Wang Guowei's theoretical core of "aesthetic transcendence", but also integrates Liang Qichao's social concern. However, its uniqueness lies in the institutional scheme of elevating aesthetic education to "replacing religion", with the goal of building a new national spiritual system, rather than pure emotional cultivation or individual cultivation. The two-way criticism of the retro school and the westernization school highlights the independence of Cai Yuanpei's thought. Facing the Confucian movement (retro school) represented by Kang Youwei and Chen Huanzhang, he criticized its retrogressive tendency of "religionizing Confucianism", and believed that the ethical shackles of "Three Guidelines and Five Permanent Members" were contrary to the free spirit of modern aesthetic education; In view of the Westernization school who advocates "total Christianization", he pointed out that the "exclusivity" and "ignorance" of religion will hinder the establishment of scientific spirit and national cultural subjectivity. In the double criticism, Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education program shows the wisdom of "dual purpose": it not only opposes the cultural conservatism of the retro school, but also rejects the cultural inferiority of the westernization school, and tries to build a modern spiritual system with local foundation by integrating Chinese

and western aesthetic education resources.

5. CONTEMPORARY VALUE: THE MODERN TRANSFORMATION OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION THEORY

Although Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought was born in the social context a hundred years ago, its philosophical core and practical logic still have important enlightenment to the spiritual civilization construction and educational reform in contemporary China. This value is not only reflected in the reference of historical experience, but also in the creative transformation of theoretical resources.

5.1. Solving the Dilemma of Spiritual Governance: Aesthetic Education as a Modern Path of Meaning Construction

Contemporary Chinese society is undergoing a profound transformation. The utilitarian tendency of market economy and the diversity of values brought by globalization make some groups face a "crisis of meaning". Cai Yuanpei's theoretical thinking of "replacing religion with aesthetic education" provides an important reference for solving this dilemma. From the perspective of practical needs, the Chinese Religion Blue Book (2022) shows that the growth of emerging belief groups and spiritual emptiness have coexisted in recent years, reflecting society's urgent need for "non-utilitarian spiritual products." Cai Yuanpei's idea of "replacing religious identity with aesthetic community" has shown results in contemporary practice: the "Urban Culture Menu" project implemented in Shenzhen has significantly improved the "spiritual sense of belonging" of participating citizens through public art exhibitions, community drama festivals and other activities, and reduced the proportion of religious inclination by 29%; Hangzhou's "Citizen Culture Living Room" project integrates aesthetic experience into daily life through museum opening at night and street art performances, and residents' spiritual life satisfaction increases by 34%. These cases confirm Cai Yuanpei's prediction that aesthetic education can meet the individual's demand for spiritual transcendence by constructing a "non-religious world of meaning" and become an effective path for spiritual governance in modern society.

5.2. Empowering Quality Education Reform: Return from "Skill Aesthetic Education" to "Personality Aesthetic Education"

At present, although the reform of quality education has made progress, the problems of "skilled aesthetic education" and "marginalized aesthetic education" have not been fundamentally solved. Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought provides theoretical guidance for breaking through this dilemma.

At the ontological level, it is necessary to reconstruct the core value of aesthetic education and return from "skill training" to "personality self-cultivation". Cai Yuanpei's emphasis on "the unity of body and image" and "moral standard" enlighten us that aesthetic education should not be limited to the teaching of skills such as painting and music, but should be the link of the integration of morality, intelligence, physique, beauty and labor. For example, ecological ethics should be cultivated through natural aesthetic education, empathy should be cultivated through drama aesthetic education, and the educational goal of "storing goodness with beauty" and "enlightening truth with beauty" should be realized.

On the practical path, we can learn from its concept of "whole life education". First, we can promote curriculum integration, such as integrating the cognition of "scientific beauty" into science class (such as the concise beauty of mathematical formulas and the harmonious beauty of physical laws), and strengthening the aesthetic experience of literary works in Chinese class; Secondly, to build a network of "home-school-community collaboration", schools can set up "family aesthetic education workshops" in conjunction with the community, and cooperate with art galleries and theaters to develop practical courses, so that aesthetic education can break through the campus boundary and become an education that runs through the whole process of individual growth. This transformation not only inherits Cai Yuanpei's practical philosophy of "paying equal attention to knowledge and action", but also responds to the demand of contemporary quality education for "all-round development", providing historical reference and realistic path for the modernization of Chinese aesthetic education.

6. CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY AS A CIVILIZATION SCHEME

Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education thought is essentially a set of holistic schemes to respond to the transformation of modern Chinese civilization. In the double dilemma of the collapse of traditional values and the impact of the West, he tried to reconstruct the spiritual world and social order of modern Chinese people with aesthetic education as the fulcrum, and its significance far exceeded that of simple educational reform. Theoretically, Cai Yuanpei founded the first modern aesthetic education philosophy system in China. He combined Kant's transcendental aesthetics, Schiller's aesthetic liberation theory and Confucian tradition of "combining rites with music", and systematically answered the core proposition of "how aesthetic education shapes modern personality" for the first time through the triple structure of "integration of body and image", "moral standard" and "equal emphasis on knowledge and action", which sublimated aesthetic education from skills teaching to the core path of national spirit construction, and provided unique ideological resources for China's modernity transformation. At the practical level, its legacy has a profound influence so far: Peking University Painting Research Association and National Conservatory of Music have created professional art education systems; Practices such as civilian aesthetic education and co-education have laid the paradigm of educational equality and quality education, and become the historical forerunner of the contemporary all-round development concept of "morality, intelligence, physique, beauty and labor". However, this scheme leaves an "unfinished question". How to balance individual aesthetic liberation with social collective will? Cai Yuanpei not only expects aesthetic education to realize individual spiritual freedom, but also hopes that it will serve national cohesion. This tension has not disappeared in contemporary times. In fact, this is the vitality of his thought. It reminds us that aesthetic education, as a civilized scheme, should not only protect the spiritual home of individuals, but also become the link of social consensus. Only in this way can we build a new form of civilization with individuality and commonness, freedom and order in the tide of modernity, which is the enlightenment of Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education philosophy through a hundred years.

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All authors contributed equally to this work and approved the final manuscript.

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