

# From "Art Is Experience" to "Culture Is Creativity": The Reform of Public Aesthetic Education in Digital Society

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**Abstract:** As human society has entered digital society from former industrial and industrial society, a series of changes have taken place in public aesthetic education from "art is experience" to "culture is creativity": the goal changed from "cultivating personality" to "cultivating creativity"; the content expanded from artistic cultivation to cultural creativity; the object changed from mass to public; the implementation path changed from artistic experience under classroom organization to cultural creativity under industrialized organization. This reform is not subversive, but continuous. It has intensified basic function of aesthetic education and reshaped the relationship between aesthetic educational activities and aesthetic educational objects and the government. However, the protection of intellectual property rights for cultural creativity and the "degree" of creativity need special attention.

**Keywords:** Art, Experience, Culture, Creativity, Aesthetic Education

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of public aesthetic education (P.A.E.) is not to impart professional knowledge and skills, but to cultivate the humanistic feelings of the audience and encourage the audience to consciously practice their own aesthetics. It has existed since ancient times, both inland and abroad. In the west, the ancient Greeks used different art forms such as epic, drama and music to carry out aesthetic education to free people. The "teaching of six arts" is a long-term important content of public aesthetic education in ancient China. However, there is no strict and unified formula for the purpose, content, object and implementation path for public aesthetic education. They will change with the changes of the times and science and technology. However, the productivity transformation from workshop handicraft industry to machine industry has not substantially changed the purpose, content, object and implementation path of public aesthetic education, but the current digital technology has made it produce unprecedented new changes. This paper will explain the new changes of the purpose, content, object and implementation path of public aesthetic education in digital society in detail, and further reflect on the significance and problems brought by these new changes, hoping to outline the overall ecological

picture of public aesthetic education in digital society and highlight the role of public aesthetic education in cultivating public creativity; shaping public independent personality; reconstructing value of cultural organizational form. These values are particularly important for correcting digital instrumentalizing tendency of human beings and human activities in digital society.

## 2. The Transformation of the Purpose of P.A.E.: From "Cultivating Personality" to "Cultivating Creativity"

The purpose of public aesthetic education in pre-industrial society and industrial society is the same, that is to cultivate people's internal psychology, making it surpass the utilitarian reality and obtain the spiritual "ultimate" perfection. The essence of this purpose is to cultivate individual personality in an all-round way, which can be summarized as "cultivating personality".

"Cultivating personality", specifically, can be understood from three aspects: firstly, it means repairing the spiritual deficiency caused by reality. Artificially adapting to the various orders of social reality will deliberately train skills in

one aspect, and even lead to the imbalance of overall development. This is particularly prominent in the industrial society with the increasing degree of work specialization and mechanization. Therefore, "we have the responsibility to restore the integrity of our nature destroyed by dogma through higher education"[1].

Secondly, "cultivating personality" means to make people surpass practical utility and obtain spiritual freedom. Human utilitarian and low-level perceptual knowledge can not surpass utilitarianism and achieve freedom without the promotion training of "self-restraint personality". This realm of freedom is mainly perceived through feelings [2]. However, "self-cultivation of personality" is to stimulate people's existing and potential "talents", rather than re-input a new personality.

"Cultivating personality" also means transforming reality with people's inner beautiful personality and creating a beautiful social living environment. "Cultivating personality" is not only to appreciate art, but also to create and grasp life, so as to make the aesthetic personality cultivated by art intervene in reality and transform the "seamless network of interests" of reality [3]. People should regard their career as a work of art, only to meet their ideals, regardless of gain or loss. In this way, we can make real achievements.

The purpose of "cultivating personality" has been greatly impacted after the emergence of digital technology. Digital technology has raised the automation level of the whole social production to an unprecedented level. This reflects that it not only actively participates in human group social activities, but also deeply participates in its individual spiritual activities. The shrinking of human individual initiative and creativity in digital age seems inevitable. "The depth of experience is flattened into a digital level face without qualitative change, and individual experience is gradually transferred to a homogeneous collective experience" [4]. In this context, only "cultivating personality" can not solve the "rootless" problem of culture. We must repair and improve human's natural creativity destroyed by digital technology and strengthen its ability to transform reality on the basis of "cultivating personality".

