
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Brief Analysis of Dunhuang Culture and the Aesthetic Appropriateness of Preschool Education

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ABSTRACT

China's aesthetic education Dunhuang culture, as a type of non-heritage culture, has a rich and varied aesthetic character. Integrating Dunhuang culture into the aesthetic education of our preschools will not only help to build our preschool system but also deepen young children's sense of identity with our national culture and foster confidence in our own culture from an early age. This article looks at the links between aesthetic education and Dunhuang culture, analyses some of the contradictions between Dunhuang culture and modern society, as well as the possibilities of integrating Dunhuang culture into aesthetic education work and offers some suggestions on how Dunhuang culture can be integrated into aesthetic education work.

KEYWORDS

Pre-school aesthetic education, Dunhuang culture

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the state has strongly supported preschool education and its aesthetic education. The state, as well as the community, is aware of the importance of strengthening aesthetic education for the growth of children and the development of preschool education.

Dunhuang art, a traditional Chinese folk art, is known for its rich and varied aesthetic style. Dunhuang murals contain five aesthetic styles: "sublime and elegant, symmetrical and harmonious, feminine and masculine, mournful and heroic, solemn and romantic" (Li & Dong, 2007), which can be incorporated into preschool art classes to allow preschoolers to feel the power and emotion of art in the Dunhuang aesthetic style, thus promoting early artistic behavior and physical and mental development of preschoolers. At the same time, the aesthetic spirit of Dunhuang - the spirit of tolerance, innovation, and transcendence (Ma, 2008) - can implicitly influence preschoolers in their learning process and strengthen their sense of identity and pride in Chinese culture.

To enable preschool children to build an interest in aesthetics, to fully identify with our national culture, and plant the seeds of aesthetic faith in the minds of preschool children at the stage of their initial exposure to aesthetics in life, it is very important to carry out aesthetic education among preschool children. Taking Dunhuang culture as an example, the integration of its rich cultural heritage, rich aesthetic style, and unique aesthetic spirit into the preschool aesthetic education system will enhance the innovation and effectiveness of preschool aesthetic education and help establish a modern preschool aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics. One day, he will make outstanding contributions to Chinese aesthetics, traditional Chinese culture, and the inheritance and dissemination of Dunhuang culture.

This paper examines the relevance of Dunhuang culture to pre-school aesthetic education, discusses the possibilities of integrating Dunhuang culture into pre-school aesthetic education from a brief analysis of the links and contradictions between the current

state of aesthetic education in China and Dunhuang culture, and provides some operational suggestions for the practical integration of Dunhuang culture into pre-school aesthetic education.

2. A Brief Analysis of the Current State of Aesthetic Education in China and the Links With Dunhuang Art

Aesthetic education is a kind of beauty education that leads people to experience beauty, feel beauty, enhance their aesthetic level and finally give them the ability to create beauty. Aesthetic education can enhance people's aesthetic qualities in all aspects, enrich the mind and emotions, feel the spirit of aesthetics, and thus have the opportunity to experience a poetic life. It can be said that successful aesthetic education can benefit people for life. Similarly, aesthetic education should also begin in the pre-school years of children so that the value of aesthetic education can be maximized and children can grow up nourished.

In recent years, the state has attached great importance to pre-school aesthetic education and has initially formed a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics. The *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in a New Era*, issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council on 15 October 2020, set out the requirements for the development of aesthetic and art education in all school levels, giving hope and a bright vision for the development of preschool education for young children. It can be said that the aesthetic education one receives during one's formative years begins with pre-school aesthetic education, which shows the importance of pre-school aesthetic education to one's aesthetic education.

However, pre-school aesthetic education is still at a relatively weak stage compared to other stages of aesthetic education. There are shortcomings in preschool aesthetic education, such as a lack of professional teachers and a misdirected aesthetic education system that need to be addressed. At this stage, preschool aesthetic education classrooms place too much emphasis on imitation and skill inculcation for preschoolers. Teachers tend to give preschoolers a more rigid and patterned grading system while neglecting aesthetic education and its important creative and inclusive aspects; teachers also neglect to cultivate the emotional output and aesthetic cultivation of preschoolers in the teaching process, which takes away the soul of aesthetic education. Art education, as an important part of aesthetic education, has three levels of meaning for preschool children: firstly, it is a kind of emotional education, providing preschool children with an opportunity to grasp the world and communicate their emotions; secondly, it is a kind of creative education, aiming at developing preschool children's creative abilities and allowing them to express their ideas boldly with art; once again, it is a kind of operational education, which can develop preschool children's brain, eye, and hand coordination activities, hands-on ability, etc. (Yu, 2000). Dunhuang art, as a gradually marginalized form of traditional Chinese art, has a rich cultural heritage, a rich aesthetic style, and a unique aesthetic spirit. Dunhuang fresco art contains a remarkable aesthetic of 'sublime and elegant, symmetrical and harmonious, feminine and masculine, mournful and heroic, solemn and romantic (Yu, 2000). There are many points where these rich aesthetic styles fit with the shortcomings of contemporary Chinese preschool aesthetic education. Therefore, integrating Dunhuang aesthetics into preschool aesthetic education classrooms will not only help to establish a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics and further enhance the benefits of aesthetic education for children but will also subconsciously integrate the spirit of aesthetics into aesthetic education classrooms, leading preschool children to experience the spirit of tolerance, innovation, and transcendence that Dunhuang aesthetics embodies (Ma, 2008) and building a sense of identity and pride in Chinese culture among preschool children from an early age.

3. The Contradiction Between Dunhuang Culture and Contemporary Popular Culture

Many factors contribute to the marginalization of a thing, but the root cause of marginalization is inevitably its contradiction and discord with the mainstream. If we want to bring Dunhuang culture into the preschool aesthetic education classroom, we first need to find the contradictions between Dunhuang culture and contemporary popular culture, i.e., the reasons for the marginalization of Dunhuang culture and the withering of its talents.

3.1 The Concept of Dunhuang Culture's Heritage Changed by the Times

As time advances, people's production and lifestyle have changed greatly, and people's perceptions have also changed dramatically. In ancient times, the skills possessed by non-heritage workers were fundamental to the survival of a family, and it was strictly forbidden for the skills of non-heritage to be leaked out, except for the intergenerational transmission within the family and the incorporation of the master-apprentice method of transmission from a foreign family. In ancient times, non-heritage art was not only a means to earn a living but also a source of faith and a spiritual pillar for a family. (These are both cares for the cultural heritage, but at the same time, this closed nature has become part of the reason for the loss of related skills.)

In ancient times, when one went out to fight, one could get certain resources and opportunities by telling one's master. But in modern times, society is more likely to make initial determinations about your abilities according to your education, and it has become less important who you are a disciple of. But the non-foreign heritage is still preserved in the way the master leads the apprentice, which does not provide great help for the contemporary people to face the competition in the job market, making more people tend to study and then take a good university.

3.2 Fast Development of Technology, Fast Pace of Life

With the rapid development of modern technology, people are looking for high efficiency, fast-paced, and more convenient ways of production and life. However, Dunhuang culture itself is not particularly compatible with the fast pace. Both the fresco art and the clay art of Dunhuang culture tend to be more of a "slow and careful work". The frescoes were not painted before, and the clay sculpture did not look much better when it was still a prototype. Moreover, in the fast-paced social life, people's minds lack patience, and people's time is fragmented. Dunhuang culture, as a niche culture with deep historical meaning, cannot be told in a little fragmented time. This limits the promotion and expansion of Dunhuang culture.

3.3 Barriers to Learning and Large Investment Costs

Many non-heritage projects for the selection of talent have a characteristic, that is, a tendency to "child skills" and even have certain requirements for talent (sometimes, we have to admit that people are born with certain differences in some aspects). The tendency to "child's work" is, to some extent, to offset the impact of some natural factors with time to grind. The cultivation of an excellent NRM culture inheritance of talent is inseparable from a large investment of time, financial resources, and energy, and the cost is not small or even high. Therefore, there will not be many inheritors of each type of non-traditional culture. Dunhuang culture is less demanding than "child's play", but it also requires a certain amount of artistic talent.

And, to stick with the same thing for so long, more or less have to bring the love of that kind of thing, which is also particularly critical. However, it is not easy to persist in one's love for the same thing. We cannot guarantee that the inheritors of non-traditional culture will not persist because of internal or external factors and will eventually switch to other professions. In addition to talent, time, and interest requirements, access to Dunhuang culture is also a threshold. Some people are not exposed to it as children, and even if they are exposed to it as adults and have a great interest in it, adults who already have their main jobs and lives are unlikely to devote much time to it and are more likely to use it as a hobby.

3.4 People's Lack of Cultural Understanding and Lack of Identity

We all know that foreigners actually love Dunhuang culture, but for historical reasons, some of our people and Dunhuang locals don't know much about their own culture and don't have a high sense of identity. As a result, they are more inclined to take an out-of-town university in order to pass on their local Dunhuang culture.

During the formative years of youth, Dunhuang culture does not have a distinctive curriculum or materials to deepen local understanding of Dunhuang culture. However, in order to focus on their studies, they are bound to give up something, and under the tremendous pressure of studying, few teenagers are exposed to niche, non-textbook-related cultural knowledge like Dunhuang.

4. A Partial Analysis of the Possibilities of Integrating Dunhuang Art into Pre-School Aesthetic Education

Dunhuang's art not only fits the characteristics of preschool children's drawings but also the characteristics of preschool children's picture books. Dunhuang art is, therefore, an important influence on the aesthetic output and delivery of preschools. On the one hand, early preschoolers often draw things in a concise, general, exaggerated, and fanciful way to express their innermost emotions. The depiction of figures in Dunhuang fresco art often uses exaggeration and distortion, which is in keeping with the characteristics of early pre-school children's drawings. On the other hand, pre-school children tend to prefer dotted lines or an artistic symbolic language that conforms to some pattern of movement. Picture books for pre-school children have their basic elements of shape, color, composition, text, and plot. Artistic symbols in picture books need to meet the requirements of readability, representativeness, and functionality (Chen & Liu, 2015). Dunhuang fresco art, with its formal harmony, matching colors, mobilization of the sense of sound and rhythm, completeness of the composition, and clever framing of layout, allows different artistic genres to blend and complement each other, creating a harmonious scene of meteorological and formal perfection in its overall effect, where faith and aesthetics, ideals and reality achieve aesthetic unity (Zhou, 2000). At the same time, the Dunhuang murals, such as the frescoes of the Nine-Coloured Deer King's Hongsheng, and the Vesak King's Quest for a Son, embody the spirit of excellent traditional Chinese culture, meet the components and requirements of picture books for preschool children. Moreover, the aesthetic style and spirit of the Dunhuang murals are of high aesthetic value.

In addition to effectively meeting the needs of pre-school children's aesthetic education activities, we are building their sense of identity with Chinese national culture at a time when they are forming their national and cultural views. If we plant the seeds of this culture in the minds of pre-school children, they will be more likely and willing to pass on and promote the best of Chinese traditional culture, including the 'marginalised' Dunhuang culture, when they grow up.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Dunhuang culture, in line with the needs of pre-school aesthetic education, is an education that is emotional, creative, and manipulative. Although there is some risk of Dunhuang culture being gradually marginalised and left untouched, there are many

opportunities and possibilities for integrating Dunhuang culture into pre-school aesthetic education that has not been fully explored. The integration of Dunhuang culture into preschool aesthetic education will not only ensure the inheritance and development of Dunhuang culture and traditional Chinese folk culture but will also be an innovation in Chinese preschool aesthetic education, which will greatly contribute to the endogenous motivation of preschool children to learn about aesthetic education, enrich the content of Chinese aesthetic education activities and enhance the value of preschool aesthetic education.

5.1 Provide Policy Support to Integrate NRM Culture with Education

The state can provide some support by introducing policies that integrate NRM culture into the curriculum and advocate that kindergartens actively extract knowledge and elements of Dunhuang and other NRM cultures into the education of preschool children, gradually forming a new teaching culture.

Local governments with distinctive cultures should support the development of distinctive curriculum programs in schools, such as Dunhuang, for example, for local schools to develop and support cultural programs featuring Dunhuang culture.

5.2 The Kindergartens Actively Put Dunhuang Elements in the Teaching Process

Kindergartens can bring in external Dunhuang cultural practitioners regularly to provide art education for children, such as knowledge of mural painting.

General teachers can also increase their understanding of Dunhuang culture by looking up materials and, once they have gained a certain level of knowledge, offer related early childhood curriculum activities that incorporate frescoes and clay sculptures into the teaching process.

5.3 Immerse the Child in the Situation to Stimulate Interest

The growth of young children cannot be separated from the construction of the environment. Based on sufficient financial conditions, kindergartens can increase the construction of clay craft classrooms and add Dunhuang elements to the design of the walls to create a strong Dunhuang cultural atmosphere and further stimulate the interest of children.

Parents can take their children on trips to heritage sites such as the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang during vacation time, allowing children to experience the culture firsthand, increasing their confidence in our culture, and stimulating their interest in Dunhuang and other non-heritage cultures.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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