ART EDUCATION IN CHINA

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I. Development of Art Education in China

A. History of National Policies for Art Education

The history of art education in China can be traced to as far back as the late period of the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911). In the School Regulations 《奏定学堂章程》, drafted in 1903 by the Qing government, crafts, painting, music, and other art courses were not compulsory. Approximately 10 years later, the Ministry of Education of what was in 1912 the Republic of China drafted its Provisional Standards for General Education Courses 《普通教育暂行课程之标准》. The standards required primary schools to provide at least one of the following courses: painting, crafts, or choir. Since then, art education has been incorporated into the general education system in China.

In 1952, three years after the People’s Republic of China was created, the Ministry of Education issued three documents: Provisional Primary School Regulations 《小学暂行规程 (草案)》, Provisional Middle School Regulations 《中学暂行规程 (草案)》 and Provisional Nursery School Regulations 《幼儿园暂行规程 (草案)》. All three documents required schools to offer a comprehensive education with intellectual, moral, physical, and aesthetic components. In terms of aesthetic education, the major goal in primary schools was to nurture a love for beauty and instill art appreciation in children. In middle schools, the goal was to elevate artistic taste and encourage artistic creativity in students, while nursery schools aimed to instigate an interest in art and promote creativity in children. During that period, China celebrated moderate achievements in art education. However, during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, when class conflict was rampant and revisionism opposed, art education became a victim of vicious political attacks.

In the 1980s, China implemented a series of regulations to develop art education. The Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee for Reform of the Educational System 《中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定》, promulgated in May 1985, guaranteed art education
as part of schooling. The Report on the Seventh Five-Year Plan《关于
第七个五年计划的报告》and the Compulsory Education Law of
the People’s Republic of China《中华人民共和国义务教育法 (草案)》, were issued in 1986 to implement moral, intellectual, physical,
and aesthetic components into comprehensive education. In September
1986, the State Education Commission set up the first specialized
agency for art education, the Art Education Office. In December of the
same year, the Art Education Committee was established. In November
1989, the first National Working Conference on Art Education
in Schools was organized by the State Education Commission, which
issued the Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Art Educa-
tion in China’s Schools (1989–2000) 《全国学校艺术教育总体规划
(1989年－2000年)》. The Plan outlined the tasks required to implement
art education in Chinese schools by the late 20th century and specified
the educational and teaching reforms required.

Under the guiding principles mentioned above, specific teaching
documents, such as art course designs and curriculum projects, were
formulated and implemented. Schools compiled art education course
books with Chinese or regional characteristics. The exchange of art
education methodologies (such as classes, courses, and students) with
other countries and regions was also promoted.

In February 1993, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council
released an official document titled Chinese Educational Reform and
Development Outline 《中国教育改革和发展纲要》. Provision 35 in
this document specially expounded upon the role of aesthetic education
in schooling. In June 1994, the CCP Central Committee and the State
Council held the Second National Working Conference on Education,
during which aesthetic and art education were high on the agenda. In
July of that year, the State Education Commission released a notice
to initiate art appreciation courses in Chinese middle schools, putting
an end to the exclusion of art courses in middle school curriculum.\(^1\)
In July 1996, the State Education Commission required higher educa-
tion institutions to promote unified planning and make great efforts to
introduce art courses to students.

\(^1\) The documents mentioned above are included in New Milestone: A Collection of
Documents from the National Education Working Conference, compiled by the State Education