



The Objectives of Cultivating Artistic Talents in the 21st Century: World Experience, China's Path

Xiao Huang*

International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email: HuangXiao2023HX@163.com

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Abstract

In response to the current complex international situation and contemporary environment, artistic talents should shoulder multiple missions and responsibilities. As a Chinese scholar who has engaged in teaching literary and art theory in several countries, I attempt to shape China's path through world experience and propose that there should be three main goals for the cultivation of artistic talents in the 21st century. Firstly, artistic talents should possess both national and global characteristics, as well as local and universal characteristics; Secondly, artistic talents should become cross-border high-end talents with comprehensive abilities and qualities; Thirdly, artistic talents should possess a strong sense of social responsibility, and should pay attention to the dialogue with the public and the transformation of the living landscape.

Subject Areas

Art

Keywords

Artistic Talents, Cultivation Objectives, World Experience, China's Path

1. Introduction

The 21st century is an era of "multiple changes happening simultaneously, with globalization, marketization, urbanization, industrialization, and informatization closely intertwined, forming a superimposed process of mutual influence and mutual promotion." [1] This is an era of prosperity and vitality, but also an era of crisis and turmoil at the same time. Climate change, epidemics, wars, genetic technology, artificial intelligence, etc. have filled many people with worry and fear. As

*The author's Chinese name is 黄笑.

political scientist Liu Jianguo pointed out: “At present, changes in the world, the times, and history are unfolding in unprecedented ways. On the one hand, the historical trend of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit is irresistible and unstoppable, the will of the people and the trend of the times determine that the future of mankind will ultimately be bright. On the other hand, hegemonic and bullying behaviors such as bullying the weak, plundering by trickery, and zero-sum game are extremely harmful. The deficit of peace, development, security and governance has worsened, anti-globalization thoughts are on the rise, and unilateralism and protectionism have increased significantly. Human society is facing unforeseeable challenges.” [2] Professor Hu Yong of Peking University believes that if we are not careful enough, the human race will be on the brink of destruction, which makes the 21st century the most critical century of all centuries so far. [3] Actually, outstanding artistic talents can play a considerable positive role in the humanities crisis of the 21st century. Du Wei, a professor at Hangzhou Normal University, believes that art is a special way of creatively mastering the world, which brings inner freedom and harmony to people by establishing an experiential relationship between the subject and the object. [4] Gao Shiming, the president of China Academy of Art, once said: “The reason why art is so important is that it has a liberating power. It not only settles people’s body and mind, but also opens up people’s body and mind, allowing people to maintain emotional vitality and spiritual autonomy in an increasingly intelligent and virtual society.” [5] In such an era, how the training model and direction of artistic talents should fit in with the positive role that art can play has become a topic worthy of in-depth study. As the author of this article, I’ve conducted language, culture, and art teaching activities in North America, Latin America, Europe, and other places. In this article, I will discuss and explore what skills and qualities the artistic talents should be equipped with in the 21st century based on what I’ve seen and heard, combined with cases from many countries and multi-angle observations.

2. Analysis and Research Outcome

1) One of the objectives of cultivating artistic talents in the 21st century should be making them both national and worldly, local and universal

Take Mexico as an example: As a country that has produced literary and artistic masters such as Octavio Paz, Juana Cruz, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and José Orozco, the Mexican government has long actively supported the development and progress of the country’s humanities and arts. Each year, the National Council for Culture and the Arts of Mexico provides financial support to outstanding Mexican artists and newcomers in the art world, called FONCA (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes), ranging from a few hundred dollars to thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars. Art practitioners who win government sponsorship can use the funds for the creation of artworks, as well as for overseas study, further education, etc., and eventually present their art projects to the public. Readers can find detailed information on the official website of the Mexican Ministry of Culture at <https://fonca.cultura.gob.mx/>, as shown in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. The official website of the Mexican Ministry of Culture.

In particular, the Mexican government encourages young artists who present their national history in artistic form. For example, in 2016, one of the recipients of FONCA was Fabian Ramírez (b. 1994), who graduated from the School of Art of the National Autonomous University of Mexico that year. With the support of the FONCA scholarship, he was able to go to the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in Germany to pursue a master's degree. His paintings blend narrativity with expressionism, seeking a modernity that is unique to the Mexican cultural entity. His works such as “Firing the Idols”, “Emperor”, “Crying Together”, etc. directly confront the national trauma of Mexico, depicting the complex state of mind of the Indigenous Mexicans under the rule of Spanish colonists with highly powerful brushstrokes, and attempting to revive the ancient Aztec and Mayan civilizations with paintings. From 2022 to 2024, Fabian Ramírez has been invited to tour the major cities of Europe to exhibit his artistic creations. [6] His success proves that living in an era of globalization, we have an even greater obligation to protect cultural diversity.