"Cultivating creativity" can also be understood from three aspects: firstly, it means repairing people's damaged initiative and creativity. Creativity is the inherent natural demand of human beings. If human beings completely hand over the right of active creativity to AI, only passively consume creativity, and even equate the consumption of creativity with creativity itself, human natural creativity will be seriously damaged. "That complacency, passivity and credulity of thought" [5] also exists in the AI era. Of course, this does not mean the complete exclusion of digital technology, but the need for digital technology to return to the tool standard, making human realize "digitization is a means"[6] and maintain the active role of natural creativity in social and historical development.

"Cultivating creativity" secondly means cultivating personality in the process of cultivating creativity. "Cultivating creativity" does not abandon "cultivating personality", but develops it. Truly valuable creativity does

not come out without ground, but requires long-term accumulation and brewing. "The definition of creativity is: the unusual new synthesis of ordinary old materials" [3]. The familiarity with "old materials" needs to be accumulated, and the emergence of "new comprehensive" thinking also needs to be brewed and pondered. The creator's personality and temperament are naturally cultivated. It can be said that "cultivating personality" is not only the premise of cultivating creativity, but also a necessary process.

"Cultivating creativity" finally means the cultivation of human's ability to actively transform and create reality. The strong and dynamic natural creativity of human beings is the basis for the improvement of social productivity and the fundamental driving force for historical development and era transformation: "creative thinking has brought new things - creativity - from the solution of simple and small problems to the solution of various ideas and inventions that have rapidly changed our world"[7]. With the development of digital technology and the shrinking of human natural creativity, this training is necessary and urgent.

### 3. The Transformation of the Content of P.A.E.: From Art to Culture

In order to achieve the goal of "cultivating personality", the public aesthetic education of pre-industrial society and industrial society takes art as the main educational content. Firstly, art has the characteristics of sensibility and rationality, fuzziness and clarity, individual experience and universal knowledge, so it emphasizes the coexistence of "holistic" aesthetic thinking. This is conducive to repairing the spiritual deficiency brought by reality. "As far as experience is concerned, thinking in the way of beauty and strict logic can be in harmony, and can coexist in a not very narrow field" [2].

Secondly, although art emphasizes the aesthetic thinking of the coexistence of multiple spiritual factors, sensibility, fuzziness and individual experience are still dominant relative to rationality, clarity and universal knowledge. Aesthetic judgment "is made by those senses affected by feelings"[2]. "The low-level ability in this talent is easy to awaken, and should be in proportion to the spiritual nature of cognition" [2]. This not only ensures the people's ability to accept art, but also confirms the feasibility of implementing aesthetic education to the general public through art.

Finally, art has the characteristics of surreal utility, which is easy to make people obtain spiritual freedom and liberation. In the relationship between reality and people, the activities of people and objects are limited by the environment. In the relationship between art and man, man is "the master of his own mind"; objects "can show value in themselves"[3]. Both people and objects can maintain their independence in the relationship between art and people. On the one hand, they can fully reflect their own value; on the other hand, they can achieve a state of freedom and autonomy.

As mentioned earlier, the emerging digital technology represented by AI can deeply participate in the spiritual

activities of groups and individuals, which will certainly threaten the exertion of human natural creativity, but it also more conveniently extends the aesthetics to the depths of daily life and deepens the "aestheticization of daily life" proposed by Featherstone. "Aestheticization of daily life" is certainly not marked by the emergence of AI. Its emergence is more closely related to the characteristics of consumerism in contemporary society, but its impact on the traditional existence of art is the same as AI. Although the acceptance of art does not require hard rational training, it is easier for the general public to stimulate aesthetic feelings and aesthetic creativity through "aestheticization of daily life". In this way, "culture", which has aesthetic connotation, is not pure art, and can be integrated with daily life style, gradually replaces art in contemporary society and constitutes the main content of public aesthetic education. This "culture" is not a traditional elite culture, but "the whole way of life" defined by the Birmingham School, or it can be more specifically expressed as "a field of significance connecting the field of production (economy) and the field of social relations (politics)" [8].

