The Integration and Innovation of Calligraphy and Aesthetic Education in University Art Programs

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Abstract

Calligraphy, as an ancient art form rooted in our national traditional culture, has long been cherished by people. It embodies the ideals of "pursuing both professional excellence and moral integrity" and "conveying principles through writing." Calligraphy holds profound value for shaping character and enhancing morality, while also serving an important aesthetic educational function that subtly influences our lives. However, the current calligraphy education system tends to overly emphasize technical skills, neglecting the aesthetic educational role of calligraphy. Although technique is a part of calligraphy education, it should not be its sole focus. In the new era and under new circumstances, calligraphy education needs to reassess and rethink its professional orientation, training objectives, and teaching methods. This paper delves into the current state of calligraphic aesthetic education in university art programs, aiming to explore new ways to effectively integrate calligraphy with aesthetic education. The goal is to enhance students' recognition, understanding, and appreciation of traditional calligraphy culture, making calligraphy a powerful tool for cultivating well-rounded individuals and promoting cultural heritage. This exploration seeks to inspire the integration and innovation of calligraphy and aesthetic education within university art programs, thereby advancing the development and perpetuation of calligraphic art.

Keywords

Traditional Culture; Calligraphy; Aesthetic Education; Art Education.

1. Overview of the Aesthetic Education of Calligraphy

Mr. Chen Zhenlian stated in his work "Calligraphy Art Education" that: "Aesthetic education is a form of emotional education, moral education, and aesthetic education. In traditional Chinese culture, emphasis is placed on moral cultivation, and the fusion of calligraphy quality and personal character represents the highest realm."[1] He emphasized the multiple functions of aesthetic education, expressing that it is not only a process of cultivating aesthetic ability but also a comprehensive form of education that encompasses the emotional, moral, and aesthetic dimensions. Calligraphy art education, as a transitional form, aims to balance the relationship between writing skill education and calligraphy creation education. It not only emphasizes the practical writing skills of calligraphy but also transcends the pursuit of technical perfection, aiming to influence and educate individuals through the expression of beauty in form and content.[2]

Through calligraphy art education, students can not only enhance their aesthetic abilities but also cultivate emotions, strengthen moral concepts, further improve individual character, inspire creativity and wisdom, and help them become people who love and understand calligraphy.

The aesthetic education of calligraphy holds a unique position in China. It boasts a rich cultural and artistic history, instilling not only a sense of pride in Chinese calligraphic culture but also reinforcing cultural confidence as people appreciate its beauty. Calligraphy not only serves the

functions of emotional and moral education but also plays a significant role in aesthetic education. With a long history of Chinese characters dating back over three thousand years from oracle bone script to seal script, clerical script, regular script, and cursive script, calligraphy has evolved through various stages, each imbued with distinct aesthetic styles corresponding to different dynasties. Spatially, calligraphy embodies the structural beauty of Chinese character writing, akin to architecture, constructing graceful forms. Temporally, the rhythm of calligraphic strokes resembles the melodies of music, where the flow of rhythm can be felt between fast and slow movements.

During a press conference held by the Ministry of Education on October 16, 2020, the importance of aesthetic education in schools was emphasized. One of the goals of school aesthetic education is to cultivate students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy, integrating aesthetic education into the entire educational process of schools, and fostering students to become comprehensive developers and successors of society. As an integral component, calligraphy art education aims to assist students in overcoming "aesthetic blindness," enhancing their aesthetic abilities, and comprehensively promoting their development. This initiative integrates calligraphy art education into school education, aiming to cultivate a new generation with refined aesthetic perspectives and humanistic literacy.

2. Current Situation of Calligraphy Art Education in Colleges and Universities

2.1. Calligraphy Colleges and Universities

Higher education institutions that offer calligraphy majors, especially those represented by the eight major academies of fine arts, have long been regarded as occupying the pinnacle of the discipline. Their core objective is to inherit and promote the essence of calligraphy tradition, aiming to cultivate calligraphic artists who embody the principles of "conveying principles through writing" and "pursuing both professional excellence and moral integrity." [3]However, contemporary calligraphy institutions, whether specialized independent colleges or comprehensive universities, share similar problems. The main issue is that most students overly emphasize the mastery of calligraphic techniques while neglecting the elements of calligraphy art education. It can be said that today's calligraphy college students largely lack an understanding of aesthetic education. Some students' calligraphic aesthetics are limited to aspects such as the smoothness of character structure, the neatness of composition, variations in pen strokes, and the use of pen tip pressure, without grasping the deeper connotations of "beauty" in calligraphy. This phenomenon is widespread and manifested primarily as follows:

2.1.1. Rote Learning Habits before the Test

Many calligraphy art examination candidates, due to their poor academic performance in other subjects, choose calligraphy as a pathway for university art education. However, they often lack a deep understanding of calligraphy. Pressured by time and the need to excel academically, they can only receive mechanical technique training, focusing on structure, composition, lines, and layout, aiming to replicate classic samples without any deviation permitted. This teaching method emphasizes technical proficiency but overlooks theoretical knowledge and aesthetic education elements in calligraphy art. Students gradually develop a learning approach overly focused on technique while neglecting the aesthetic connotations of calligraphy in such an environment.

