Original Paper

Research on the Cultivation Path of College Students' Aesthetic Values in the Digital-Intelligent Era

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Abstract

With the in-depth development of digital-intelligent technologies, the aesthetic values of contemporary college students are undergoing structural reshaping, facing multiple practical dilemmas such as the symbolization of aesthetic subjects, the distortion of aesthetic objects, and the stylization of aesthetic relationships. Based on an analysis of the aforementioned issues, this paper proposes constructing a multi-dimensional collaborative cultivation system centered on the tripartite integration of "ideological and political guidance, artistic practice, and technological empowerment." The research points out that by strengthening the top-level design of aesthetic education, reconstructing an integrated curriculum system, building an interdisciplinary teaching team, and innovating process-oriented and developmental evaluation mechanisms, it is possible to effectively guide college students to transcend superficial aesthetic experiences, establish authentic and subjectivity-embodying aesthetic values, and ultimately achieve the educational goals of humanistic beauty, freedom beauty, and harmonious beauty.

Keywords

Digital-Intelligent Era, Aesthetic Values, Aesthetic Literacy, Aesthetic Education, Cultivation Path

The new information communication methods represented by artificial intelligence, big data, virtual reality and other technologies in the digital-intelligent era are profoundly reshaping college students' aesthetic experiences, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic creation methods. The cultivation of contemporary college students' aesthetic values faces both innovative opportunities brought by technology and unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, digital-intelligent technologies provide new teaching methods for aesthetic education, such as virtual simulation, personalized recommendation, and immersive experience; on the other hand, the phenomenon of aesthetic alienation induced by technology has become increasingly prominent, mainly manifested in the symbolization of aesthetic subjects, the distortion of aesthetic objects, and the stylization of aesthetic relationships. This kind of

alienation not only affects college students' correct cognition and judgment of beauty but also relates to the improvement of their personality and the shaping of their values.

1. Practical Dilemmas in the Cultivation of College Students' Aesthetic Values

Under the tide of digital-intelligent technologies, college students' aesthetic experiences have been unprecedentedly expanded, but they have also fallen into a series of complex and profound practical dilemmas. These dilemmas are not superficial phenomena but inherent structural contradictions that profoundly affect college students' cognition, judgment, and creation of beauty.

1.1 Symbolic Alienation of Aesthetic Subjects

As digital natives, the aesthetic activities of contemporary college students are undergoing a profound alienation from "essential expression" to "symbolic performance." The most typical manifestation is the fundamental transformation of aesthetic motivation—from the traditional "shooting for beauty" to the utilitarian "shooting for posting." In this process, the aesthetic subject no longer focuses on the internal experience and true expression of beauty but alienates themselves into "actors" performing symbolically on the stage of social media.

College students conduct highly refined self-construction in the digital space through elaborate makeup design, fashionable dressing, and posed photography. On the surface, this is to show personality and aesthetic taste, but in essence, it falls into passive catering to standardized and internet-famous aesthetic paradigms. This symbolic alienation leads to a paradox: the more one pursues unique self-expression, the more one falls into the rigid mold of homogenized aesthetics. Eventually, in the continuous symbolic performance, the aesthetic subject gradually loses their independent aesthetic judgment ability, and their real aesthetic needs are replaced by the desire for recognition in the virtual space, falling into the predicament of self-alienation.

1.2 Distorted Landscape of Aesthetic Objects

The powerful image processing tools provided by digital-intelligent technologies, such as AI photo retouching and filter effects, enable college students to easily create "perfect" visual images beyond reality. However, this technical convenience has led to a serious disconnect between aesthetic objects and the real world, forming a prevalent distorted aesthetic landscape.

In the trend of pursuing "photo success rate," college students are keen to use various digital-intelligent modification tools to create an idealized self-image. From flawless skin texture to extreme optimization of body proportions, from virtual replacement of background environments to artificial rendering of light and shadow effects, technology reconstructs carefully calculated "perfect images." This excessive modification not only distorts authenticity but also creates an abnormal visual landscape—it is no longer a reflection of reality but a negation of it.