Just as art is in line with the purpose of "cultivating personality", culture is also in line with the purpose of "cultivating creativity". First of all, culture attaches great importance to people's initiative and creativity. "The field of meaning connecting the field of production (economy) and the field of social relations (politics)" means that people have established a meaningful connection between the "field of production" and the "field of social relations" through their own understanding and practice. If this meaningful connection is successfully established, people's understanding and practice of these two fields must be creative.

Secondly, culture can cultivate personality in the process of cultivating creativity. The achievements of mankind's transformation of nature over the ages have been integrated into people's subconsciousness, forming people's internal "cultural memory" and shaped people's "cultural psychology". "Our conscious behavior is the product of the unconscious deep psychological structure mainly caused by genetic influence." [9] This also makes the so-called human natural creative ability not a simple creativity of primitive people that lacks cultural accumulation, but needs long-term accumulation and brewing. The individual's personality is cultivated in it.

Finally, culture can cultivate people's ability to actively transform and create reality. While producing culture, man is also transforming and creating reality. The two are integrated: "this production is man's dynamic class life. Through this production, nature can express his works and his reality." [10]

#### **4. The Transformation of the Object of P.A.E.: From Mass to Public**

In the pre-industrial society and industrial society, the object of public aesthetic education is mass. After entering digital society, the object of public aesthetic education has become the public. There are essential differences in cultural

accumulation, psychology, consciousness and social behavior between mass and public. The cultural accumulation of the mass is shallow. The individual consciousness of independence is weak, presenting obvious group consciousness. This group consciousness is mainly manifested as follows: firstly, individuals in mass have conformity and are dominated by the law of unity of group spirit [8]. This Law of spiritual unity enables them to obtain a group psychology. Individual intelligence and personality are weakened, heterogeneity is swallowed up by homogeneity, and unconscious quality prevails.

Secondly, mass tends to turn complex problems into simple slogans. The individual's shallow cultural accumulation and deep-rooted group psychology make the mass' way of thinking tend to be simple. They usually understand complex problems through simple slogans. "They either accept or reject all the opinions, ideas and beliefs provided to them as absolute truth or absolute fallacy"[9].

Thirdly, it is easy for mass to endow their ideals with an arbitrary nature. The simplistic thinking of mass makes them paranoid about any opinions, ideas and beliefs. "At public gatherings, even the slightest retort made by the speaker will immediately attract roar and rude scolding." [9] Ideal tyranny makes mass easy to obey the power, but rarely influenced by kindness.

Finally, mass has no individual consciousness, their personal interests and goals do not exist in the group, their psychology is often in a hypnotic open state, and they are easy to accept psychological hints. This makes every emotion and action contagious among mass, which makes them feel that they have unstoppable power and dare to vent their instinctive desires that are limited when they are alone. "The group is anonymous, so it does not have to bear responsibility" [9].

With the advent of the digital society and the intensifying of the beautification of daily life, people began to gradually come into contact with the previously unreachable elite culture. The cultural accumulation of social individuals and the gradual intensifying of cultural cultivation. The individual's real sense of independence and autonomy, rather than the blind freedom chaos at mass level, began to sprout. Individuals also have a new understanding of the relationship between individuals and the group formed by individuals through their relationship with each other. People's psychology, consciousness and social behavior habits have changed, opening the transformation from mass to public.

Public can also be called citizens. The state endows individuals with equal citizenship at the institutional level, providing legal protection for individual rights and obligations, and making "citizens" truly become the master of individual life and independently and consciously perform relevant rights and obligations. The so-called oppressive and oppressed relationship between ruling class and mass in the pre-industrial society and industrial society has been gradually dispelled in the relationship between "public" and "people". In this sense, it can be said that "the information society has led to a social transformation as far-reaching as the industrial revolution" [11].

There are essential differences between public consciousness and mass consciousness, mainly as follows: firstly, individuals in the public maintain self independence. "Citizenship is more often considered to be about membership, attribution, rights and obligations" [11]. These qualifications, ownership, rights and obligations are undertaken and performed by the people independently and voluntarily. Their collective cohesion is based on internalizing the rational cognition of national identity into emotional experience and ideal belief.