Chinese President Xi Jinping once delivered a speech at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on March 27, 2014, in his speech, he stressed the need for mutual respect and harmonious coexistence among different civilizations, and proposed that exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations should become a bridge to enhance friendship among peoples of all countries, a driving force for the progress of human society, and a bond to maintain world peace. In recent years, Chinese literary and artistic workers have been committed to “telling China's stories well”, because “telling China's stories well in Chinese discourse and conveying China's voice to the people of the world is not only related to whether China can gain a firm foothold in the international public opinion field, but also about how China can open a new situation in the midst of change”. [7] Chinese people living in the 21st century have used the power of the internet to spread the wisdom of ancient Chinese and the beauty of Chinese culture to the world on a broader platform. Well-known bloggers such as Li Ziqi (李子柒), Grandpa Amu (阿木爷爷), and Dianxi Xiaoge (滇西小哥) show the world China's agricultural civilization, cooking skills and construction techniques through short videos. In fact, the excellent cases of outstanding artists from Mexico and other countries can give us inspiration on how to tell Chinese stories and what it means to “tell Chinese

stories well”.

In 2019, Huazhong University of Science and Technology and China International Communications Group signed a strategic cooperation agreement, and jointly built the Institute for Creative Communication of the Chinese Story (ICCCS), the first think tank research institution in China with the purpose of telling Chinese stories well. The purpose of the institute is to “tell Chinese stories well with academic knowledge and spread human civilization with stories”. On May 15, 2022, ICCCS and the China Internet Information Center (CIIC) jointly released the “Top Ten Research Cases of Chinese Good Stories in 2022” at the “2022 Chinese Story International Communication Summit Forum”. The winning cases cover ten dimensions, including Chinese character stories, Chinese city stories, Chinese Hong Kong stories, Chinese sports stories, Chinese War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression stories, Chinese ecological protection stories, Chinese rural revitalization stories, Chinese digital civilization stories, Chinese media stories and Chinese corporate stories. [7] It can be seen that the Chinese academic community has paid great attention to how to tell Chinese stories well.

When training art students, Chinese colleges and universities should pay attention to the students’ learning and inheritance of Chinese “intangible cultural heritage”, while giving them international horizons and perspectives. Only in this way, when students carry out specific concrete artistic practice, can they promote Chinese culture in a modern way that is accepted by the majority of people worldwide. In addition, students should also be trained in narrative strategies, expression strategies and communication strategies, so that art creation can become one of the important ways for the world to understand China.

2) The second objective of cultivating artistic talents in the 21st century should be making them cross-border high-end talents with comprehensive abilities, qualities and accomplishment

Taking Latin America as an example, the state university system, the Inter-American university system and the autonomous university system throughout the region are all focused on cultivating innovative artistic talents with philosophical thinking and humanistic care. The curriculum of these universities is often cross-faculty, cross-disciplinary and cross-professional. Such training model is in line with the current overall trend, that is, cross-border talents are becoming more and more popular, and many industries and fields are increasingly in need of versatile and compound talents with a variety of knowledge and skills. Therefore, comprehensive courses such as artificial intelligence and art, artificial intelligence and philosophy, art and psychotherapy, new media art, gender and art, ethnicity and art, which include multiple disciplines and components such as sociology, psychology and philosophy, are widely offered in art colleges and departments in Latin America and North America, in order to cultivate top-ranked talents that meet the future market demand. These courses, which have high requirements for course instructors, are also welcomed by students.

In order to provide students with more practical opportunities, universities in Latin America have jointly established many foundations with local art galleries,

museums, and art galleries to support students to do on-site/resident creation and research. Moreover, in this “global village” era, cooperation between different universities in different countries is also becoming more frequent. Universities in Puebla, Queretaro, Guanajuato and other places in Mexico regularly exchange and cooperate with other universities in North America and Latin America. While teaching in the state university systems of Oaxaca and Puebla in Mexico, I worked closely with faculty staff and students from New York University Buenos Aires, University of Palermo, and University of Belgrano, I combined different ways of presenting ideas, such as philosophy, poetry, and drama, and collaborated with costume designers, stage designers, and performing artists to create a series of cross-boundary works that were exhibited in these partner institutions.

