Research on the Cultivation Path of Design Thinking in China's Basic Education Stage Based on Attribute Construction

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Abstract: Against the dual predicaments of fragmented educational theories and formalized practices, this paper focuses on the philosophical inquiry into the essence of aesthetic education and constructs a theoretical framework centered on the "unified cognitive system of truth, goodness, and beauty." By integrating ontological reflections on truth, goodness, and beauty in Chinese and Western philosophies, it reveals the core proposition that "beauty is the symbolic unity of truth and goodness," and clarifies the unique value of aesthetic education as a symbolic integration mechanism for human cognition of the world and as a quality dimension in the integration of the five educations. Through conceptual clarification and logical deduction, the study incorporates classifications of thinking modes into the analytical framework of the integration of the five educations, demonstrating that aesthetic education, as a quality vector dimension permeating the cultivation goals of moral, intellectual, and physical education, essentially promotes the integration and sublimation of the values of truth and goodness through symbolic practices. Ultimately, it constructs a "cognition-ethics-symbol" triangular theoretical model, providing an underlying cognitive foundation for the construction of aesthetic education theories in the new era and responding to the fundamental educational questions of "what kind of people to cultivate," "how to cultivate people," and "for whom to cultivate people."

Keywords: Cognitive System of Truth, Goodness and Beauty; Integration Mechanism of the Five Educations; Symbolic Thinking; Essence Theory of Aesthetic Education

1 Introduction

Currently, educational models such as PBL and STEAM disrupt classrooms under the banner of "practical innovation." When aesthetic education is reduced to art curriculum reforms or campus cultural activities, educational theory faces the real-world contradiction between "blind practice-driven action" and "theoretical anemia." While specific teaching strategies and plans emerge endlessly, they lack an overarching foundational logic. The call for interdisciplinary education grows louder, yet due to vague core concepts and chaotic structural calculations, integration remains superficial. This dilemma is particularly pronounced in the realm of aesthetic education—between the policy discourse of "cultivating through beauty" and the practical operations of "art grading exams" or "absolute freedom," there lies a cognitive gap regarding philosophical questions such as "What is beauty?" and "What is the purpose of aesthetic education?"

The theoretical construction of aesthetic education needs to transcend the limitations of positivism and return to philosophical depth. The transcendental nature of higher-order concepts determines that truth, goodness, and beauty, as the ultimate categories of human cognition, cannot be verified through limited classroom experiments but must rely on philosophical reflection and logical deduction. For instance, the question "Does beauty necessarily encompass truth and goodness?" is an ontological issue that cannot be answered empirically. The primary task of contemporary aesthetic education is to clarify the ontological question of "what aesthetic education is," rather than hastily providing operational solutions. Only by establishing a clear conceptual system can a solid foundation be laid for subsequent practical research.

The conceptual systems of truth, goodness, and beauty manifest as two distinct evolutionary paths and semantic connotations in Eastern and Western cultural contexts. Western philosophy's exploration of truth, goodness, and beauty exhibits a trajectory from ontological unity to epistemological differentiation. Plato asserted that "beauty is difficult," while Aristotle constructed an ontological system of "truth, goodness, and beauty," viewing beauty as the formal manifestation of truth and goodness. Kant, through his three critical systems, assigned truth, goodness, and beauty to different domains yet implied that beauty serves as a mediator connecting the two. Schiller, on the other hand, argued that aesthetics could facilitate the unity of truth and goodness, achieving the existential state of a "complete human being." Chinese philosophy,

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grounded in the principle of "harmony between heaven and humanity," centers Confucianism on "goodness" and Daoism on "natural authenticity," unifying truth, goodness, and beauty within cosmic order and ethical practice. The coexistence of these two philosophical discourse systems in our education has led to semantic confusion in core concepts, constituting one of the primary challenges in the theoretical construction and practical implementation of aesthetic education.

This paper focuses on three theoretical objectives: first, to investigate the ontological positioning of "beauty" in the cognitive system and define its stable connotation within the context of aesthetic education; second, to construct the intrinsic correlation mechanism between aesthetic education and moral, intellectual, and physical education, deconstructing the internal logic of "the integration of five educations"; third, to elucidate the characteristics of aesthetic education as the core of symbolic thinking and reveal its quality empowerment mechanism in the integration of five educations. By integrating philosophical resources from both Chinese and Western traditions, this study aims to build a systematic theory on the essence of aesthetic education, providing theoretical support for the integrated education of five domains.

