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RECEIVED 20 August 2024

ACCEPTED 12 February 2025

PUBLISHED 05 March 2025

CITATION

Zhao X (2025) Breakthroughs, lags, and contradictions: an analysis of the practices and effects of new media art aesthetic education in China.
Front. Educ. 10:1483559.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1483559

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Breakthroughs, lags, and contradictions: an analysis of the practices and effects of new media art aesthetic education in China

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The paper takes the evolution of China's aesthetic education policy as its entry point to elucidate the intrinsic driving forces behind the development of aesthetic education. Political ideology, labor, and moral education are often interwoven, and these aims have simultaneously provided an opportunity for new media art to engage with aesthetic education. Under the policy support of the Ministry of Education's new round of aesthetic education immersion initiatives, new media art has undertaken a series of reforms, innovations, and experiments—employing interactive and immersive methods—to enhance and expand aesthetic experiences. Due to the alignment of certain concepts with those in traditional philosophy, it has garnered institutional favor. Research indicates that new media art-based aesthetic education possesses notable advantages in cultivating imagination, creativity, and other capacities in the digital age; however, despite its rapid development propelled by policy momentum, it still faces challenges such as a shortage of qualified educators and a narrow understanding of aesthetic education—issues that may paradoxically give rise to a dilemma rooted in deeper systemic contradictions.

KEYWORDS

aesthetic education, new media art, Chinese education, digitalization, ideological

1 Introduction: the possibility of new media art aesthetic education

“Aesthetic education,” originally proposed by the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller in his 1793 work *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, posits that “The transition from the passive condition of perceiving to the active one of thinking and willing is only effected, then, through an intermediate condition of aesthetic freedom,...In a word, there is no other way to make the sensuous man rational than by first making him aesthetic” (Schiller, 1954). He believes that aesthetic education is fundamentally an education concerned with the human being, it serves as a crucial means to overcome the fragmentation of human nature, restore human wholeness, and achieve spiritual liberation. Consequently, although the cultivation of sensibility—the direct focus in educating aesthetic sentiment—constitutes the immediate entry point of aesthetic education, it does not reject rationality. Instead, rationality is embedded within the psychological structure and functions as the intrinsic driving force behind the development of aesthetic capacity.

In the early 20th century, the concept of “aesthetic education” was introduced into China by figures such as Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei, and Cai Yuanpei. Cai argued that the tasks of an educator could be summarized in five aspects: “national military education,

utilitarianism, civic morality, world outlook, and aesthetic education. Among these, civic morality was regarded as the cornerstone—since both world outlook education and aesthetic education were seen as means to cultivate morality, while national military education and utilitarianism necessarily took morality as their foundation” (Shu, 1981). Moreover, he asserted that “the realization of world outlook education must be achieved through aesthetic education” (Cai, 1912). This perspective makes it clear that from its inception in China, aesthetic education was conceived as an extension of moral education—aimed at cultivating one’s aesthetic sensibilities and refining moral character, thereby constituting an integral part of moral instruction. Since then, aesthetic education has experienced a long and tortuous development. Professor Zeng Fanren categorizes its evolution into three stages: 1978–1986, 1986–1999, and 1999 to the present.

The paper seeks to integrate Professor Zeng’s periodization with a historical institutionalist approach, situating the changes in aesthetic education policy within a broader national context and analyzing the transformation of aesthetic education’s status from both a macro-institutional and a meso-organizational perspective.

1.1 Fracture balance: moral education and essential-qualities-oriented education in parallel

Phase one (1978–1986): the restoration period. During this phase, efforts were primarily directed at setting past errors right by denouncing the negation of aesthetic education propagated by the Gang of Four and extreme leftist ideologies. Many venerable scholars in the cultural and arts communities converged in their attention to aesthetic education, emphasizing its significance and calling for the restoration of its legitimate status. Notably, Zhu Guangqian elaborated on the liberating function of aesthetic education, arguing that it could emancipate and elevate individuals’ innate desires—enabling them to discover the myriad novelties of the universe and life, thereby imbuing existence with vitality, freeing them from base tastes, and ultimately achieving a higher state of being (Zhu, 1987). Propelled by academia, the Chinese Aesthetics Society established the Aesthetic Education Research Association, which was later followed by the formation of a similar association under the Chinese Association of Higher Education. In this manner, within the political framework of “emancipated the mind,” aesthetic education was reactivated.