Long-term immersion in this distorted landscape makes college students gradually alienated from their true selves and even develop "image anxiety". When the technically modified "perfect self" forms a sharp contrast with the real self in the mirror, this division not only affects individuals' self-identity but

also distorts their understanding of the essence of beauty, making aesthetic activities deviate from the original intention of perceiving and recognizing beauty.

1.3 Stylized Replication of Aesthetic Relationships

Social media platforms and algorithm recommendation systems in the digital-intelligent era are systematically reshaping the mode of college students' aesthetic relationships. Originally diverse, open, and in-depth aesthetic interactions are being simplified into stylized replications of quantitative indicators such as "likes, reposts, and comments."

Under the dominance of algorithms, aesthetic evaluation has lost its due richness and depth, becoming computable and predictable data streams. In-depth aesthetic exchanges and constructive artistic criticism are increasingly absent in fast-paced social media, replaced by superficial emotional reactions and conformity-based aesthetic choices. This superficial interaction mode makes college students pay more attention to the communication effect and traffic data of works rather than their inherent aesthetic value.

This vicious circle of stylized replication further strengthens the traffic-oriented creative tendency. When engaging in aesthetic creation, college students often unconsciously take "algorithm friendliness" as a prerequisite, pursuing instant visual impact and emotional stimulation rather than in-depth artistic expression. The result is the utilitarian turn of aesthetic values—beauty no longer originates from inner touch and creative joy but is alienated into a tool for gaining attention and recognition, which fundamentally deviates from the essential pursuit of aesthetic education in cultivating people.

2. Theoretical Foundations for the Cultivation of College Students' Aesthetic Values

Faced with the aesthetic dilemmas brought by digitalization, it is necessary to take scientific theories as the foundation to provide direction for path construction.

2.1 Theoretical Guidance of Marxist Aesthetics

With its profound theoretical connotation, Marxist aesthetics provides a solid directional guidance for addressing the aesthetic dilemmas brought by digitalization. This aesthetic perspective profoundly reveals the practical nature of beauty, holding that beauty is not an abstract concept but rooted in human activities of transforming the world. In the current era swept by the digital-intelligent tide, virtual and reality are intertwined, and aesthetic standards are increasingly blurred. However, Marxist aesthetics reminds us that aesthetic activity has always been one of the basic practical forms through which humans actively recognize and transform the world. It cannot be separated from the soil of material production activities but is mutually permeable and restrictive with them.

Marxist aesthetics emphasizes that beauty is the objectification of human essential forces and a product of social practice. This means that in the digital-intelligent environment, although virtual technology can create stunning visual effects, true aesthetic value still needs to be verified and endowed through practice. People should not indulge in virtual appearances but participate in social practice to materialize essential forces such as wisdom and emotions into specific aesthetic objects, thereby

realizing self-confirmation and gaining true aesthetic experience in the process of objectification.

At the same time, Marxist aesthetics points out that aesthetic activities are social and historical. In the digital-intelligent era, changes in aesthetic standards are affected by various factors such as social productive forces and cultural forms. Therefore, constructing a healthy aesthetic path requires basing on social practice, focusing on the needs of social development, guiding people to establish correct aesthetic concepts, avoiding being confused by false aesthetics created by digital-intelligent technologies, and thus discovering, creating, and disseminating beauty in real social practice.

2.2 Contemporary Inheritance of Chinese Aesthetic Spirit

Under the impact of the digital-intelligent tide, young students are facing the dilemma of superficial and fragmented aesthetics. The time-honored Chinese aesthetic spirit, with its unique theoretical connotation, provides a solid theoretical foundation and rich ideological resources for young students to break through the predicament.