2.1.2. The Need for Utilitarian Evaluation

During their university studies, students feel compelled to intensify their professional training in calligraphy techniques in order to attain awards or advantageous positions. They strive to enhance their technical skills to stand out in professional courses or art exhibitions. This

utilitarian demand leads students to focus more on calligraphy techniques while neglecting cultural cultivation and aesthetic education. Students seem to have become accustomed to regarding technical proficiency as the sole criterion for success.

2.1.3. Exhibition Hall Culture-oriented Techniques

Contemporary calligraphy exhibition culture, while promoting the flourishing development of calligraphic art, also reinforces the status of technique in selection and exhibition to some extent. Exhibition selection rules prioritize technique, making it the primary focus, while cultural cultivation is relatively difficult to demonstrate in exhibitions. In order to excel in competitive exhibitions, students pay more attention to practicing techniques, while the elements of aesthetic education appear relatively less important.[4]

Therefore, in calligraphy majors at universities, students excessively emphasize technical performance while overlooking the aesthetic education elements of calligraphy. This phenomenon is widespread in calligraphy colleges, and addressing this issue requires a better balance between technical education and aesthetic cultivation.

2.2. Non-calligraphy Colleges and Universities

In non-calligraphy majors at higher education institutions, particularly in education-related programs, calligraphy courses often focus on improving the basic writing skills of teacher candidates, with the main objective being to cultivate their educational and teaching abilities. However, there are several issues in this field, mainly manifested as follows:

2.2.1. Lack of Emphasis on Calligraphy Art Education

Some higher education institutions do not sufficiently prioritize calligraphy art education, lacking clear aesthetic education objectives and relevant textbooks. This may result in calligraphy courses failing to cultivate students' aesthetic awareness and artistic values.

2.2.2. Insufficient Textbooks

Due to a lack of specialized calligraphy art education textbooks, some teachers may rely solely on personal experience to teach, or develop their own teaching materials, or even use generic teaching materials. This can lead to hollow and ambiguous course content that fails to meet students' needs.

2.2.3. Emphasis on Theory over Practice

In some education-related programs, calligraphy courses may prioritize rote theoretical teaching over practical calligraphy skills and aesthetic awareness cultivation. This may cause students to doubt the practical applicability of the course and reduce their motivation to learn.

2.2.4. Unscientific Evaluation Criteria

Some institutions primarily use theoretical assessments as evaluation criteria, failing to comprehensively evaluate students' calligraphic performance and creative abilities. This evaluation method may not provide effective guidance and feedback to students, leading to a disconnect between evaluation results and actual performance.

In summary, although calligraphy courses are offered in non-calligraphy majors at higher education institutions, several issues persist, including the level of emphasis on calligraphy art education, insufficient textbooks, the need for improvement in teaching content and methods, and the rationality of evaluation criteria. In the future, it is necessary to pay more attention to the value of calligraphy art education, provide appropriate textbooks and training, optimize course content and evaluation methods, to ensure that students can develop their calligraphy skills and aesthetic abilities comprehensively.

3. The Integration and Innovation of Calligraphy and Aesthetic Education

3.1. Introducing Aesthetic Education

Aesthetics is regarded as the precursor to learning, implying that studying calligraphy is no longer limited to simple brush and ink techniques but starts from a higher level of aesthetics. Students should first cultivate a high level of aesthetic awareness and establish a comprehensive artistic view of calligraphy. This can be achieved through activities such as observing classical calligraphic works, analyzing aesthetic elements, and practicing imitation. The focus is on "seeing before doing"; students should be able to "understand" and "articulate," which will stimulate the observation and thinking abilities of students with zero foundation. From aesthetic enlightenment to the application of specific techniques.

3.1.1. Enriching Classroom Teaching Content

Topics such as "What is Calligraphy," "Calligraphic Aesthetics," "The Noble Character of Calligraphers," "The Origin of Calligraphy," and "Calligraphy and Traditional Culture"[5] can be introduced into the classroom teaching of calligraphy art education. Through these topics, students' understanding and appreciation of calligraphy can be strengthened. Delve into the history and evolution of calligraphy and the lives and works of calligraphers from various eras, thereby stimulating students' strong interest in calligraphy.

3.1.2. Establishing Online Resources and Learning Platforms

The government can establish online resources and learning platforms, providing courses, video tutorials, calligraphy exhibitions, and interactive social platforms for calligraphy education. Such platforms will help university students learn more in calligraphy art education and share experiences and works with each other.

3.1.3. Themed Exhibitions and Calligraphy Competitions

Calligraphy associations, literary federations, and universities across the country can actively organize themed exhibitions and calligraphy competitions, encouraging university students to actively participate in calligraphy creation. These exhibitions and competitions can serve as stages for students to showcase their works and also stimulate more students' interest in learning calligraphy.

3.1.4. Community Practices and Volunteer Activities

Encourage university students to participate in community calligraphy art education practices and volunteer activities. Students can organize calligraphy workshops to teach calligraphy skills while bringing calligraphy art into the community to spread the cultural value of calligraphy.

3.2. Strengthening Calligraphy History Education

The integration of calligraphy art education with calligraphy history is of profound significance for higher education, as this fusion not only helps improve students' aesthetic level but also cultivates their comprehensive cultural literacy and creativity.

3.2.1. Integrating Historical Culture and Calligraphy Art Education

University courses should include basic knowledge of calligraphy history, such as the development of calligraphy, characteristics of different script styles, and works of important calligraphers. This will help students establish a framework for understanding calligraphy from an aesthetic perspective. Students need to understand not only the techniques and styles in calligraphy history but also the historical and cultural context. This means they need to study historical events, social backgrounds, cultural traditions, etc., to deepen their understanding of the connotations of calligraphy. Calligraphy art education is not just about the transmission of theoretical knowledge but also includes practical calligraphy exercises and creations. By

studying calligraphy history, students can be inspired and attempt to imitate the works of ancient calligraphers.

3.2.2. Interdisciplinary Education

Integrate calligraphy art education with related disciplines such as art history, Chinese cultural studies, aesthetics, etc. This comprehensive education can help students understand the status and influence of calligraphy more comprehensively. Additionally, students can visit museums, cultural heritage sites, etc., to experience ancient calligraphy works firsthand, thereby integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

By combining calligraphy history with calligraphy art education, not only do students' aesthetic levels improve, but they also have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese calligraphy culture and tradition, enhancing cultural confidence and national identity. This integrated education cultivates more comprehensive students and lays a solid foundation for their future artistic and cultural exploration.

3.3. Effective Integration with Multimedia Technology

In higher education calligraphy art education, utilizing multimedia and internet technology to provide a richer educational experience has become an important educational approach.

3.3.1. Interactive Digital Copying Platform

The interactive digital copying platform (as shown in Figure 1) is a highly promising innovative educational method in calligraphy art education. It integrates multimedia technology, providing a new dimension to calligraphy education.[6]

Fig.1 Interactive digital copying table, by the author

This set of equipment has various advantages, making calligraphy education more interactive and engaging. Firstly, it comes with comprehensive calligraphy teaching courses and diverse teaching materials, allowing school teachers to freely choose teaching content based on students' needs and levels. Teachers can easily design teaching plans that suit their style and meet students' learning situations using this tool, and they can even modify the content as needed. This provides powerful support for teachers to better guide students.

During the process of learning calligraphy, this set of equipment offers students various beneficial teaching methods. Students can read model copies, copy model copies, compare different versions, reflect on their own works, and continuously adjust and improve them. Additionally, the resource database contains individual Chinese characters from famous steles and calligraphy works from various dynasties for students to typeset and simulate creation. This not only enriches font choices but also facilitates students' practice. Through this approach, students can practice calligraphy more systematically and comprehensively, enhancing their learning effectiveness.

In conclusion, the interactive digital copying platform is an innovative tool that contributes to improving the quality of calligraphy art education. It provides teachers with more teaching flexibility and creates a richer learning experience for students, making calligraphy art

education more attractive and interactive. The introduction of this technology not only promotes the modernization of calligraphy education but also helps cultivate students' love for and understanding of Chinese traditional culture.

3.3.2. Virtual painting and calligraphy exhibition hall

The virtual calligraphy and painting exhibition hall (as shown in Figure 2) is a captivating educational tool that allows schools and students to delve into various aspects of calligraphy by
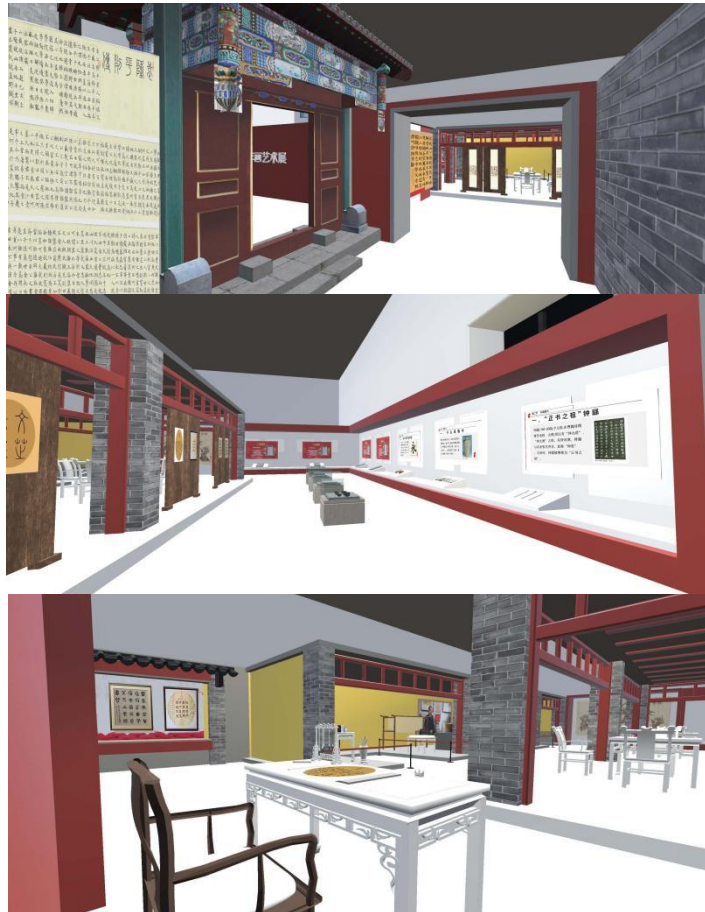

Fig. 2 Virtual painting and calligraphy exhibition Hall
provided by the digital Media School of an university

integrating multiple multimedia elements. This exhibition not only provides the historical background and development process of calligraphy but also presents works in different styles and writing techniques to help students better understand and appreciate this ancient art form. The virtual calligraphy and painting exhibition hall contains a vast array of calligraphy works, covering different periods, styles, and masters. These images are presented in high definition, allowing students to carefully observe each stroke, gaining insights into the details of different calligraphy works, such as brushwork, ink usage, and paper selection. This helps students better understand various calligraphy styles and traditions. Moreover, through the virtual calligraphy exhibition, students can watch videos demonstrating calligraphy masters writing firsthand. These videos showcase the process and techniques of each stroke, enabling students to witness the actual creation of calligraphy and learn correct brushwork and writing techniques. Such interactive methods assist students in mastering practical calligraphy skills. Additionally, the textual content in the virtual calligraphy exhibition includes explanations of calligraphy history, biographies of calligraphers, calligraphy schools, and techniques. These

textual materials provide background knowledge of calligraphy, allowing students to understand its origins, development, and the contributions of different calligraphers.

Through the integration and interactive presentation of the virtual calligraphy and painting exhibition hall, students are provided with a comprehensive learning experience in calligraphy. They can explore the beauty, artistry, and history of calligraphy in an immersive virtual environment, deepening their understanding of Chinese traditional culture. This interactive learning approach stimulates students' curiosity, ignites their passion for calligraphy, and injects new vitality into calligraphy art education.

4. Summary

Calligraphy, as the most profound symbol and embodiment of traditional Chinese culture and philosophical thought, plays an indispensable role. It is not only a key component of Chinese culture but also a pillar of the Chinese national spirit, effectively enhancing individual character. [7]Compared to other forms of aesthetic education, calligraphy art education possesses unique characteristics of longevity, stability, and subtle influence. In higher education institutions, calligraphy education integrates traditional Chinese culture, aesthetic education, moral cultivation, and professional knowledge, cultivating students with diverse qualities. This innovative integration helps deepen students' understanding and love for traditional culture, enhancing national self-esteem and pride, and effectively improving their humanistic qualities and correct aesthetic awareness. [8]Universities should continuously improve educational concepts, integrate calligraphy education into other disciplines, and provide students with more comprehensive education. This will stimulate their interest in learning and autonomy, laying a solid foundation for inheriting traditional Chinese culture and cultivating innovative talents. This integrated education will promote the flourishing development of aesthetic education in higher education institutions.

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