High technology such as virtual imaging technology and artificial intelligence have created infinite possibilities while injecting fresh blood into art. The Italian government recruits high-level talents proficient in both liberal arts and science almost every year to accomplish “Pompeii Project”. Applicants need to have professional knowledge in history, archaeology, and art, at the same time, be excel in computer technology, so as to restore Pompeii in virtual space. Upon the completion of this public-benefit project, all people will have access to an electronic Pompeii. On March 24, 2022, an experimental study named “Reviewing Pompeian domestic space through combined virtual reality-based eye tracking and 3d GIS” was published in the journal *Antiquity*. Danilo M. Campanaro and Giacomo Landeschi, scholars in charge of this research project “are reconstructing Pompeii and its frescoes with the help of virtual reality and eye-tracking technology that not only allows people to walk inside the house and observe the experience as residents do, but also aims to better understand Roman architectures and how ancient houses were designed by tracking the eye movements of tourists exploring the space in VR.” [8] In addition to Italy, other countries such as France, Germany, and Spain are also carrying out similar “digitization of historical relics” projects that benefit all citizens eventually. In the near future, humans will be able to have an overview of ancient civilizations around the world with the help of special instruments. All people—regardless of skin color or race—can enjoy cultural heritage to the greatest extent possible and in an equitable manner.

This trend and demand also point out the direction for a new talent training model. As mentioned earlier, future art talents should possess knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines at the same time, and should be both proficient in a particular field and possess a broad base of knowledge. This requires in-depth cooperation between different departments and majors. Only by establishing a normalized model of “joint training” can we meet the future talent market needs.

China is a country with a splendid civilization of 5,000 years, and a large number of historical and cultural heritages need to be deciphered and restored by high technology. From 2018, China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation started to use artificial intelligence and drone technology to protect and restore the Great Wall. In 2023, Sichuan Archeology Research Institute has cooperated with Tencent SSV Digital Culture Laboratory to solve the problems of cultural

relics restoration and archaeological mapping, taking Sanxingdui (三星堆) as a pilot to explore the possibility of human-machine collaboration with AI intelligence to assist cultural relic restoration. [9] Since the 1990s, the Dunhuang Research Academy has begun to digitize the Mogao Caves (莫高窟). The purpose of this project is to “rescue the precious cultural relics information of the Mogao Caves so that they can be preserved permanently and authentically, provide accurate and detailed information for Dunhuang studies, and create virtual caves for tourists to enjoy and visit.” [10] If people can enter a vivid virtual world to view the Mogao Caves, then the Mogao Caves can reduce the time and frequency of opening to tourists, so as to play a better protection effect on cultural relics. As of August 20, 2023, “Digital Dunhuang” has collected data from 290 caves with a collection area of 26,000 square meters, produced panoramic tour programs for 172 caves, and scanned the spatial structure of 206 caves. [11] This project is still ongoing, and more advanced information technologies such as digital photography and three-dimensional information acquisition are being used.

It can be seen that a rapidly developing China is also in urgent need of a group of high-level talents who are proficient in archaeology, art and technology—the so-called “all-in-one” talents. “In the era of deep integration of culture and technology, various elements are infiltrating each other imperceptibly and subtly. Scientific inventions and creations are integrated into the imagination and emotion of culture and art, and artistic creation and exploration of beauty are infiltrated into the rationality of science and technology. Culture and technology are increasingly moving towards deep mergence. The integration of culture and technology is not a simple addition, but an organic fusion.” [11]

3) The cultivation of artistic talents in the 21st century should also emphasize social responsibility, dialogue with the public and the transformation of the living landscape. Art is not about self-admiration, and aesthetics is not the privilege of the elite

In the 1960s, western countries began to explore the interaction between art and community, as well as the possibility of art entering and transforming communities. In 1965, French scholar André Malraux proposed the concept of “museum without walls” in his book *The Imaginary Museum*, arguing that an art gallery should not be just a closed space. In 1977, American artists Susan and Luis Cervantes founded an organization called Precita Eyes Muralists in San Francisco’s Mission District. Every year, they recruit 3,000 young artists to decorate the entire city with murals. Susan once said: “A mural is a bridge to the community.” Since then, the movement “Murals Entering into Communities, Murals Entering into Cities” in the United States has spread to many cities in many states. Philadelphia in Pennsylvania State, Waco in Texas State, Newton in Kansas State, Joplin in Missouri State and other cities have joined this art movement. Artists have transformed neighborhoods and cities with colorful mural art.