The harmonious beauty of "the unity of heaven and humanity" is the cornerstone of the Chinese aesthetic spirit. It advocates the harmonious unity between humans and nature, and between humans and society. In the digital-intelligent era, virtual and reality are intertwined, and young people are prone to indulging in the virtual world and neglecting the beauty of nature and reality. "The unity of heaven and humanity" reminds young people that aesthetics should not be limited to the light and shadow on the screen but should go into nature, feel the grandeur of mountains and rivers, the changes of seasons, cultivate a keen perception of beauty in the nourishment of nature, achieve physical and mental harmony, and get rid of the aesthetic isolation and narrowness brought by digitalization.

The educational beauty of "literature carrying the Dao" endows aesthetics with profound social significance. In the digital-intelligent era with complex information, aesthetics often remains superficial. "Literature carrying the Dao" urges young people to recognize that works of art are not only visual enjoyment but should also carry morality, ethics, and values. In the process of aesthetics, young people should explore the spiritual connotation behind works, improve their moral cultivation through aesthetics, cultivate a sense of social responsibility, and guide the direction of aesthetics with correct values.

The artistic conception beauty of "subtlety beyond charm" pursues meaning beyond words and imagery beyond form. Faced with fragmented information in the digital-intelligent era, young people are likely to develop a superficial aesthetic habit. "Subtlety beyond charm" encourages young people to deeply appreciate works of art, feel infinite artistic conception in limited forms, cultivate in-depth aesthetic ability, resist the erosion of fragmented aesthetics, and improve their aesthetic taste and spiritual realm.

2.3 Path Enlightenment of Modern Aesthetic Education Theory

Since Schiller and Dewey pioneered modern aesthetic education theory, it has always emphasized the unique value of aesthetics in terms of personality integrity and human liberation. In the digital-intelligent era, this theory shows more profound connotation and strong vitality, providing a solid theoretical foundation for young students to break through aesthetic dilemmas.

Modern aesthetic education theory breaks through the limitation of traditional aesthetic education that only focuses on the teaching of artistic skills, elevating aesthetic education into an important way to cultivate sound personality and promote people's all-round and free development. The digital-intelligent tide has brought a large amount of information and diverse aesthetic stimuli, but it has also led to young students' superficial and fragmented aesthetics, and even aesthetic confusion. Modern aesthetic education theory emphasizes guiding young people to deeply perceive and understand beauty through rich and diverse aesthetic experiences, thereby shaping a complete personality. For example, when appreciating classic works of art, young people can not only appreciate the beauty of artistic form but also experience the emotions, thoughts, and values contained in them, realizing the nourishment of the soul and the sublimation of the spirit.

Scholar Liu Jinnuo's viewpoint points out the direction for the application of modern aesthetic education theory in the digital-intelligent era. Faced with new challenges in the technical environment, aesthetic education should not escape passively but actively embrace digital-intelligent empowerment and innovate educational models. Using technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence can create immersive aesthetic experiences, allowing young people to more intuitively feel the charm of beauty; with the help of big data analysis, it is possible to accurately grasp young people's aesthetic needs and preferences and provide personalized aesthetic education content.

3. Implementation Paths for the Cultivation of College Students' Aesthetic Values

Based on the analysis of the dilemmas and goal positioning of college students' aesthetic values in the digital-intelligent era, it is necessary to construct a multi-dimensional collaborative cultivation path to achieve educational effectiveness.

3.1 Strengthen Top-Level Design and Build a Comprehensive Aesthetic Education System

Colleges and universities should elevate the cultivation of aesthetic values to a strategic height, deeply integrate it into the top-level design and overall planning of talent training, and build a three-dimensional aesthetic education system that runs through the entire process of education and teaching, involves all staff, and covers all aspects. To achieve this goal, first of all, it is necessary to integrate and innovate at the mechanism level, establish an aesthetic education work committee led by the main leaders of the university, with the collaboration of multiple departments such as academic affairs, student work, publicity, and information technology center. This committee will break the barriers between traditional colleges, departments, and departments, comprehensively plan and efficiently allocate aesthetic education resources across the university, and ensure the systematic and institutionalized advancement of aesthetic education work.