Phase two (1986–1999): the development period. In 1986, the “Seventh Five-Year Plan” reinstated aesthetic education as one of the equally important national educational guidelines alongside intellectual, moral, physical, and technical education. Within the modern compulsory education framework, aesthetic education was implemented as a guiding curriculum issued by the education authorities—centered on music and fine arts—and its principles were integrated into everyday life (e.g., in attire, demeanor, language, and behavior). Subsequently, the 1999 *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Deepening Educational Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Essential-qualities-oriented Education* established the comprehensive promotion of quality education as the developmental goal for the new phase, formally incorporating aesthetic education as an integral component of essential-qualities-oriented education. This evolution indicates that,

amid economic transformations, aesthetic education was envisioned as a driving force and methodological pathway for cultivating innovative talent.

Phase three (1999–2010): A period of sustained and in-depth development. In 2002, the Ministry of Education formulated the *National Plan for the Development of School Arts Education*, which mandated the establishment of an arts education system spanning primary, secondary, and tertiary levels that conforms to the requirements of quality education while reflecting Chinese characteristics. This plan aimed to strengthen school-based aesthetic education by optimizing the school arts education environment and set forth a 10-year developmental target: by 2005, urban schools within the nine-year compulsory education framework were to achieve a 100% start rate for arts courses; by 2010, rural schools were expected to reach 100%, with schools in disadvantaged areas attaining an 80% start rate, among other benchmarks [National Plan for the Development of School Arts Education (2001–2010), 2002]. Under the overarching guidance of essential-qualities-oriented education, fine art, arts education, and film and television education, among other forms, served as means to achieve these objectives.

Over the course of more than two decades, the evolutionary logic of aesthetic education has shifted—from a politically charged process of “emancipated the mind” to the establishment of a modern educational system, and from moral education to quality education. The development of “aesthetic education” in China has never been simply equated with “art education” or “fine arts education,” nor has it merely followed the Western conception of aesthetic education (as articulated primarily by Schiller), nor is it entirely analogous to traditional ethical teachings such as “poetic education” or “musical education” in classical philosophy. In the post-reform era, China exhibits a superposition of premodern, modern, and postmodern socio-economic and cultural phenomena; consequently, the definition and application of aesthetic education have evolved in tandem with shifts in political demands and frameworks. Yet beneath the surface of apparent divergences and complexities lies a consensus: the implementation of the Party’s educational policies—emphasizing the holistic development of intellectual, moral, physical, and aesthetic dimensions—is essential for cultivating successors to socialism and fostering a strong sense of national and ethnic identity.

1.2 Progressive transformation: cultural inheritance and the digitization of aesthetics

Under the influence of a series of “institutional complexes”—including national macro-level systems, educational policies, and the ideologies of political elites—the call to improve aesthetic education and return to the intrinsic purpose of education, namely enhancing students’ aesthetic sensibilities and humanistic qualities, has grown increasingly urgent over many years. In particular, around 2012, the development of mobile internet and smart technologies spurred profound changes in both aesthetics and the educational ecosystem.

At the 2014 Symposium on Literary and Artistic Work, President Xi particularly noted that literature and art can manifest the beauty of belief and the beauty of nobility, and that outstanding literary and artistic works should reflect the aesthetic pursuits of the Chinese people (Central Propaganda Department of the CPC, 2015).

Consequently, “improving aesthetic education teaching” was separately designated as an annual key work item by the Ministry of Education for the first time in 2014. In September 2015, the General Office of the State Council issued the *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education*, the first guiding document on aesthetic education at the macro policy level. The Opinions set an overall goal to “preliminarily form a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics by 2020, featuring interconnections among preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education; a combination of classroom instruction and extracurricular activities; mutual reinforcement between general education and specialized education; and linkage between school-based aesthetic education and that in society and families” (General Office of the State Council, 2015). In response, the “National Aesthetic Education Alliance” was established, with more than 140 institutions engaged in aesthetic education participating nationwide. Aesthetic education has thus gradually embarked on a localized path aimed at the “all-round development of the person,” tailored to China’s national conditions and the contemporary era (Guo Y, 2024).

Two localized pathways have emerged. The first involves integrating China’s outstanding traditional cultural arts—such as music, dance, drama, traditional opera, folk arts, and traditional handicraft techniques—as an essential component of aesthetic education throughout the entire schooling process. At the same time, local cultural resources are developed according to the region’s material conditions, with the goal of nurturing each learner into a “beautiful person” characterized by refined thoughts, emotions, knowledge, and behaviors.

The second pathway focuses on integrating technology to adapt to the learning environment of the new generation. In a society characterized by high levels of media exposure and the pervasive presence of digital technology, many scholars have convincingly argued that “without the dissemination mechanisms provided by media technology, there can be no education” (Guo W, 2018). As of December 2024, the number of Chinese internet users reached 1.108 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 78.6% and mobile internet users numbering 1.105 billion. Online video users totaled 1.07 billion, live-streaming users 833 million, online music users 748 million, and online literature users 575 million. Among these, individuals aged 6–20 account for 3.7%, those aged 10–19 for 13%, and those aged 20–29 for 13.1% (China Internet Network Information Center, 2025), with users in the educational stage comprising 29.8% of the overall internet user base. In response to this rapidly changing social environment, the Ministry of Education’s *Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era* (2019) stressed that aesthetic education should integrate the construction of online platforms for aesthetic education resources, vigorously develop high-quality digital aesthetic education materials that complement curriculum texts for both universities and primary and secondary schools, and encourage all levels of schools to harness the new “Internet+” development trends by strengthening mobile internet-based learning platforms. According to iiMedia Research, the digital environment has become a crucial venue for autonomous learning among college students, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Analysis of College Students’ Consumption Data, 2021).

Thus, as digital technology permeates every aspect of life and the new generation increasingly devotes time and resources to digital media, modern aesthetic education is quietly evolving. To enhance the

educational function of aesthetic education in the new era, the Ministry of Education issued the *Notice on the Comprehensive Implementation of School Aesthetic Education Immersion Actions* in 2023. The notice emphasizes the need to deepen aesthetic education reforms, enhance teachers’ aesthetic education literacy, promote arts practice activities, foster a campus culture of aesthetic education, optimize the aesthetic education evaluation mechanism, improve rural aesthetic education, empower aesthetic education with smart technologies, and integrate social aesthetic education resources. Among these, the empowerment of school aesthetic education through digital technologies calls for the development of high-quality digital educational resources for teaching, exhibition, and interactive experiences, while promoting the integration of digital technologies with traditional Chinese culture. The notice also advocates exploring the use of cloud exhibitions, digital cultural heritage, virtual performances, and holographic technologies, as well as utilizing sensors, big data, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality to facilitate the inheritance of Chinese civilization and explore the revitalization of teaching content and methods.

It is evident that the development of the era and changes in the media environment have created the necessity for the immersion of aesthetic education, while the immersion of aesthetic education itself provides the possibility for constructing an embodied experience within aesthetic education. New media art has become an effective means for constructing such embodied experiences. Through the balance of perception and environmental reconstruction, it enhances students’ critical thinking in response to media and fosters humanistic care, thus facilitating individual growth and socialization.

2 Paths and effects of new media art under the aesthetic education immersion action

The media penetration and usage rates have led to the formation of distinct cognitive traits and aesthetic preferences in the new generation compared to previous generations. For example, internet algorithms make it easier for adolescents to group together with like-minded individuals, resulting in a tendency to abandon anything that is overly complex. These algorithms also reinforce the cognition of similar ideas, leading to a diminished curiosity and a reluctance to change. At the same time, due to the constant bombardment of information, the younger generation tends to lose patience and places greater emphasis on immediate results. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the emergence of the ‘controllable generation’ (Lin, 2021). Behind this control lies a fundamental mode of existence for the new generation, shaped by digital stratification brought about by algorithms. Algorithms categorize users into different layers for precise community marketing, fan maintenance, and personalized recommendations. The result is the ‘layered alienation’ of users, as seen in phenomena such as ‘fan circles,’ where users become further confined within a technological cage, seeking fulfillment in their self-constructed virtual identities and social circles. In addition, the long-term discipline of exam-oriented education, compounded by technological differentiation and tendencies toward group separatism, has severely curtailed the new generation’s agency in choosing and engaging in reading and perception. For example, Professor Yi’s survey of students’ artistic literacy across 12 universities in Jiangsu

Province revealed that an education system focused primarily on knowledge memorization and skills training has left college students with relatively weak abilities in aesthetic perception, imagination, and expression (Yi, 2023).

In response to these new characteristics and trends, and driven by policy, the educational system has witnessed a proliferation of aesthetic education practices and innovations that leverage new media art to liberate imagination and foster effective learning outcomes.

2.1 Network collaborative type: intellectual mutual awakening

Debates over art have been perennial—spanning issues such as its definition, boundaries, functions, objectives or means; the dichotomy between fine art and popular culture; inclusion versus exclusion; funding, market forces, and money; and the camps of art versus anti-art, among others. New media art, which uses the “internet” as a creative tool and encompasses forms such as interactive texts, multimedia novels, digital communities, and net art, is characterized by its shared element of “hypertext.” Its focus diverges from that of other art categories, emphasizing distinctive aesthetic features and immersive aesthetic experiences. In current educational practice, this manifests in five main forms: online learning platforms, virtual classroom environments, digital creative tools, art education games, and instructional course videos.

For example, the “City Dream Factory” website developed by Youfuxijie Primary School in Nanjing uses the city as its theme to integrate art and composition teaching. On this website, students can observe the city’s rapid changes and view its new look through 360-degree, three-dimensional animations. Furthermore, through sub-sections such as “A Corner of the City” and “City Colors,” students can interactively adjust parameters like the city’s scale and layout using mouse-drag operations, thereby constructively envisioning urban designs or color schemes. They can also upload and display their own “ideal cities” and engage in discussions about urban ideas via a “City Q&A” section, enriching their understanding of the city (Zhou, 2009). In addition, initiatives led by institutions such as Peking University have launched online humanities courses offering shared credits—courses including *Art and Aesthetics*, *The Art of Dunhuang*, *The Premier of Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Classic Appreciation of Kunqu Opera*, *The Great Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Art Classics from World-Famous Museums*, and others. At present, there are 1,872 art-related courses on MOOC platform and 344 nationally recognized exemplary courses. By the end of 2020, the course *Art and Aesthetics* had been selected by 890,000 students across 1,107 universities—with nearly one-third of these students coming from western universities—benefiting close to 3 million students overall (Ye and Gu, 2021). This media art form, which is internet-based and aligns with the new generation’s proclivity for information consumption and expression, has evolved into an approach that emphasizes “intellectual education” and constructs a media aesthetic taste based on “technology-oriented identity.”

The “hypertext” cyber space constructed via the internet facilitates intellectual immersion by transporting the mind into a virtual textual world created by artists. In this process, artistic strategies such as the “embedded event window narrative” and “framing narrative” are frequently employed. The “embedded event window narrative”

strategy creates a spatial metaphor—presenting narrative as a holistic image that can be grasped instantly without depicting a sequential temporal unfolding of its elements (Herman, 2002). In this strategy, the artist embeds an “event” to pull participants back from aimless wandering into a focal point, thereby transforming systemic weaknesses and media blind spots into sites of action. By using such “events” to set the discussion agenda, the artist transforms these moments into material for audience reflection. In contrast, the “framing narrative” merely provides a framework or platform, leaving the remainder of the narrative to be constructed by the participants. This strategy can stimulate creative contributions that benefit all involved. Thus, the consensus underlying this type of new media art is the construction of distributed and interconnected subjectivity, which guides audiences to contemplate the possibility of a new type of public sphere. Such “intellectual” participation engenders deep cerebral immersion.

In today’s environment of pervasive digital technology and often overwhelming information flows, “college students’ smartphone-mediated content tends to focus more on entertainment, consumption, and personal matters, lacking depth and social awareness—particularly in relation to politics, beliefs, aesthetics, and art, which connect with ideal convictions and aesthetic tastes” (Zhang and Chen, 2017). Network collaborative new media art projects have thus elevated the reform of aesthetic education evaluation mechanisms to a position of importance. They call for exploring diversified educational evaluation methods that focus on individual student growth and respect and protect student interests and individuality. Crucially, these projects guide students to utilize tools more effectively through cross-disciplinary collaboration, encouraging them to actively interact with and participate in artworks. Through self-reflection and engagement with public issues, students are able to reconstruct media memory and adjust their behavioral relationships. Moreover, new media art constructed via the internet employs polyphonic narrative techniques to stimulate, enhance, or activate intellectual curiosity. By placing tools directly in the hands of learners and returning control of these tools to participants—thereby enabling them to master the technology they use—such practices help to dissolve real-world constraints, create an open and actively participatory environment, liberate individuals from the traditional “knowledge–power” spatial structure, and bridge the profound divide between technological elites and the technologically illiterate (Katz, 1995). In doing so, they reclaim control from dominant stakeholders. John Naisbitt once remarked, In an age when technology was less advanced, human thought evolved to a high degree; in an age of advanced technology, human thought, by contrast, appears diminished—exhibiting a low level of thinking that is dependent on high technology (Naisbitt, 1999). Consequently, network collaborative new media art projects enable students to regain mastery over tools and knowledge, thereby achieving intellectual co-activation.

2.2 Virtual participation type: mutual interpretation through principles and practice

In modern educational systems, aesthetic education is an educational process that actively engages students and guides them into aesthetic activities, generating aesthetic experiences. This process

highlights a strong ‘activity’ nature. One of the most widely applied forms of new media art in educational settings is virtual interactive participation, such as the VR version of the domestic animated series *Lovely China*, produced by China Central Television (CCTV) using holographic technology. This VR experience incorporates an interactive ‘time-travel’ narrative, where virtual characters, guided by a book tour, travel back to the war era and assume various roles around the historical figure Fang Zhimin. The main storyline revolves around the virtual characters’ interactions with Fang Zhimin. A more typical example is the *National Museum Wonderful Night* project, which uses AR technology to ‘revive’ national treasures from different dynasties, such as the gilded silver sachet from the Tang Dynasty, the phoenix crown of Empress Xiaoduan from the Ming Dynasty, and the Qing Dynasty famille rose heart-turning bottle. Other projects, such as the Sichuan Provincial Science and Technology Department’s popular science initiatives *Jiaolong’s Expedition* and *Along the River During the Qingming Festival 3.0*, further exemplify this approach. Under policy guidance, Chongqing Jiaotong University has even established a virtual aesthetic education research studio. These teaching applications are primarily organized around two thematic categories: revolutionary classics (red classics) and traditional culture.

As digitization deepens, the tension between the “traditional” components of aesthetic education in modern schooling and the emergent “contemporary” demands becomes increasingly pronounced, leading to notable shifts in aesthetic capacities. Confronted with vast amounts of information, individuals tend to favor visual modalities for information acquisition and processing. Consequently, virtual participatory new media art—created through interactive technological means—reconstructs the audience’s perceptual system via mimetic environment design. In scenarios where the virtual and the real are interwoven, new spaces for learning and dialog emerge, constructed through concrete situational experiences that balance perception, vision, hearing, and the other senses. Recent neuroscientific evidence indicates that the power of aesthetic experience—and its potential cognitive benefits—lies in providing the brain with a rapid, cross-dimensional integration of salient information. This pleasurable visual aesthetic experience can enhance learning potential by fostering the synergistic integration of information across systems that typically compete from psychological or neurological perspectives. The interplay among three cross-modal networks—the default mode network, the central executive network, and the salience network—enables the default mode network (i.e., the brain’s baseline neural state) to become active even in the absence of external stimulation (Schwengerer, 2023).

At the same time, enhanced visual representation allows for a more intuitive expression of complex themes, achieving the goal of simulated learning. Virtual participatory new media art, employing interactive technologies such as animation software, computer graphics, and artificial intelligence, generates scientific imagery that renders the invisible visible and creates novel illusory forms. This cultivates a type of technological imagination that explores concepts and narratives beyond traditional, non-interactive visual expression. Gradually, such practices move beyond the mere pursuit of visual pleasure to enable an intuitive grasp of abstract principles or emotions, presenting a profound artistic form capable of evoking both intellectual and emotional responses. The hyperreal quality produced by scientific imagery can be translated into a form of new visual knowledge—not necessarily a “law governing all changes in the

universe,” but one that may depict the structure of the microscopic world, subtle nuances of human emotion, digital drama, or fleeting yet intense connections with strangers. In essence, this “new knowledge” may address either serious macro-level public issues or the ineffable, minute emotions of everyday life; it may represent universal principles or the logic underlying a seemingly trivial fragment of the world.

This pedagogical practice fosters what might be termed “mutual elucidation through inquiry” in the realm of aesthetic experience. As stated in *The Great Learning from the Book of Rites*: “If one wishes to be sincere in one’s intentions, one must first extend one’s knowledge. The extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things” (Zhu, 1983). Cheng Yi posited that “where any object embodies a principle, one must thoroughly pursue that principle” (Cheng H and Cheng Y, 1981). In the words of Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, “to investigate is to exhaust; an object is tantamount to a principle; only by exhausting the principle can one attain knowledge, for without such exhaustion knowledge cannot be attained” (Cheng H and Cheng Y, 1981). Zhu Xi further clarified that “attaining knowledge pertains to the self, while investigating things pertains to the external object” (Zhu, 1983). In this sense, a new media art work—as an object—embodies a “principle.” Its “investigation” (格, gé) involves probing or examining its inherent elements, while “attainment” (致, zhì) entails the acquisition of knowledge. Attaining knowledge requires reflective discernment and self-authenticity (as exemplified by Xiong Shili’s notion of direct personal verification or “experiential demonstration”), thereby “positioning a thing appropriately to gain knowledge about its essence and inherent regularities.” This “position” depends on the work’s placement within the organic interrelations of both its internal and external contexts, as well as on the existence, state, and development of the self. Ultimately, through the mediation of the work, the interplay between the “object” and the “mind” becomes mutually clarifying and inspirational.

In summary, within the new era’s aesthetic education immersion initiatives, new media art primarily facilitates direct emotional engagement—encouraging learners to invest their feelings willingly and actively, thereby achieving self-education. This process cultivates a keen capacity for analogical reasoning and guides the regulation of imagination—“imagination is only truly imagination when confined within boundaries” (Best, 1988)—thus unlocking and channeling the subconscious potential of life. Moreover, the powerful convergence of visual aesthetic experience and creative thinking—akin to a mixed focal point—utilizes the configuration of three cross-modal neural systems (the default mode network, the central executive network, and the salience network) to confer advantages in information processing. This configuration assists participants in expanding their experiential world, enhances their sensitivity to implicit knowledge, fosters intuitive and creative thinking, and ultimately amplifies their learning potential.

3 Contradictions and lags of new media art under the institutional complex

An analysis of aesthetic education policies, new media art strategies, and their effects reveals that aesthetic education has developed rapidly under policy impetus—as evidenced by both the surge in research topics and teaching practices (see Figure 1, based on

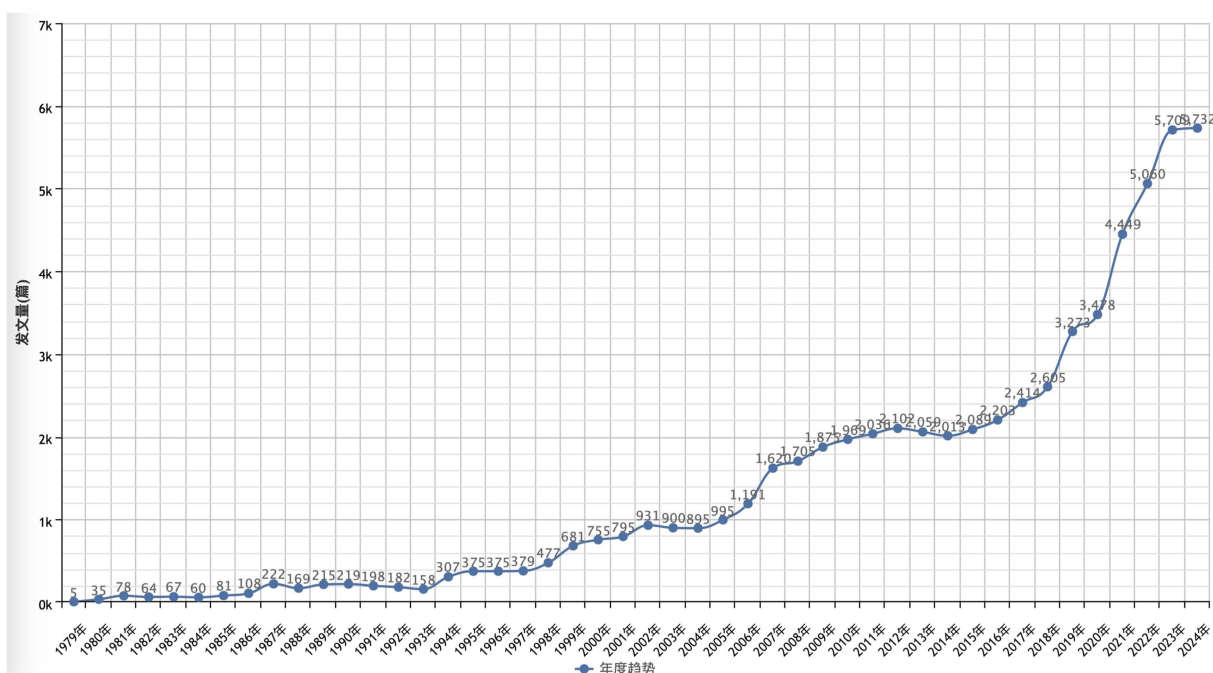


FIGURE 1
Aesthetic education research publications trend (1979–2024).

CNKI publication data). For a long time, debates and controversies have persisted within China's educational community regarding the status and positioning of aesthetic education. Theoretically, many scholars argue that aesthetic education is subordinate to moral education, functioning as normative education that is overly theoretical. In practice, intellectual education often replaces aesthetic education, and assessment is primarily conducted through examinations in art and fine arts. The introduction of new media art has further diversified and complicated these issues.

3.1 Confusion in prioritizing goals

In 1979, Zhou Yang stated at the Fourth National Literature Conference: "Under the socialist system, aesthetic education is a powerful means to cultivate communist moral sentiments... It is of profound significance for transforming the spiritual outlook of our nation and enhancing the scientific, cultural, and artistic accomplishments of the entire people" (*Aesthetic Education Journal Editorial Office, Collaborative Innovation Center for Aesthetic Education and Cultural Communication, 2016*). This remark, to some extent, elucidates the underlying logic of aesthetic education—it is seen as a tool for shaping communist morality, which requires an idealistic pursuit beyond current realities, a humanistic concern that transcends individual interests, a spiritual quest surpassing material needs, and a continuous striving toward an ever-approachable ideal. In actual teaching practice, however, the pervasive maxim "practice is the sole criterion of truth" transforms these conflicts into political alignments: private morality becomes public, while genuine personal moral values are obscured. Tangible, visible benefits are then adopted as the sole standard for making choices. As a result, the genuine aims

of new media art-based aesthetic education—such as stimulating imagination and enhancing learning potential—are abandoned in favor of an emphasis on the novelty of media technology forms. Moreover, the predominance of new media art works centered on revolutionary classics and traditional culture in the teaching process further reinforces utilitarian tendencies and undermines the inherent critical spirit of new media art.

3.2 Conflict in resource allocation

This conflict is primarily manifested in the ineffective distribution of resources between top-level design and curriculum implementation. National guiding documents repeatedly stress the necessity and importance of aesthetic education and have formulated various guiding plans. For example, the Guiding Plan for Public Art Courses in General Colleges and Universities stipulates that the number of public art teachers should constitute between 0.15 and 0.2% of the total student population, and that full-time teachers should account for no <50% of the total art teaching staff (*Ministry of Education Office, 2006*). However, significant disparities in fiscal conditions across provinces result in vast differences in educational investments. For instance, in six provinces—including Henan and Guangxi—rural primary schools face a shortage of aesthetic education teachers exceeding 50%, and the course offering rate for aesthetic education is only 3% (*Tang and Yin, 2017*). Moreover, a 2021 study organized by the Gansu Provincial Government Advisory Office, surveying over 20 primary and secondary schools in two cities and one prefecture, found that art teachers comprised only 7.11% of the total teaching staff in Lanzhou and a mere 3.1% in Zhangye (*He et al., 2021*).

These conflicts in goal-setting and resource allocation impede sustainable development.

3.3 Conflict between macro-level goals and micro-level implementation

Society at large expects aesthetic education to play a significant role within the educational system, cultivating students' aesthetic abilities, creativity, and overall competence—thus producing talent that meets societal needs and even promoting cultural prosperity. Yet, in practice, aesthetic education is often confined to the teaching of artistic subjects (such as music, fine arts, and dance), with an excessive focus on skill training and disciplinary knowledge transmission, thereby neglecting its diversified and holistic objectives. As noted in the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education, “In some regions and schools, the educational function of aesthetic education is not fully recognized. There is an overemphasis on examination-oriented training at the expense of cultivating overall quality, a focus on a select few rather than the entire student body, and a prioritization of competitions over popularization. Moreover, phenomena such as perfunctory implementation, class cancelations, and scheduling conflicts persist; resource allocation does not meet standards, teacher staffing remains significantly insufficient, and there is a lack of a coordinated mechanism for integrated advancement (General Office of the State Council, 2015).” These limitations at the implementation level have led to a narrow or fragmented conception of the goals of aesthetic education, making it difficult to achieve the profound impact that society expects. In addition, the shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate resource allocation, and the absence of a coordinated advancement mechanism further exacerbate these conflicts.

Therefore, education goals driven by politics tend to be short-term oriented, which does not align with the long-term nature required by aesthetic education. When campaign governance is applied in the field

of education, systemic conflicts can directly affect the effective allocation of resources, decision-making processes, and delays in coordination. When the entities responsible for implementing education are unclear about which goals to prioritize, it leads to delays in overall progress and developmental lags. It is evident that the immersive effects of new media art-based aesthetic education require greater stability and consistency in educational objectives, as well as an inclusive institutional framework.

Author contributions

XZ: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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