The art space generation and construction project in the Aubing district of Munich, Germany reflects that art can produce a closer chemical reaction with the public life of the community in which it resides. Based on the street gardens, urban

parks, and suburban woods, Aubing artist groups occasionally create new and unique space installations based on the concept of “harmony between people, art and nature”, which from time to time bring surprises to local people’s visual and spatial experience. The group of artists also decorated barns and houses on local farms, motivated by the desire to allow people to live amidst the art. In the spring of 2024, with the sponsorship of relevant art foundations, artists transformed a three-story granary in the Aubin district into Germany’s largest contemporary art center today, forming a layered intertextual landscape with the surrounding restaurants and bars. Aubing, as a rural area far from the center of Munich, has become a unique “art field” through the involvement and intervention of artists and the participation of all art lovers.

It is worth mentioning that since the 1990s, Chinese artists and designers have also begun to pay attention to the intervention of art in public spaces. Bringing art into communities and using art to transform messy urban-rural fringe areas has become a trend. The Shanghai Duolun Museum of Modern Art, which opened in 2003, has become a distinctive landmark in the city from an unfinished/half-built building in the Hongkou district. In 2019, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the opening of Duolun Road Cultural Celebrity Street, Duolun Modern Art Museum invites citizens to create literary works about Hongkou Memories. This art project aims to stimulate the subjectivity of the general public. Zeng Yulan, director of the art museum, once said in an interview: “Located in the Duolun residential area, we are increasingly aware that as a member of the community, the people we relate to are not only the visitors who are attracted to the exhibition, but also those who live in the community and others who enter the community. When a person develops a deeper understanding and concern for his or her current environment, culture and history, he or she will naturally want to respond and express it. Art can be a way to help people open their emotions and find a spiritual habitat.” [12]

In January 2024, the Academy of Fine Arts of Shanghai University planned the “People’s Park Treasure Hunt Program” around the two keywords—“community” and “park”, which is both an art exhibition and a community activity, with both figurative works and natural space experience. The 21 invited artists brought a total of 16 groups of works on the theme of “Art in the Park”, making them “hidden” in the context of the park. “Treasure Hunt” becomes an opportunity to gather audiences for interaction. Artists invite audiences to hold “treasure maps” to find artistic creations hidden in the park, take photos with them and share them on social media, completing their own treasure hunt. [13]

The above cases show the growing connection between contemporary art and the community and the public. Future art talents should also pay attention to the geo-centricity/locality, public character and mass participation of art, and actively absorb and accept the public’s interpretation of works. In recent years, the Chinese government has been calling for the use of art to reshape the countryside. “The intervention of art in the construction of rural culture and the integration of art and rural modernization is a new strategy to transform rural landscape, beautify

rural cultural space, safeguard rural culture, develop rural cultural industry and promote rural revitalization.” [14] Therefore, Chinese universities should focus more on the above qualities when cultivating artistic talents.

3. Conclusion

Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce once said: “Art is a history with emotions. All pure artistic expressions are both themselves and universality at the same time. Every word of the poet and every creation of the artist contains the fate, hope, pain, joy, glory and sorrow of the entire human race, and all the scenes of real life.” [15] Today, with the rapid development of everything especially technology, human beings are more likely to face value crisis and spiritual dilemma, while outstanding art can communicate the past and the present, purify and sublimate people's hearts by virtue of eternal vitality, guide human beings to find truth, goodness and beauty, and lead human beings to an endless future. The cultivation of artistic talents is a long and arduous task. I believe that my article will arouse the attention of art schools and colleges, and senior leaders will realize the important role that art talents can play in the 21st century. At present, some art colleges located in underdeveloped areas of China are still unable to keep pace with the international standards in terms of training models and curriculum settings. The selection of textbooks and course content is outdated and conservative. This is mainly because senior leaders lack a global vision and global strategic awareness. I hope this academic article can play a positive guiding role.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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