At the same time, efforts should be made to promote the digital transformation of aesthetic education carriers and models, and focus on building an intelligent aesthetic education platform that integrates resource aggregation, teaching interaction, and achievement display. This platform needs to deeply integrate high-quality online digital resources with offline physical practice resources, analyze students'

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aesthetic preferences and development trajectories with big data technology, provide personalized and adaptive learning path recommendations for students, and realize the precision and scientization of the aesthetic education process.

Ultimately, efforts should be made to build an aesthetic education network system covering four dimensions: "professional teaching, campus culture, social services, and international communication." In professional teaching, aesthetic principles should be organically infiltrated to improve the aesthetic level of disciplinary connotation; in campus cultural activities, a strong atmosphere of advocating and experiencing beauty should be actively created; through social service and practice projects, students' ability to apply and create beauty in real scenarios should be tempered; in international exchanges and communication, the unique charm of the Chinese aesthetic spirit should be vividly displayed to enhance cultural influence. Thus, a new pattern of comprehensive aesthetic education featuring internal and external linkage, four-dimensional collaboration, and full-process penetration will be formed, making aesthetic education a crucial support for empowering students' all-round development and shaping new people of the times.

3.2 Innovate the Curriculum System and Realize the Tripartite Integration Path

The curriculum system is the main channel for the cultivation of aesthetic values. Colleges and universities should strive to construct a modern aesthetic education curriculum system that is rooted in profound cultural heritage and reflects the spirit of the digital-intelligent era. The core of this system lies in promoting an educational mechanism of in-depth integration and organic connection of the tripartite elements: "ideological and political guidance, artistic practice, and technological empowerment."

Firstly, taking art as the carrier, deeply integrate ideological and political elements to realize "cultivating people through beauty and educating people through culture." The curriculum should thoroughly explore the ideals and beliefs, family and country feelings, and socialist core values contained in works of art and cultural classics, so that aesthetic education teaching not only has artistic appeal but also carries value leading power, achieving "emotion and soul," and shaping students' spiritual character in an imperceptible way.

Secondly, promote aesthetic education from knowledge transmission to practical creation, and construct an integrated learning path of "teaching-creation-application." We can actively explore the collaborative teaching model of "college teachers + inheritors of intangible cultural heritage + industry mentors," and organically integrate intangible cultural heritage such as Shu embroidery, ceramics, and folk music, as well as cutting-edge fields such as virtual reality art and digital media design into the curriculum. Through project-based learning, guide students to use digital technology for artistic creation and expression, and understand aesthetic principles and master creative methods in practice.

Thirdly, rely on digital-intelligent technology empowerment to expand the forms and evaluation methods of aesthetic education teaching. With the help of intelligent teaching platforms and tools, support personalized learning paths and creative feedback, and realize the transformation from unified

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teaching to teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. At the same time, use digital technology to extend the classroom boundaries and build a learning field combining virtual and real, and linking online and offline.

This tripartite integrated curriculum system of "ideological and political-art-technology" not only breaks the time and space limitations of traditional aesthetic education but also enables students to simultaneously improve their aesthetic literacy, technical capabilities, and cultural confidence in creative practice. Ultimately, it realizes the coordinated development of knowledge, abilities, and values, forming a new paradigm of aesthetic education curriculum with contemporary characteristics and educational effectiveness.

3.3 Strengthen Teacher Team Construction and Improve Teachers' Digital-Intelligent Aesthetic Education Literacy

The teaching team is the core force determining the effectiveness of aesthetic value cultivation. Faced with the new requirements for aesthetic education work in the digital-intelligent era, it is necessary to strive to build a professional and compound aesthetic education teaching team that not only deeply grasps the laws of aesthetic education but also proficiently masters the application capabilities of digital-intelligent technologies.