2 Beauty as the Symbolic Unity of Truth and Goodness: An Ontological Definition

Truth, goodness, and beauty are adaptive compensatory products resulting from the high differentiation and complexity of human social organizational structures. Together, they constitute an efficient information processing mechanism that follows the spiral ascending rule of "truth → goodness → beauty → truth," exhibiting the relativity, relationality, and vectorized characteristics of cognition. This forms an open-ended meaning-generating system closely linked to subjective practice.

2.1 Semiotic Interpretation of "Symbols" and the Necessity of Their Introduction

Saussure proposed in Course in General Linguistics that "a sign is the unity of the signifier and the signified": the signifier is the material carrier of the sign (such as the written form of a character, sound waves of speech, or the colors and lines of an image), while the signified is the concept or meaning conveyed by the sign (e.g., the signifier of "plum" is its written form, and the signified is "a cold-resistant Rosaceae plant"). This binary relationship is not naturally bound but rather a product of social convention, as the same signifier can correspond to different signifieds across cultures (e.g., the differing meanings of "dragon" in Chinese and Western cultures).

Peirce further classified signs into three categories: iconic signs (such as the resemblance between a photograph and its subject), indexical signs (such as the causal link between smoke and fire), and symbolic signs (such as the conventional association between the color red and revolution), revealing the multiple pathways through which meaning is generated in signs. Regardless of type, the essence of a sign lies in its role as a medium for human cognition and communication: it transforms abstract thought (truthful cognition, moral values) into perceptible forms, converts individual experience into social consensus, and turns fleeting moments into historical heritage. As Cassirer stated in An Essay on Man, "Man is the symbolic animal"—signs are the fundamental tools with which humans construct a world of meaning.

Introducing the concept of "symbols" into aesthetic education research carries a threefold necessity: Resolving the fragmentation of truth, goodness, and beauty: Truth (cognitive laws) possesses objectivity, while goodness (ethical values) embodies normativity. Both require transformation into perceptible existence through symbolic forms—beauty emerges as the "byproduct" of this transformation. For instance, the "beauty" of mathematical formulas (such as Euler's formula) manifests the unity of logical truth (self-consistency) and intellectual goodness (cognitive economy) through mathematical symbols. Similarly, the "beauty" of moral actions (such as acting bravely for justice) represents the immediate presentation of virtuous values through behavioral symbols.

Explaining the social communicability of beauty: The reason beauty can transcend individuals and spatiotemporal boundaries (such as the cross-cultural appeal of the Mona Lisa) lies in the social nature of symbols—they are "historically formed collective representations" (in Durkheim's words). Confucianism uses "jade" as a metaphor for virtue, enabling abstract moral qualities like "benevolence, righteousness, and propriety" to be perceived through the symbolic characteristics of jade, such as its texture and color. Daoism's "the greatest music has the faintest notes" employs "formlessness" as a symbol for the ineffable nature of the Dao, both demonstrating how symbols empower the dissemination of beauty.

Establishing the practical foundation of aesthetic education: The core goal of aesthetic education is to cultivate "symbolic competence"—the ability not only to recognize symbols that embody true and good values (such as perceiving the truth of order from architectural symmetry) but also to create new symbolic forms (such as using theater to express environmental concepts). The cultivation of this ability is precisely what distinguishes aesthetic education from mere artistic skill training.

2.2 Relativity in cognitive structures: Generating meaning through interaction

The Unity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty: In Chinese philosophy, "Dao" is the noumenon of the cosmic operational laws, while "truth" represents the emulation of "Dao" (such as Daoism's "Dao follows nature" and Confucianism's "sincerity is the Dao of heaven"). "Virtue" is the implementation of "Dao" in human society (an alternative term for Dao), and "goodness" embodies the execution of "virtue" (such as Confucianism's "benevolence" and Mohism's "promoting the benefits of the world"). "Beauty," on the other hand, is the symbolic expression of humans "honoring Dao and valuing virtue" to achieve a state of "perfect harmony" (as Confucius

stated, "perfect in beauty and perfect in goodness"). The three attain ultimate unity in the concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity": "truth" is the realization of heavenly Dao, "goodness" is the sincere virtue of heavenly Dao, and "beauty" is the perceptual manifestation of heavenly Dao (capable of being sensed).

In Western philosophy, the trajectory of truth, goodness, and beauty evolves from the ontological unity in ancient Greece (Plato's "Theory of Forms") to Kant's epistemological differentiation (truth, goodness, and beauty belonging to understanding, reason, and judgment, respectively), and then to Schiller's dialectical unity (aesthetics facilitating the fusion of sensibility and reason), demonstrating a path from integration to fragmentation and then to reconstruction. Although linguistic philosophy deconstructs the fixed essence of traditional concepts of truth, goodness, and beauty, it also reveals their context-dependency (language games in specific scenarios).

Beauty, as the symbolic unification of truth and goodness, must be understood within a specific cognitive framework. The manifestation of beauty and symbolic construction: Truth and goodness are products of mental cognition, requiring social dissemination through symbolic media (text, graphics, sound, etc.). Beauty is the expression of truth and goodness in symbolic form by a specific subject in a specific context. The reason "beauty" can be "appreciated" lies in its nature as a symbolized object; truth and goodness cannot be directly perceived (there is no concept of "appreciating truth" or "appreciating goodness"), while the essence of symbolic meaning is the truth and goodness values projected by the artist. (Fig. 1)

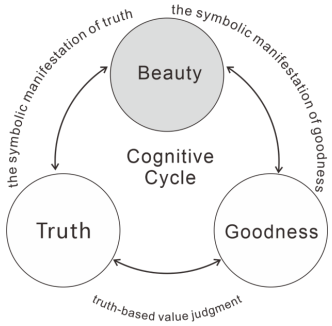

Figure 1. The trinity structure of truth, goodness, and beauty

For instance, Confucianism employs "jade" as a metaphor for virtue, binding the aesthetic attributes of natural objects with ethical character, thereby transforming "jade" into a symbolic carrier of benevolent qualities such as "benevolence, righteousness, and propriety." Meanwhile, the Daoist aesthetic concept of "the greatest music has the faintest notes" symbolizes the ineffability of the "Dao" through "formless beauty." Beauty and art manifest in perceptible forms such as vision and hearing merely because they are first encountered by the senses, yet their essence lies in the symbolic representation of the information-processing mechanisms underlying truth, goodness, and beauty.

2.3 The essential attribute of beauty: vectorized symbolic practice

Truth, goodness, and beauty, along with falsehood, ugliness, and evil, constitute the two sides of cognition, possessing vector attributes with both direction and intensity. Directionality of the Vector: Beauty consistently points toward the "unity of truth and goodness," yet its direction is contextually pluralistic. The "beauty of artistic conception" in traditional Chinese art points to the truth and goodness of "harmony between heaven and humanity," while the "beauty of harmony" in Western classical art points to the truth and goodness of "rational order." These form distinct aesthetic vectors within different cultural frameworks, yet both ultimately converge on the unity of truth and goodness as their ultimate direction. (Fig. 1)

Intensity of the Vector: The "degree" of beauty is determined by the integrity of symbolic practice. Li Bai's poetic line "The waterfall flies down three thousand feet" achieves a profound unity through the precision of linguistic symbols (truth) and the emotional intensity (goodness), resulting in powerful aesthetic impact. Conversely, artworks that merely pile up forms, lacking depth in truth and goodness, become expressions of low aesthetic intensity. The relativity of beauty and ugliness stems precisely from variations in intensity—what is beautiful may appear "not beautiful enough" or even "ugly" when compared to something more beautiful. (Fig. 2)

The Dynamism of Vectors: Beauty manifests as a "vector field" characteristic in history, evolving from the mysterious beauty of primitive totems (a chaotic unity where truth, goodness, and beauty were undifferentiated) → to the concise beauty of scientific rationality during the Enlightenment (with clarity of truth highlighted) → to the deconstructive beauty of contemporary multiculturalism (redefining traditional boundaries of truth and goodness). The direction and intensity of beauty transform alongside the expansion of human cognitive practices.

This vectorized trait demonstrates that there is no "absolute beauty" independent of context, only an "optimal integrated state" achieved through symbols within specific cognitive frameworks, fulfilling the need for "socially constructed order in complex real-world scenarios." The symmetrical beauty of Euler's formula exemplifies a high degree of alignment between logical truth and intellectual goodness in mathematical language, with its aesthetic intensity varying according to the depth of the observer's comprehension. Conversely, the falsehood of certain cult doctrines and the malevolence of their purposes ultimately manifest as societal ugliness. (Fig. 1)

2.4 The Dialectical Nature of Cognitive Cycles: Approaching "Wholeness" Through Relativity

The dynamic evolution of the triadic relationship among truth, goodness, and beauty forms a spiraling structure of "cognition → symbolization → reflection → new cognition": Truth →

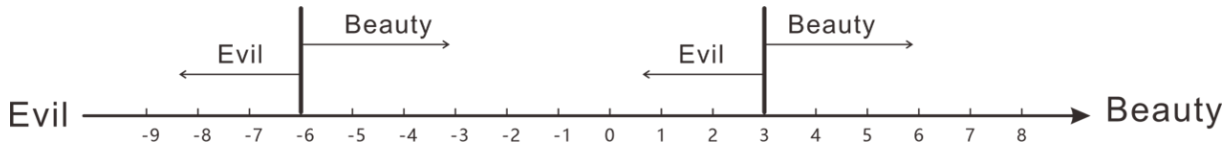

Figure 2. Vector characteristics of the relativity between beauty and ugliness

Goodness: The practical implementation from fact to value. When a subject recognizes the truth that "carbon emissions cause global warming" (scientific observation), it forms the value judgment that "emission reduction is good" (ethical choice), thereby achieving the first integration of the objectivity of truth and the practicality of goodness.

Goodness → Beauty: The symbolic construction from abstraction to concreteness. Transforming the "goodness of environmental protection" into perceptible symbolic forms (e.g., sculptures of melting glaciers) endows abstract values with emotional carriers, completing the transition from "ought" to "perceptible."

Beauty → Truth: The feedback and elevation from symbols to cognition. Aesthetic experiences (e.g., the awe inspired by environmental art) prompt the subject to re-examine climate data, driving deeper scientific inquiry—symbolic practices of beauty serve as the starting point for new cognition.

In this cycle, truth, goodness, and beauty exist in a "relatively holistic" form. Through optimizing symbolic practices (enhancing the vectorial intensity of beauty), humanity approaches a more complete understanding of the world, yet can never attain the absolute "totality of truth, goodness, and beauty."

Beauty, as the symbolic unification of truth and goodness, is neither subjective emotional expression nor objective formal attributes. Rather, it is the "optimal manifestation of the truth-goodness relationship" achieved by the subject through symbolic practices under specific historical conditions.

3 The Logical Reconstruction of Five-Education Integration: Aesthetic Education as a Vector Dimension of Quality

3.1 The Logical Flaws of the Traditional Five-Education Concept and the Construction of a Vector Model

Traditional education often treats the Five Educations as independent entities, leading to two major misconceptions: first, the disciplinary fragmentation that overlooks the intrinsic connections among the educations (e.g., treating aesthetic education as an isolated course); second, a static understanding that views moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic educations as fixed competencies (e.g., intellectual education = knowledge quantity, aesthetic education = painting and music), neglecting their quality-enhancing dimensions.

Based on the preceding analysis, this paper proposes the "Five Educations Vector Model," which primarily includes the following core viewpoints:

Achieving an intrinsic logical unification between the two conceptual groups centered on "beauty"—"truth, goodness, beauty" and "moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic." It reveals beauty as the ontological boundary of the symbolic unity of truth and goodness. "Moral, intellectual, physical" are fundamental attributes inherent to all individuals, namely biological, intellectual, and social attributes, serving as the direct objectives of quality-oriented education.

Aesthetic education empowers the qualitative enhancement of the "moral, intellectual, physical" foundational qualities. Aesthetic education is not a parallel existence alongside moral, intellectual, and physical educations but rather a vector dimension that imbues the three with the "direction of beauty (not ugliness)" and the "degree of beauty (not ugliness)," elevating moral, intellectual, and physical educations from "factual competencies" to "positive value qualities."

Art education (in the broad sense) serves as the method and vehicle for implementing aesthetic education. Art education is education aimed at beauty, with the two being two sides of the same relationship. The diversity of "goodness" in real life determines the richness of "beauty" and "artistic" expressions.

Labor education is the ultimate domain where moral, intellectual, and physical educations converge with aesthetic education, completing the cognitive loop of aesthetic education through labor practices. The model integrates the five major forms of human thinking to construct a systematic logical framework for the Five Educations, with beauty and art serving as threads running throughout. Ultimately, through labor practices, the goal of "vectorized generation of competencies and literacies" is achieved. (Fig.3)

3.2 The Quality Empowerment Mechanism of Aesthetic Education on Moral, Intellectual, and Physical Development

Aesthetic Education of the Body: The harmonious unity achieved through physical activity between bodily functions and mental willpower, embodying the "truth of biological regularity" and the "goodness of vitality manifestation." A healthy physique serves as the material foundation for intellectual and moral practice, with the symbolic expression of bodily beauty represented by a naturally robust constitution, agile and vigorous movements, and precise, delicate operations (such as Confucian "archery and charioteering" ritualizing the virtue of "moderation and harmony" through symbolic actions). Modern sports can draw from the traditional "Six Arts," emphasizing rhythmic movements and teamwork in activities like basketball and dance, transforming physical exercise into a dual symbolic carrier of "free will"

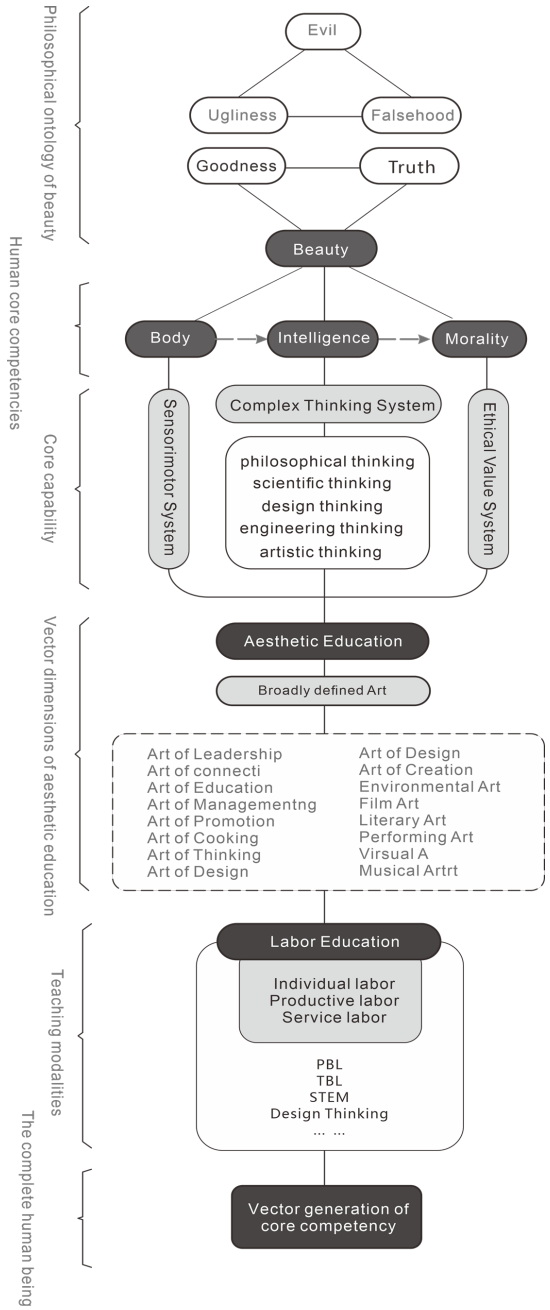

Figure 3. The Five-Education Vector Model

and "social ethics," thereby elevating it from mere physical training to aesthetic education of life.

Aesthetic Education of the Intellect: Intelligence is humanity's structured capacity to process complex information (such as mathematical formulas, scientific laws, and theoretical systems), aligning with the cognitive economy principle of "simplification." The qualitative dimension of aesthetic education emphasizes "metacognition": what knowledge is, how it is generated, how it interacts with the world, and the relationship between the truth of knowledge and the value of goodness. Aesthetic education of the intellect integrates scientific and philosophical thinking, elevating fragmented "dead knowledge" into systematic "living knowledge." For instance, the aesthetic arrangement of Mendeleev's periodic table reflects both the truth of chemical laws and the goodness of cognitive systems; the symmetry of Maxwell's equations symbolizes the unity of logical truth and intellectual goodness.

The Aesthetics of Moral Education: The core of moral education lies in the symbolic practice of moral behavior, transforming abstract norms into concrete actions through the integration of philosophical thinking and design think-

ing. For instance, the beauty of "integrity" is not merely in verbal promises but in sustained actions that "honor one's word as a thousand pieces of gold" (e.g., Shang Yang's "Moving the Wood to Establish Trust," which built a symbol of trust through concrete actions). Aesthetic education empowers moral education by cultivating the ability to create and recognize moral meaning: translating abstract moral principles into tangible behavioral symbols (such as designing action plans for "energy conservation") and discerning the benevolent essence behind behaviors (distinguishing between "publicity-driven charity" and "sustained acts of kindness").

3.3 Theoretical Orientation of Labor Education: The Ultimate Field of Symbolic Practice

Marx proposed that "labor creates beauty," emphasizing that humans objectify their essential powers through practice. Labor is not only material production but also the core domain of symbolic creation. The process of labor involves humans mobilizing and integrating five major forms of thinking to create favorable living environments and wealth.

Traditional craftsmanship: In Jingdezhen ceramic production, artisans' understanding of clay properties (truth, scientific thinking) and their pursuit of "utility in objects" (goodness, design thinking) are transformed into artworks that combine practical and aesthetic value through the pursuit of quality (beauty, artistic thinking). (At the same time, there exist numerous failed works that do not achieve the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty.) Modern innovative practice: When students design energy-saving devices, they must integrate scientific principles (truth, scientific thinking), environmental concepts (goodness, design thinking), and appropriate forms (beauty, artistic thinking) to make the fruits of labor a material carrier of the "knowledge-intention-action" closed loop.

Labor holds a special position among the five aspects of education: First, it completes the cognitive loop by transforming the truth of intellectual education and the goodness of moral education into the beauty of labor. Second, it achieves symbolic creation, not only replicating existing symbols but also inventing new ones (such as new technologies and tools), which represents the concentrated manifestation of human practical wisdom (for example, the craftsmanship spirit of ancient China passed down "the truth of skills and the goodness of ethics" through "the beauty of artifacts").

3.4 Integration of Thought Forms: Achieving Dialectical Unity in Artistic Practice

The concept of art possesses dual dimensions, both narrow and broad.

Narrow Art: The Imaginative Construction of Perceptual Symbols.

Art in the traditional sense (e.g., music, dance, etc.) conveys meaning through perceptual symbol systems such as auditory and visual means, with its core lying in imaginative and analogical thinking. Imaginative thinking is exemplified in Li Bai's poetic lines, where the "truth" of a waterfall and the "goodness" of freedom are fused into poetic symbols. Analogical thinking is illustrated by Zheng Banqiao's use of bamboo to symbolize human resilience, aligning the growth patterns of plants with steadfast character through linguistic symbols. Narrow artistic thinking is characterized by perceptual immediacy and emotional projection, often mistakenly perceived as exclusive to the discipline of art.

Broad Art: The Qualitative Elevation of Symbolic Creation. Transcending disciplinary boundaries, the essence of "art" lies in the creative process that elevates "technique" into "art" (a vector of beauty). Any effort embodying this quality can be regarded as a broad artistic act, and its practitioner is often termed an "artist." Examples include the art of management, performance art, and tea ceremony. Here, "technique" represents method, while "art" signifies quality. When technique surpasses utilitarian aims to pursue "clarity of truth," "purity of goodness," or "the unity of form and content," it ascends to "non-utilitarian, symbolically free creation." Broad artistic thinking permeates scientific discovery, moral practice, and daily life, centering on the conscious pursuit of unifying "truth, goodness, and beauty" in symbolic creation.

The essence of artistic thinking lies in the "qualitative dimensional elevation of symbolic creation," manifesting the leap from "technique" to "art," which aligns with the goal of "beauty" and possesses both directionality and gradation. Directionality guides symbolic creation beyond mere formal accumulation, pointing toward the deep integration of truth and goodness; gradation measures the completeness of this unity (as exemplified in Wu Guanzhong's paintings, where the Eastern cultural essence and personalized painting language achieve a contemporary unity of high order, resulting in intense aesthetic appeal).

This broadened concept of artistic thinking dispels the misconception that "art belongs exclusively to artists," revealing its nature as a "universal human capacity for symbolization." It permeates the details of scientific discovery, moral practice, and daily life, serving as the core driving force for the integration of the Five Educations.

The five modes of thinking achieve dialectical unity in aesthetic education, jointly promoting the integration of the five educations. Philosophical thinking provides ultimate value anchoring (e.g., "harmony between heaven and humanity" serving as the cognitive foundation for ecological aesthetic education and offering value evaluation benchmarks); scientific thinking supplies instrumental methods (e.g., analyzing with data symbols); artistic thinking generates and innovates symbols (e.g., expressing truth and goodness through drama and painting); design and engineering thinking furnish pathways and carriers (e.g., translating environmental concepts into actionable plans). For instance, in ecological aesthetic education, students employ philosophical thinking to comprehend the "human-nature relationship" (truth), while artistic thinking transforms it into visual symbols like the ink-scroll motif of "mountains and waters embracing"; scientific thinking analyzes carbon cycles (truth), and artistic thinking elevates data curves into ecological totems; design thinking

formulates environmental solutions (goodness), and artistic thinking converts them into icon systems that integrate functionality with recognizability. This fusion renders philosophy, science, and design no longer abstract concepts but perceptible, contemplatable, and transmittable systems of symbolic meaning.

4 Addressing the Three Fundamental Issues of Education

The ultimate goal of education is to cultivate "whole persons" capable of integrating truth and goodness through symbolic systems to create meaning, with core characteristics manifested at three levels. Cognitive level: Identifying unified embodiments of truth, goodness, and beauty across domains (e.g., perceiving theoretical beauty in science, discerning behavioral goodness in ethics); Practical level: Transforming truth and goodness into perceptible forms through creative symbols (e.g., expressing philosophical ideas via poetry, realizing moral concern through design); Existential level: Becoming living symbols of truth, goodness, and beauty oneself (where words and actions naturally manifest the truth of knowledge, the goodness of morality, and the beauty of life, exemplified by Socrates' philosophical life of "unity of knowledge and action").

4.1 Responding to "What Kind of People to Cultivate": The Symbolic Subject of Unity in Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

Education should cultivate "symbolically meaningful subjects"—individuals who not only master knowledge and skills but also employ symbolic systems to construct meaningful worlds, capable of grasping the essence of truth and goodness in complex times and guiding value orientations.

Socialist society emphasizes collective value-oriented subjects of meaningful practice. Guided by Marxism, "truth" serves the cognition of social laws (e.g., historical materialism), while "goodness" aligns with the interests of the people. Subjects must possess the symbolic expressive capacity for socialist core values (e.g., transforming "common prosperity" and "ecological civilization" into policy and cultural symbols), resist symbolic alienation (e.g., consumerism), and promote the modern transformation of China's excellent traditional culture (e.g., integrating "harmony between humanity and nature" into ecological civilization symbols).

The individualistic orientation of capitalist society has limitations. It narrows "truth" to technical rationality and confines "goodness" to utilitarian calculations, making subjects prone to the trap of instrumental rationality (e.g., symbolic consumption alienation) and often separating technological innovation from humanistic concern. Both contexts share common values such as scientific spirit and ethical commitment. However, socialism pursues the socio-historical unity of "truth, goodness, and beauty," while capitalism often leads to their instrumentalized fragmentation.

4.2 Responding to "How to Cultivate Individuals": The Pathway to Developing Symbolic Thinking

The "cultivation pathway" of the new aesthetic education philosophy is implemented through theoretical system foundation, educational ecosystem reconstruction, and tiered implementation strategies, ensuring "symbolic thinking cultivation" permeates all levels of education.

Constructing a Unified Theoretical Framework:

Based on the "cognitive system of truth, goodness, and beauty," it clarifies the essence of aesthetic education as a "symbolic unity of truth and goodness," establishing tiered objectives for symbolic thinking:

Basic Level (Primary School): Cultivating "symbolic perception" (e.g., perceiving the truth of order through natural observation).

Intermediate Level (Secondary School): Developing "symbolic comprehension" (e.g., transforming truth and goodness symbols in interdisciplinary projects).

Advanced Level (University): Enhancing "symbolic creativity" (e.g., constructing unified representations of truth, goodness, and beauty in specialized fields).

Symbolic Integration of Teaching Content:

Infusing symbolic aesthetics into subject curricula (e.g., the truth-goodness construction in poetic language, the formal beauty of mathematical formulas) and fostering interdisciplinary thinking through projects like "symbolically transmitting traditional culture."

Quality-Oriented Shift in Evaluation Standards:

Establishing a "three-dimensional evaluation system for symbolic thinking":

Cognitive Dimension: Identifying unified representations of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Value Dimension: Making positive value judgments based on unified cognition.

Practical Dimension: Problem-solving and creative realization through labor processes.

Implement a tiered cultivation strategy. In basic education (primary school), establish tangible connections between "truth, goodness, and perceptibility" through physical practices (e.g., the symmetrical beauty of formation drills) and life symbols (e.g., the responsible goodness of waste sorting). In secondary education (middle school), enhance analytical and transformative abilities through disciplinary symbol conversion (e.g., comparing the commonality of order in musical and scientific symbols) and symbolic critical thinking (e.g., contrasting moral symbolism in Chinese and Western art). In higher education (university), promote the integration of disciplinary frontiers with symbolic innovation (e.g., symbolic expression of AI ethics) and foster interdisciplinary awareness and capability in constructing cultural symbols.

4.3 Responding to "For Whom to Cultivate People": The Construction of Symbolized Cultural Subjects

Education serves as the mechanism for inheriting and reconstructing humanity's "cultural genes," with its core mission

being to transform individuals into "active carriers" of specific social symbolic systems—internalizing the meaning codes of cultural symbols while creatively transforming these systems to become "cultural subjects" bridging tradition and modernity, the local and the global.

Cultural genes exist in symbolic forms such as language, rituals, and artifacts. Through systematic symbolic practices, education enables individuals to master "cultural coding rules" (e.g., Chinese students comprehending Confucian ethics through concepts like "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness") and achieve "meaning regeneration" (e.g., the "Doctrine of the Mean" being reinterpreted as modern conflict-resolution wisdom). Individuals thus assume dual roles as both inheritors (preserving the core values of cultural symbols) and innovators (adaptively reshaping cultural genes).

The "symbolic subject" of socialist education must integrate a global vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind" with a local consciousness centered on "serving the people" (e.g., the symbolic practice of "common prosperity"). At the local level, it transforms traditions like the "unity of knowledge and action" into modern symbols; at the global level, it asserts subjectivity in symbolic negotiations. Education must balance the stability and innovation of cultural genes, social constraints and individual transcendence, cultivating "global citizens carrying cultural genetic codes"—deeply rooted in local "truth and goodness" while engaging in global meaning-making with open symbolic thinking.

5 Conclusion

The core contributions of this paper are as follows: First, a breakthrough in ontology by proposing that "beauty is the symbolic unity of truth and goodness," transcending the traditional frameworks of formalism or emotionalism. Second, methodological innovation through the construction of the "Five-Education Vector Model," positioning aesthetic education as a quality dimension that permeates moral, intellectual, and physical education. Third, clarification of mechanisms by elucidating the characteristics of aesthetic education as the core of symbolic thinking and revealing its empowering role in the integration of the five educations.

This study focuses on theoretical construction, aiming to provide a unified explanatory framework for educational phenomena based on the cognitive system of truth, goodness, and beauty. Although this construction may face criticism for being "detached from practice," it offers foundational logic for practice and requires long-term empirical validation in future educational endeavors. Future research can deepen in three aspects: First, applying Saussurean and Peircean semiotic theories to analyze the symbolic mechanisms in educational contexts. Second, investigating the challenges posed by "machine symbols" in the era of artificial intelligence to the cognition of truth, goodness, and beauty. Third, synthesizing traditional aesthetic education philosophies such as China's "Six Arts Education" to construct a theoretical system with cultural consciousness.

Amid the impacts of digitization and globalization, the construction of an essentialist theory of aesthetic education not only concerns the completeness of educational theory but also addresses how humanity can safeguard the values of truth and goodness and cultivate "whole persons." This is both a theoretical proposition and a practical challenge for the inheritance of civilization.

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