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Field, Cultural Lineage, Creation: Construction and Practice of an Embodied Aesthetic Education Model in Higher Education—A Case Study of the General Education Course *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice*

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Abstract

Aesthetic education in higher education in the new era undertakes the dual mission of cultural inheritance and value shaping, but the integration of excellent local traditional culture into general education courses faces dilemmas such as disconnect between theoretical knowledge and embodied practice, limited learning fields and gaps between specialized dance training and general aesthetic education. Based on the theory of embodied cognition, this article takes the general education course *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice* of South China Normal University as a study sample to build a "field-cultural lineage-creation" embodied aesthetic education model: the field integrates multiple spaces to reconstruct real cultural experience; the cultural lineage embeds dance within a living tradition, merging cognition, experience and identity; the creation promotes students to shift from learners to creators and realizes traditional innovative expression. In order to guarantee the effective implementation of this model, a four-stage teaching mechanism, T-P-R-C (Theory, Practice, Reflection, and Creation) is adopted. This study shows that this model has effectively improved students' aesthetic experience, cultural identity and innovation ability, and provided a practical paradigm that can be promoted for integrating excellent local traditional culture into aesthetic education in higher education.

Keywords

Embodied aesthetic education; Lingnan dance; intangible cultural heritage; field-cultural lineage-creation model; T-P-R-C mechanism

1. Introduction

In the new era, aesthetic education has been given the important mission of implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, strengthening cultural confidence and carrying forward China's excellent traditional culture. In December 2023, the Ministry of Education issued a notice on the comprehensive implementation of the action to immerse aesthetic education in schools, urging art courses to act as the core medium and arts education to span the full talent-cultivation cycle (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This not

only highlights the fundamental role of aesthetic education in talents cultivation in higher education, but also puts forward new requirements for how colleges and universities can build a curriculum system with the functions of aesthetic education, cultural inheritance and value shaping.

Lingnan dance is a treasure of China's excellent traditional culture. It originates from the unique natural conditions of Lingnan region (geographically the south of the Five Ridges), historical evolution and folk customs of Lingnan. In the long-term cultural exchanges and integration of Guangfu (Cantonese), Chaoshan (Teochew), Hakka and Lingnan ethnic minorities, it has gradually formed a distinctive Lingnan dance, which has a high artistic appreciation and also reflects the characteristics of cultural openness and compatibility of Lingnan culture. Incorporating Lingnan dance in the general aesthetic education course in higher education can not only improve students' artistic cultivation, but also deepen their understanding of traditional Chinese culture. However, based on the current practice of art education courses in higher education, introducing Lingnan dance into general education courses faces three real challenges: first, disconnect between theoretical knowledge and embodied practice. The course only explains or imitates actions, and cannot make students have a real sense of beauty and understanding of culture; second, limited learning fields. The cultural resources of intangible cultural heritage dance are far away from college classrooms, and it is difficult for inheritors, folk life scenes, etc. to become teaching resources that can be used for a long time; lastly, gaps between specialized dance training and general aesthetic education. Traditional art education courses fail to effectively bridge the academic background and artistic experience of non-art major students, resulting in insufficient willingness to participate and cultural resonance.

To address these dilemmas, this article takes the general education course *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice* of South China Normal University as a practical sample, and comprehensively uses literature analysis and case study methods. On the theoretical basis of embodied cognition, the author proposes the "field-cultural lineage-creation" embodied aesthetic education model, and aims to answer three questions: What kind of cultural field should colleges and universities rely on to carry out physical aesthetic education? How can the excellent local traditional culture realize the construction of cultural significance through embodied experience? How can aesthetic education in colleges and universities promote students from cultural learning to cultural creation? Through the systematic analysis of curriculum practice, this article would further reveal the operation mechanism and practical value of integrating excellent local traditional culture into general education in colleges and universities, aiming to provide a practical path for the reform of aesthetic education in higher education in the new era.

2. Theoretical Foundation of Embodied Aesthetic Education in Higher Education

2.1 Field: The Spatial Logic of Embodied Aesthetic Education

French sociologist Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define a field as a dynamic relational space composed of the position of the actor and its interrelationship. This viewpoint provides an important insight for understanding the transformation of aesthetic education in higher education. For traditional cultural education, the field is not only the physical space where teaching activities occur, but also the existing space of cultural significance, social relations and physical experience. Only when students enter the real situation of culture can they understand the historical profundity, social structure and spiritual connotation behind the art form. In light of this, aesthetic education requires colleges and universities to re-understand the fields for aesthetic education and expand the traditional classroom into an open education field composed of classroom teaching, cultural base, social practice, digital platform and campus culture. In this process, students are no longer just recipients of cultural knowledge, but take the initiative to build the learning subjects of cultural meaning in physical participation, environmental interaction and situational experience. As a result, the field reconstitutes the spatial basis for the embodied aesthetic education of higher education.

2.2 Cultural Lineage: The Cultural Logic of Embodied Aesthetic Education

"Field" addresses where aesthetic education occurs, "cultural lineage" defines what it conveys. Lingnan dance originated from the long-term life practice and mutual interaction of Lingnan people. Its value is not only reflected in the movement form, dance skills or artistic style, but also in the regional memory, national emotions and cultural spirit embedded. Therefore, the cultural lineage in embodied aesthetic education does not simply refer to the transmission of cultural knowledge, but to the overall construction process of cultural meaning. By learning dance forms, experiencing movement styles, understanding folk backgrounds and participating in cultural practices, students would form an overall understanding of traditional Chinese culture and realize the transformation from "understanding a dance"

to "understanding a culture". From the perspective of education, the continuity and coherence of cultural lineage has actually promoted the transformation of aesthetic education from knowledge education to cultural education. Local traditional culture is no longer static knowledge in the classroom, but has become an important cultural resource and wealth that connects history, reality and the future.

2.3 Creation: The Value Logic of Embodied Aesthetic Education

The core of dance aesthetic education is to realize the inner unity of aesthetic perception and cultural understanding through the physical participation of the body (Shi, 2022). The ultimate goal of aesthetic education in higher education is not to simply realize the preservation and reproduction of traditional culture, but to re-create expression on the basis of understanding tradition. Therefore, "creation" constitutes an important value that distinguishes embodied aesthetic education from general education of art appreciation. For college students, traditional cultural education should not remain at the level of cultural appreciation, but should encourage students to reinterpret and creatively transform traditional culture on the basis of their own professional background and knowledge structure.

In the process of embodied aesthetic education, "creation" could be interpreted in three distinct levels. First of all, it is the creation at the physical level. Students transform external cultural knowledge into internal embodied experience through movement experience, rhythm perception and bodily expression. This process reflects the contemporary turn of dance education from "disembodied" learning to "embodied" understanding (Lin & Yi, 2024), the body is no longer just a tool for making actions, but has become an important medium for the construction of cultural meaning. Secondly, it is a professional creation. Students from different academic backgrounds can combine their own professional advantages to express traditional culture in a variety of ways. Finally, it is the creation at the cultural level. Students gradually transform from learners of traditional culture to cultural interpreters and disseminators, giving new vitality to traditional culture in the new social environment.

3. Construction and Practice of the Model of Field-Cultural Lineage-Creation

3.1 Field Reconstruction: Constructing a Cultural Experience Space for Embodied Aesthetics Education

Traditional college dance courses mainly rely on classrooms to carry out teaching. Teaching activities focus on movement learning and appreciation of dance works, and students often remain passive recipients of artistic knowledge. The excellent local traditional culture has a distinct regional and living nature, and its cultural value comes from long-term social practice and folk activities. When traditional dance is detached from the cultural context and only learned through classroom lectures and video viewing, students would find it difficult to truly understand the cultural spirit behind it. Therefore, embodied aesthetic education highlights the construction of an open, diverse and interactive cultural experience space, coherently integrating classrooms, intangible cultural heritage bases, digital resource platforms, campus cultural activities and social practices to form a multi-dimensional and interconnected aesthetic education field.

The course *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice* of South China Normal University is constructed upon the Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture (Traditional Lingnan Dance) Inheritance Base designated by the Ministry of Education. The teaching practice breaks through the boundaries of traditional classrooms. Representative national-level and provincial-level intangible cultural heritage inheritors are invited to participate in the course teaching. This course combines with Lingnan traditional festivals, intangible cultural heritage exhibitions, and campus art activities to help students understand the cultural connotation of Lingnan dance in real cultural situations. Meanwhile, this course also uses the digital platform to build a course resource repository, an audiovisual archive, and an online learning community to realize the effective connection between classroom learning and extracurricular independent learning. He and Yao (2020) observes that Lingnan intangible cultural heritage dance requires the adoption of new technologies to explore effective transmission pathways, and that higher education institutions should fully exert their role in the preservation and safeguarding of such heritage. The introduction of digital platforms has further expanded the spatial and temporal boundaries of aesthetic education, students can switch between different cultural spaces and gradually form an overall perception of Lingnan culture. Thus, the reconstruction of the field is not simply to add practical teaching sessions, but to reconstruct the learning ecology of aesthetic education in colleges and universities, so that cultural resources can be transformed from "objects for display" into "resources for education", laying a spatial foundation for the effective implementation of embodied aesthetic education.

3.2 Cultural Lineage Integration: Achieving Deep Integration of Local Culture and Aesthetic Education

As an important part of Lingnan culture, the emergence and development of Lingnan dance is influenced by natural conditions, mode of production, customs and exchanges between ethnic groups, and has distinctive regional cultural characteristics. For example, the Yingge Dance shows unity, honesty and trustworthiness, the Lingnan Lion Dance presents the cultural character of Lingnan people who dare to work hard and strive forward, and the Copper-coin Drum Dance and the Yao's Long-drum Dance reflect the life wisdom and cultural memory of different ethnic groups. These dances are not only artistic expressions, but also important carriers of local social history and cultural spirit (Ou, 2024). Therefore, this course does not take different dances as independent teaching contents, but reorganizes the course content around the framework of "Lingnan Cultural Community". It also integrates dance appreciation, history and culture, intangible cultural heritage preservation and civic-moral education, building a course knowledge system of "dance-culture-society". In the teaching process, students not only learn dance movements and artistic styles, but also understand the social background and cultural significance of the formation of Lingnan dance through literature reviews, field-based audiovisual analysis, intangible cultural heritage inheritors' interviews and in-class discussions. Liao and Wang (2015) propose that dance education draw on materials gathered outside the classroom, examine them in class, and return them to performance. This course adopts the same logic: cultural resources collected through filed investigation and intangible cultural heritage interviews are converted into teaching content, where their connotations are further examined in teaching, so that students would gradually develop an overall sense of excellent local traditional culture.

3.3 Creation and Generation: Promoting the Creative Expression of Traditional Culture

The objective of aesthetic education in higher education extends beyond protecting and promoting traditional culture, but more importantly to stimulate students to exert their creativity on the basis of understanding traditional culture. As Wang (2018) points out that that intangible cultural heritage dance education should strengthen its societal engagement, facilitating students' transformation from learners to disseminators in cultural inheritance Therefore, the "creation" proposed in this article is not an artistic creation in a narrow sense, but a process in which students reinterpret, recreate and disseminate traditional culture in physical experience, cultural cognition and professional learning.

Creation, firstly, refers to the recreation of embodied experience. Through the study of dance movements, students transform external cultural symbols into physical experience, and form individualized understanding in the process of movement performance, rhythm control and emotional expression. Secondly, creation is reflected in interdisciplinary professional integration. As a general education course for all students, *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice* attracts students from diverse academic fields, and students are encouraged to pursue innovative practices with their own academic knowledge and skills. For instance, education major students incorporate Lingnan dance into the design of aesthetic education courses in primary and secondary schools; communication major students make campaigns of short-video dissemination for intangible cultural heritage; design major students create visual arts and cultural and creative products inspired by Lingnan culture; literature major students create cultural narratives and textual works centered on Lingnan dance. Through the cross-integration of professional knowledge and traditional culture, students of different majors have realized the continuous expansion of traditional cultural expression. More importantly, creation is reflected in the transformation of cultural identity. In the traditional classroom, students are more of the recipients of cultural knowledge; but in the process of aesthetic education, students gradually grow into cultural interpreters, cultural disseminators and cultural creators. Through course practice, they can not only understand "what is Lingnan dance", but also think about "why people dance" and "how to spread the culture of dance", so as to form a sense of responsibility to spread China's excellent traditional culture to the society. This transformation from "learning culture" to "creating culture" reflects the important value of colleges and universities in promoting cultural innovation and development, and enables the excellent local traditional culture to undergo creative transformation and innovative development.

3.4 The T-P-R-C Mechanism: Practical Pathways toward Embodied Aesthetic Education

Based on years of practices, this course has developed a four-stage teaching mechanism of "Theory-Practice-Reflection-Creation (T-P-R-C)". This mechanism involves theoretical study, physical practice, aesthetic reflection, and creative expression, which effectively transforms embodied experience into cultural understanding and innovative ability.

3.4.1 Stage 1: Theory (Theoretical foundation)

The initial stage suggests that cultural comprehension must precede movement training. Rather than jumping directly into physical movement imitation, the course traces how Lingnan dance emerged, where it came from, and what it meant to the communities that practiced it. In addition, the teaching involves literature reviews, appreciation of dance works, case studies, and in-class discussion, enabling students to comprehend the historical background, regional characteristics, and social functions of diverse dance genres. This teaching design equips students with an overall cultural cognition, and lays a solid cultural foundation for subsequent practical engagement.

3.4.2 Stage 2: Practice (Physical engagement)

In the stage of practice, it highlights "understanding culture in experience". The course adopts various teaching techniques and platforms such as classroom training, lectures by intangible cultural heritage inheritors, on-campus performance and off-campus practice bases, thus students can appreciate the artistic characteristics of Lingnan dance in physical participation. This measure ensures the simultaneous generation of physical experience and cultural experience.

3.4.3 Stage 3: Reflection (Aesthetic Reconstruction)

This stage centers on the reconstruction of experience. Through learning journals, group discussions, and in-class presentations, the course guide students to review their practical experience and reflect on the cultural connotation behind the dance movements. This process promotes the transformation of physical experience into aesthetic cognition and cultural understanding. It enhances students' independent learning abilities and transforms the artistic experience into value identification.

3.4.4 Stage 4: Creation (Creative expression)

This last stage underscores cultural creation. In this course, students are encouraged to integrate their professional knowledge in choreographic creation and project-based learning to recreate Lingnan dance, realizing a deep integration of traditional culture and specialized knowledge. Hence, students would shift from passive cultural recipients into cultural creators and disseminators.

4. Practical Outcomes and Implications

Since its debut in 2022, *Lingnan Dance: Appreciation and Practice* has been offered for nine consecutive semesters in South China Normal University, attracting over 1,000 students enrolled and establishing a mature teaching system. The practice of "field-cultural lineage-creation" mode in higher education demonstrates that integrating excellent local traditional culture into higher education should not be confined to knowledge teaching and art techniques training, but build an educational mechanism that unifies cultural understanding and value shaping through authentic cultural filed, physical experience, and innovative expression.

Aesthetic education in higher education must transition from enclosed classrooms to open, boundary-free fields. By integrating diverse resources such classroom teaching, cultural heritage base, digital platform, and social practice, universities can effectively expand students' learning fields. Additionally, excellent local traditional culture should pay more emphasis on the construction of cultural significance. Only by placing artistic forms into the local culture and excellent traditional Chinese culture can aesthetic education achieve a paradigm shift from knowledge education to cultural education. Last but not least, embodied aesthetic education must highlight innovative expression. Students of different majors could leverage their academic strengths to participate in the dissemination of traditional culture, which not only enriches the practical form of aesthetic education but also provides potential pathways for the modern dissemination of excellent local traditional culture.

5. Conclusion

The reform of aesthetic education in higher education in the new era not only needs to enrich the curriculum content, but also needs to explore new educational models that can realize the coordinated development of cultural inheritance, aesthetic education and value shaping. The "field-cultural lineage-creation" embodied aesthetic education model proposed in this article not only provides a theoretical explanation for the reform of the Lingnan dance curriculum, but also provides a practical plan for the integration of excellent local traditional culture into the general education of colleges and universities. In the future research, scholars could further verify the applicability of this model in combination with different regional cultural resources, and explore a new path for digital technology to empower embodied aesthetic education.

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