Secondly, the public attaches importance to democratic discussion and consultation on public issues based on individual independence and equality. "The concept of citizenship evokes a political tradition, that is, the debate on the participation of individuals in the formation of legal and social decisions" [11].

Thirdly, the public ideal is unified with the responsibility and obligation to public space and affairs. The public's personal experience internalizes the rational cognition of national identity into their own emotional experience and ideal belief. While striving to realize their own ideal in practice, they also fulfill their responsibilities to the state and society.

Finally, the public's individual interests and goals are also consistent with the overall interests and goals of the state and society: "any restriction on the freedom of individual contribution is actually a restriction on social resources"[11]. In such an environment, the public has the conditions to promote social development on their own, and will actively participate in the construction of public space and affairs.

## 5. Reform of the Implementation Path of P.A.E.: From "Classroom Experience" to "Industry Creativity"

Traditional public aesthetic education emphasizes surpassing daily utilitarianism in content. The audience it faces is the public with low cultural quality, strong conformity psychology, simple thinking and weak individual consciousness. Therefore, it tends to adopt classroom organization to guide the public to learn and experience.

Classroom organization has three characteristics: clear educational objectives, optimized educational environment and appropriate educational strategies. Traditional public aesthetic education hopes to change and enhance people's value judgment on social life, improve people's internal spiritual world, improve the relationship between people, and build a reasonable social life style through "self-restraint personality". This goal is very clear: "good goals are specific and meaningful to individuals. They represent your own deep-rooted beliefs - things you will never compromise." [12]

Another important feature of classroom organization is the optimized educational environment. The educational environment of traditional public aesthetic education is limited, or is being the scope that books, film and television,

outdoor landscape and other media can spread and radiate, or the public literature and art lecture hall of colleges and cultural institutions, or various literature and art venues. Their space state, displaying mode of cultural and artistic products, facilities and equipment provided for the public, clear operation rules and practices, and measures to prevent accidents will be adjusted according to the nature of the environment and the physical and mental state of the public, so as to bring the public sense of security, satisfaction and belonging as much as possible, and so as to facilitate the development of aesthetic education activities.

The third characteristic of classroom organization is the implementation of appropriate educational strategies. Traditional public aesthetic education generally moderately stimulates the public's emotional experience through classic art works, and the analysis and affirmation of art works by various media materials, commentators in mass art classes and commentators in art venues can easily stimulate the public's aesthetic pleasure, making them feel clear about their learning objectives and get encouragement, and then enter the learning state independently and actively, "not take away the independence and will they think they have"[12].

Classroom aesthetic education is aimed at the public. Under the guidance of clear educational objectives, through optimized educational environment and appropriate educational strategies, the public will gain an in-depth experience of artistic works. However, no matter how active they are, they can not eliminate the distance between aesthetic education and daily life and fully realize the function of aesthetic education. The platform of digital technology enables the public not only to consum culture conveniently and fastly, but also participate in creativity and dissemination of culture, making culture an organic part of people's daily life, and then intensified the social function of aesthetic education. In order to stimulate people's enthusiasm for creativity, people's creativity, construction and sharing of culture are generally organized in the form of industrialization.

Industrialization organization has three characteristics: practical educational objectives, strong regularity of educational environment and flexible educational strategies. The purpose of aesthetic education of classroom organization is non-utilitarian, and stimulating public creativity enthusiasm and cultivating its creativity ability will inevitably lead to actual economic benefits: "consumer participation should bring value to consumers and the company at the same time" [13].

The second characteristic of an industrial organization is that its educational environment is highly regular. An industrial organization does not ignore the optimization of the environment. It also pays attention to creating a convenient and comfortable atmosphere for public through cutting-edge digital technology and advanced auxiliary software, and bringing a sense of security, satisfaction and belonging. However, the establishment of rules is more important for an industrial organization because of this kind of environment. The environment is too open, and simulation is generally

involved in the construction, which is more conducive to the establishment and implementation of regulations and laws in all aspects, such as standardizing social life behavior, cultural creativity, communication and consumption, production, marketing and profit.

The third characteristic of industrialization organization is that its educational strategy is very flexible. Its flexibility is mainly reflected in attracting the public to independently and voluntarily create culture, rather than attracting the public to independently and voluntarily learn. In the industrialization operation mechanism based on digital technology, an individual's cultural creativity is the cultural resources that other individuals learn and absorb, and vice versa, there are no fixed educators and educated persons. Cultural enterprises are only a special type of public aggregation: "companies must learn from consumers and cooperate with consumers to create value to meet their individual and changing needs"[13]. This effectively stimulates the public's independent and voluntary cultural creativity, which reflects the flexibility of educational strategies.

Guided by the goal of practical aesthetic education, through a regular and open educational environment and flexible educational strategies, the public will obtain the ability to innovate culture through industrial organizations. However, it is worth noting that cultural creativity is not only the creativity of cultural significance and cultural form, such as "key sorting and sharing" [14], the creativity of cultural significance management, the creativity of AI cultural communication carrier of science and technology, and the creativity of cross industry chain profit model of cultural products should also belong to the scope of cultural creativity. Through cultural creativity, the public connects private space with public space, and cultural significance with political and economic fields, which not only enhances cultural creativity, but also cultivates personality and realizes personal ideals. At the same time, it also realizes the responsibility of public responsibility. "Innovation is the soul of a nation's progress, the inexhaustible driving force for a country's prosperity, and the deepest national endowment of the Chinese nation. In the fierce international competition, only innovators advance, innovators are strong, and innovators win." [15]

## 6. Conclusion: The Significance and Problems of the Evolution of P.A.E.

The digital society entered after the former industrialized and industrialized society. Public aesthetic education has undergone a series of evolution: the goal has changed from "cultivating personality" to "cultivating creativity", the content expanded from artistic edification to cultural creativity, the object transformed from mass to public, and the implementation path turned from artistic experience under classroom organization to cultural creativity under industrialized organization. The whole process of traditional public aesthetic education actually confirmed Dewey's "art is

experience" conclusion. Dewey believes that elegance or popularity is only the value judgment imposed on works of art by social life under different systems. When facing works of art, the public can not completely leave their daily life experience, and even need to "turn to the daily power and conditions of experience that we usually do not regard as the scope of aesthetics" [16]. It is through this experience that the public connects art with daily life, elegance with popularity, form with meaning. Experience has laid a foundation for art. The overall process of public aesthetic education in digital society can be summarized as "culture is creativity" according to the expression of current national policies and in contrast to "art is experience". This is right and ability of the public to independently create culture through digital technology, which connects privacy and sociality, economicity and politicality, significance and practice. This communication not only "cultivates" public's personality and cultivates public's ability to think and create independently, but also unifies public's personal ideal and demand with its responsibility for social public responsibility. The "connection" in the "meaning field connecting the production field (economy) and the social relations field (politics)" is cultural creativity for "shaping differences" [17], and the "meaning field" is the result for cultural creativity.

The change of public aesthetic education from "art is experience" to "culture is creativity" is not a subversive change, but a continuous change. That is to say, "culture is creativity" is not a negation of "art is experience", but a combination of the new changes of the educated and social life on premise of retaining aesthetic education purpose, method and way of "art is experience". "Art is experience" is undoubtedly of great significance. It turns aesthetic education from an educational guidance to people into a daily lifestyle of people, naturally intensifies basic function of aesthetic education, and reshapes the relationship between aesthetic education activities and aesthetic education objects and government, making it more reasonable. However, this change also needs to pay attention to the changes in the process of cultural creativity intellectual property protection and the "degree" of creativity. On the issue of intellectual property protection, we should pay attention to the establishment of relevant systems and rules to ensure the rational use of other people's works by our media users. On this issue, we should pay attention not to endlessly produce for one-sided economic interests or cultural effectiveness, destroy the cultural ecological balance, and ignore the guidance of innovative content on the positive energy of social life for one-sided creativity. These problems also put forward new historical tasks for the government and relevant educational institutions: "What role can they play in promoting the use of digital technology to liberate the knowledge and creativity of the whole population?" [18] Answer to this question may further intensify the basic function of aesthetic education and further rationalize the relationship between aesthetic education activities, objects and the government.

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