To this end, we should systematically construct an interdisciplinary and cross-field multi-dimensional teacher structure, actively integrate the forces of art professional teachers, humanities and social sciences teachers, computer and information technology professional teachers, as well as industry experts in the cultural industry, forming a teaching community with complementary knowledge and collaborative education. At the same time, it is necessary to establish a normalized and systematic teacher digital technology training and development mechanism, focusing on special training on artificial intelligence-assisted teaching design, virtual reality scene creation, learning analysis and evaluation supported by big data, so as to effectively improve teachers' ability to use digital tools to optimize the entire process of aesthetic education teaching.

In addition, a sound incentive and support system should be established to encourage teachers to actively carry out innovation and research on digital-intelligent aesthetic education teaching, transform practical problems into research topics, and continuously optimize teaching models and methods through the feedback and application of scientific research results. By building a virtuous cycle mechanism of "teaching-research-innovation" mutual promotion, we can continuously promote the iterative upgrading of aesthetic education teaching content, methods, and evaluation systems, and ultimately achieve the continuous improvement of aesthetic education quality and educational effectiveness.

3.4 Improve the Evaluation Mechanism and Focus on Process-Oriented and Developmental Evaluation

Constructing a scientific, effective, and clearly oriented evaluation system is a key guarantee for ensuring the continuous deepening and effectiveness of aesthetic value cultivation. It is necessary to break through the traditional single, result-oriented evaluation model and establish a dynamic and

developmental multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation mechanism that focuses on the entire process of students' aesthetic growth.

The new evaluation mechanism should focus on students' participation, experience depth, and gradual improvement of internal aesthetic literacy in various aesthetic education activities. In terms of evaluation subjects, promote the formation of a multi-subject participation model combining teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, social evaluation (such as feedback from industry experts and community representatives), and student self-evaluation, so as to enhance the comprehensiveness and objectivity of evaluation. In terms of evaluation content, focus on examining students' aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and innovative creation capabilities displayed in real or simulated scenarios, rather than limiting to the memory and reproduction of static knowledge. We can systematically design and regularly hold "Aesthetic Education Teaching Achievement Exhibitions" to focus on displaying students' outstanding creations, project reports, and practical achievements in the dimensions of "disciplinary integration, digital empowerment, social services, and cultural inheritance." Such exhibition-based evaluation is not only a visual presentation of students' aesthetic literacy and comprehensive abilities but also effectively stimulates students' sense of learning achievement and motivation for continuous investment by creating a mechanism of public display and communication feedback, thereby building a virtuous cycle of "promoting learning through evaluation, promoting teaching through exhibition, and promoting optimization through feedback," and continuously promoting the aesthetic education system to evolve in the direction of higher quality and deeper connotation.

4. Conclusion

The cultivation of college students' aesthetic values in the digital-intelligent era is a systematic project with far-reaching implications and complex connotations, which cannot be completed by colleges and universities alone. It urgently requires the collaborative participation and in-depth coupling of multiple forces such as colleges and universities, society, technology platforms, and families. Looking forward to the future, with the continuous evolution and penetration of generative artificial intelligence, metaverse, and even more cutting-edge technologies, college students' aesthetic ecology will face more profound deconstruction and reshaping. The cultivation of their values will not only usher in unprecedented opportunities such as personalized guidance and immersive experience but also face more severe challenges such as technical ethics and cognitive cocoons. In this context, college aesthetic education must maintain a keen technical insight and profound cultural judgment. While actively embracing technological innovation and exploring new paths of "digital-intelligent empowerment," it must always adhere to the educational orientation of "cultivating people through beauty." Only by continuously innovating cultivation concepts, models, and methods in dynamic balance can we effectively guide college students to establish authentic and noble aesthetic values in the complex context of intertwined virtual and reality, and ultimately contribute an irreplaceable aesthetic education

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force to cultivating new people of the times with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor.