



COMMENT ON “CONTEMPORARY ART: CULTIVATING FENG ZIKAI’S TEACHINGS”

Hanying Chen

Academy of Fine Arts, Lianyungang Normal College, Lianyungang, 222000 - China.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0685-6451> |  chenhanying92@163.com

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Aesthetic education is an education that enriches the imagination and fosters innovative consciousness, enhancing aesthetic literacy, refining sentiments, warming the soul, and stimulating the vitality of innovation and creation. To achieve the innovative development of aesthetic education in the new era, it is necessary to vigorously carry forward the spirit of Chinese aesthetic education and realize the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese aesthetic education ideas.

Feng Zikai was an art educator and aesthetic education thinker who learnt from both the East and the West. His aesthetic education ideas are still of great inspiration and reference significance in building a new era of the Chinese aesthetic education system and implementing the fundamental task of cultivating virtue and nurturing talents. Feng Zikai’s aesthetic education ideas have three important meanings: advocating the aesthetic education value of truth, goodness, and beauty, without lacking anyone, the aesthetic education essence of forming education and assisting human ethics, and the aesthetic education method of regarding the heart as the main and the skills as the secondary (Jiang; li, 2022, p. 52).

Feng Zikai has long emphasized the importance of aesthetic education. He believed that the purpose of education is to cultivate noble character, and art education is education of beauty, education of emotion, and aesthetic education is one of the three major goals including truth, goodness, and beauty of education, that is, one of the three conditions for

¹ Academy of Fine Arts, Lianyungang Normal College, Lianyungang, 222000 - China. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0685-6451>. E-mail: chenhanying92@163.com.

noble character (Jiang; li, 2022, p. 52). In Feng Zikai's view, the important goal of life is to pursue the three truths: truth, goodness, and beauty. Science pursues truth, morality pursues goodness, and art pursues beauty. Truth, goodness, and beauty, these three are interconnected and form a trinity.

Studying Feng Zikai's aesthetic education ideas naturally cannot be separated from synchronic comparison. Comparison is made to better showcase Feng Zikai's aesthetic education ideas. However, Xie and Chen (2024)'s choice to compare with Mr. Wang Chaowen does not seem to achieve this effect. A better choice may be selecting another representative art educators of the same period for comparison.

Confucius believed that education for a person should begin with aesthetic education and end with aesthetic education, which is also the simple aesthetic education thought of Confucianism. Similarly, Feng Zikai also divided human life into three levels: first is the material life, which is the pleasure of the sensory experience, followed by the spiritual life, which is the pleasure of the spirit, and finally, the highest level of the soul life, which is the pleasure of the soul (Lu, 2019, p. 144). He believes that human psychology has three aspects of activities: knowledge, will, and emotion. From these three activities, three cultures are produced, namely science, morality, and art. The beauty of art is divided into three aspects, namely natural beauty, life beauty, and supernatural beauty. The material life referred to Feng Zikai is clothing, food, housing, and transportation, and the beauty in between can be simply understood as natural beauty; the important component of spiritual life is literature and art, which open and carry life beauty; the soul life refers to religion, which is based on the subjective creation of natural and life ideals, and is supernatural beauty. The work of art is also a sincere love of beauty, and it is irresistible. Appreciating art can overcome the possessiveness of people to the greatest extent.

Feng Zikai emphasizes the children's childlike innocence and interest, believing that children have an innate sensitivity and love for music, and have different understanding and experience of music, compared to the adults' ones. So that we should respect children's personalities and interests, choose art materials and methods that are suitable for children, encourage them to freely create and perform music, and thus cultivate their musical literacy and aesthetic ability (Xie; Chen, 2024). In Feng Zikai's view, childlike innocence is a symbol of complete character. Childlike innocence is pure, candid, and full of enthusiasm, unpolluted, and is the most precious. Art education is to cultivate this 'childlike innocence' in children so that they will never extinguish it when they grow up.

Insulated perspective is an important theoretical concept in Feng Zikai's thought, guiding people to view things with an insulated attitude when creating and feeling art, thus obtaining a pure aesthetic feeling (Xie; Chen, 2024). The so-called insulation is to view a thing in isolation from all its relationships and causes in the world, and to watch it alone. Let

the thing be to other things, like the glass of a poor conductor to the electric current, cut off the relationship, so it is called insulation. Feng Zikai himself possesses an artistic heart, and at the same time, he regards the heart of art as the most important thing in art, considering it the essence of art. What is the heart of art? Feng Zikai once said, a child entered his room, turned over the watch that was covered on the table, moved the teacup that was behind the teapot to the front, and turned the shoes that were upside down under the bed. When asked why, he said, “The surface is covered on the table, how stuffy it looks!” “The teacup hides behind its mother, how can it drink milk?” “The shoes are upside down, how can they talk?” Feng Zikai greatly admired the child’s rich sense of sympathy. The heart of art is sympathy, that is, to give sympathy to all things in the world. To obtain sympathy, one must hold an insulated attitude towards life and nature (Chu, 2016, p. 33).

The relevance of a person’s ideas today must be weighed against the historical background of the period, explaining how his creative concepts affected society at the time and how they might be applied to the present. While discussing the contemporary value of Feng Zikai’s artistic ideas, Xie; Chen (2024) should reflect the national circumstances of China in the 20th century and their influences on Feng Zikai. Feng Zikai’s paintings were created during chaotic times, which generally reflected the world’s bitterness under the current political climate. He paid attention to the relationship between human ethics, nature, and society in the way of artistic aesthetics. His paintings have profound connotations and are thought-provoking, mostly holding grievances for the hardworking and poor. His painting language is simple and clear, plain and vivid, and he narrates the life philosophy and the smell of the market from the perspective of ordinary people, which is deeply loved by people and has a distinct characteristic of beautifying people.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Feng Zikai’s artistic ideas should be combined with actual works. As a renowned modern Chinese cartoonist, known as the progenitor of modern Chinese comics, Feng Zikai’s artistic works can well demonstrate his artistic ideas. Feng Zikai left behind a large number of outstanding cartoon works, but from the entire text, Xie; Chen (2024) have not cited specific examples to substantiate his aesthetic education thoughts.

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