

# The Importance of Aesthetic Education in Rural Education

Ruixin Tan<sup>1,a,\*</sup>, Chen Li<sup>2,b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of International Education, Wuhan University, Wuhan, Hubei, China

<sup>2</sup>Central China Normal University, Wuhan, Hubei, China

<sup>a</sup>739682715@qq.com, <sup>b</sup>124633923@qq.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** With the development of education's "Five-in-One" framework, the issue of aesthetic education in the aspects of morality, intelligence, physical education, aesthetics, and labor has become increasingly prominent, especially in rural and remote areas. The question of how to break through the blind spot and hotspot of ensuring high-quality and balanced aesthetic education is an urgent problem to be solved. According to the requirements outlined in the "China Education Modernization 2035" issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, it is particularly important to enhance the "cultural confidence" of children in rural schools through the integration of aesthetic education into the soft cultural curriculum. This aims to narrow the gap in self-recognition between urban and rural children and further establish a sense of confidence in rural children's psychology. Facing the common social phenomena of left-behind children and single-parent households among rural children, it is crucial to employ new forms of aesthetic education to address the lack of confidence, affection, and cooperative awareness among rural school children, and establish a balanced and comprehensive development-oriented teaching that promotes independent personality and freedom. Considering the current teaching situation in rural schools, the author, based on practical teaching experience, proposes effective strategies that are operationally feasible to address the practical issues of aesthetic education in rural schools and avoid the drawbacks of traditional education that "force-feed" knowledge. This will ultimately promote rural school children's sense of self-identity and appreciation of beauty in life.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic Education, Education Modernization 2035, High-Quality and Balanced Education, Confidence; Rural Schools

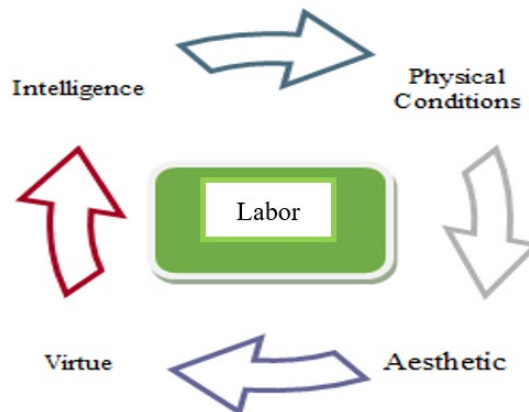
## 1. Introduction

As the cornerstone and propeller of national progress, higher education occupies a prominent position in the ideology of the new era of Chinese characteristics. The comprehensive development and modernization of education have always been a top priority, and the issue of how to achieve high-quality and balanced development in basic education, especially in the "soft cultural" art education of rural primary schools, is an urgent problem to be addressed. According to the "China Education Modernization 2035" issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in 2019, as a landmark document for prioritizing the development of education and building a strong education nation in the new era, it not only clearly sets the strategic goal of "achieving overall education modernization and entering the ranks of education powers by 2035"[1], but also emphasizes and highlights the fundamental, pioneering, and overall role of education in the national modernization process. This document provides a direction for China's future education reform and development.[2]

However, how to address the issue of uneven development and weaknesses in basic education, and effectively solve the phenomenon of "force-fed education", is crucial for achieving the modernization and internationalization of education. The imbalance in urban and rural basic education has led to rural primary schools prioritizing "hard culture" as the teaching benchmark and orientation, while the lack of "soft culture" is the fundamental reason for the lack of confidence and character in rural education. Higher education should not have a singular standard for talent; the ultimate goal is to achieve the free and equal development of individuals. When education standards become uniform, how can we cultivate high-standard talents who are diverse, ecological, and of high quality in terms of moral

character and personal development? The “14th Five-Year Plan” and the 2035 Vision Outline emphasize the need to “build a high-quality education system and improve the quality of higher education”. [3]

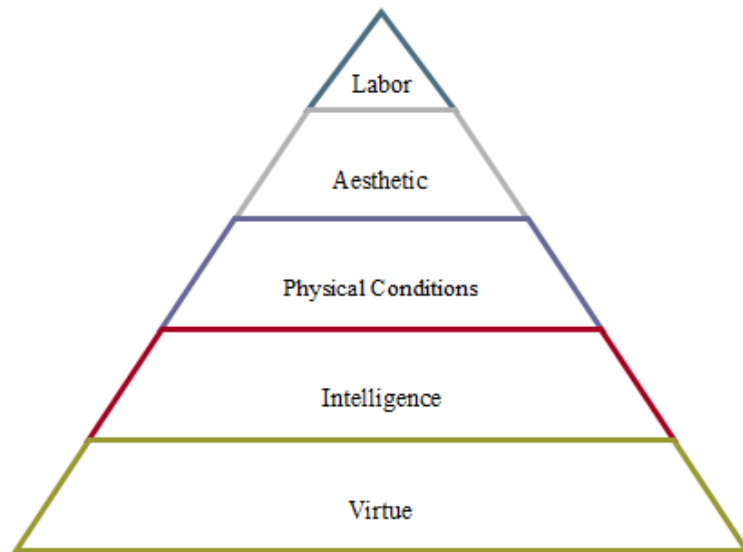
The reform and development of basic education is a “Long March” journey, and the fundamental solution lies in the “encircle the cities with the country”. Only when the education in rural primary schools becomes more palatable can one consider that comprehensive educational reform and modernization have achieved initial achievements. Regarding the modernization of education, what is the path for the modernization of facilities and educational resources in rural primary schools? The development of students’ core qualities should be consistent with the goal of “fostering virtue through education”. Morality comes first, as achieving a “honest, kind, and courageous” young generation is the foundation for cultivating a backbone of the nation with both moral character and talent. However, the importance of aesthetic education in this process is often overlooked, as the comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, physical education, aesthetics, and labor is a mutually reinforcing relationship, rather than merely fulfilling conditions. The reform and development of aesthetic education in rural areas are fundamental to moral development. Only with self-identity, social recognition, love for life and self-confidence can the Chinese “backbone” bravely carry the banner of socialism that keeps pace with the times and realize the Chinese dream from generation to generation. Therefore, closely following the ideology of the new era of Chinese characteristics, guided by the “China Education Modernization 2035”, and grasping the true meaning of “comprehensive”, we should gradually pay attention to the interrelationship between “beauty and morality” through the reform and development of aesthetic education in rural primary schools, prioritize moral character development, and truly achieve the comprehensive development of education. The popularization of education is the gratitude and feedback of contemporary youth towards education, and it involves the diverse and deep-level cultivation and development of the “backbone of China” for oneself and the next generation (Fig.1).



*Figure 1 Map of modern aesthetic education teaching model*

The “New Long March” of comprehensively deepening educational reforms should involve the reform and development of the educational thinking patterns of teachers and students, as well as the teacher-student relationship, under the traditional educational ideology. In the new era, the relationship between “beauty and morality” and the integration of morality, intelligence, physical education, aesthetics, and labor should be mutually supportive and promoting. Beauty is the beginning and end, while labor is the outcome, transformation, and output. Therefore, exploring the practical issues of aesthetic education in rural schools is of significant importance.

In response to the national requirements to narrow the urban-rural education gap and further improve the humanistic literacy of rural schools, relevant investigations and research should be conducted on the practical issues of aesthetic education in rural schools. The discussion on rural research primarily focuses on the issues, influences, and strategies (Fig.2).



*Figure 2 Map of Traditional Education Model*

1) The origin of the research problem lies in the transition from “hard” educational techniques to the in-depth application of “soft” cultural confidence. Since the second half of 2016, the author has been paying attention to the development of aesthetic education and cultural confidence in rural schools and underdeveloped areas. In-depth research and questionnaire surveys have been conducted on issues such as the impact of social phenomena like left-behind children and single-parent families on the lack of confidence, family relationships, and cooperative awareness.

2) The influence of practical issues in aesthetic education in rural schools needs to start with teaching reforms. Investigations have been conducted to explore the reasons behind issues such as students in rural schools showing aversion to learning, lack of self-acknowledgment, lack of family acknowledgment, and lack of self-confidence caused by a focus on low-level “hard” educational techniques. It has been found that changes and improvements in aesthetic education teaching methods can help improve these situations.

3) Enhancing the self-acknowledgment of children in rural schools through aesthetics. The concept of “comprehensive” development extends to “diverse” acknowledgment, where acknowledgment shifts from a “hard” standard to a “diverse” one. Guided by the principles of promoting self-confidence, cooperation, and development, and the philosophy of “maturity before success”, the aim is to improve self-acknowledgment.

## **2. The Purpose of Basic Education in the New Era**

The purpose of education is not merely to understand the world, but to transform the objective world through practice. [4] Education is a decisive battle in the face of the challenges of the times. The key focus of education is to enable individuals to achieve comprehensive and holistic development. In the new era, the concept of “fostering virtue through education” best embodies this focus. Virtue, with beauty as its foundation, is known as “virtuous beauty”. How can one be virtuous towards others if they do not love themselves or possess inner beauty? The limitations and deficiencies of traditional education make it difficult to adapt to the connotations and extensions of education in the new era. The continuous transformation from “hard power” to “soft culture” in education provides a profound analysis of the essence of “fostering virtue through education”. In 2019, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the “*Implementation Plan for Accelerating the Modernization of Education (2018-2022)*”, which clearly placed the “Implementation of the Project for Cultivating Virtue and Nurturing Talents in the New Era” as the first among the ten key tasks of promoting the modernization of education. This fully demonstrates the utmost importance of doing well in the project of cultivating virtue and nurturing talents in the new era. Making “fostering virtue through education” the fundamental task of education

in the new era is not only an urgent requirement for the shift from the extension to the essence of education but also a profound transformation from “hard” survival skills to the inheritance of “soft” culture.

“Fostering virtue by beauty, cultivating virtue in individuals, and nurturing talents in individuals” is the purpose of education in the current new era. The principle of “developing the individual before developing their talents” is the essence of education in the new era. However, rural aesthetic education in schools remains a deep-rooted blind spot and challenge. The issue of aesthetic education in rural schools is not only a hot topic in global education but also a powerful means to address cultural shocks and ideological contradictions in the context of China’s economic structural reform. Education, as the foundation of a nation, plays a pivotal role in continuity and progress, always adhering to the progressive ideas of our party. The “innovation” in education not only refers to the innovation of students’ thinking and skills but also the innovation of the education model itself, emphasizing innovation that is internal, integrated, multi-faceted, and in line with the times. Only through such innovation can we cultivate cutting-edge talents who are committed to cultivating virtue in individuals and possess comprehensive high-quality attributes that meet the demands of the times. At the same time, “beauty and virtue” are also important reflections of the “people-oriented” principle and necessary conditions for education. Focusing on “virtuous beauty” and the individual as the key aspects of education can ensure the cultivation of individuals with clear values, independent thinking, and the courage to confront cultural conflicts in the new era.

The traditional education model needs to “eliminate its dross and retain its essence”. The concept of cultivating virtue in individuals has been an integral part of the history of educational reform and has played a pivotal role in it. With the demands of “keeping pace with the times” and “development”, the principle of cultivating virtue in individuals has always played an important role in the field of education and society. However, few people have examined the dialectical relationship between “beauty and virtue”. Beauty and virtue have been an inseparable part of the five thousand years of civilization. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out, “We will accelerate the development of first-class universities and disciplines and achieve connotation-based development in higher education. We must fully implement the Party’s education policy, carry out the fundamental task of cultivating virtue in individuals, promote quality education, advance educational equity, and cultivate socialist builders and successors who have comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics, and labor skills.” How to establish a comprehensive and deepened education system under the conditions of Chinese socialism and cultivate “people-oriented” high-level talents for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, “beauty and virtue” has once again provided a strong answer. Thus, the combination of the Marxist theory of human development and the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics has begun to play a unique role in the history of educational reform.

In particular, during the symposium on ideological and political theory courses in schools chaired by the President Xi on March 18, 2019 [5], he emphasized the need to “accelerate the modernization of education, build a strong education nation, provide satisfactory education to the people, strive to cultivate a new generation capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation, and cultivate socialist builders and successors who have comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics, and labor skills.” This further clarified the fundamental task of cultivating virtue in individuals and connotation-based development in higher education in the new era, providing guidance for the development of higher education in the new era.

Beauty and virtue are the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture, the embodiment of cultural confidence, and the urgent need for high-caliber leaders who possess both virtue and talent. Faced with the trends of globalization and the continuous impact of the market economy, as well as the emergence of ideological and cultural movements, how to strengthen the educational connotation and inject a powerful stimulant into Chinese-style modernized education, where is the way out for Chinese education? These questions are best answered by beauty and virtue. The people are the driving force of history, like the vast ocean, while education is a small boat that seeks to navigate smoothly amidst the waves of globalization and to influence others with virtue and navigate the oceans with cultural confidence. Internally, facing issues such as high-intelligence crime and the gap in the domestic market economy, it requires high-caliber individuals to contribute to society with virtue rather than using financial wealth as the sole criterion. The cornerstone of all this is “beauty”, with inner beauty complementing the outward manifestation of virtue. As we aim high, we inherit traditional culture, take the nation as our responsibility, and collectively realize the Chinese Dream through loftier ideals. To achieve national rejuvenation, the rise of the country, the prosperity of culture, and the continuation of

history, it is necessary for “beauty and virtue” to permeate. Virtue is not about sacrifice or abandonment, but rather the self-realization of lofty ideals and goals, while beauty is not just appreciation but also a state of mind, the courage to face the future, and a profound self-affirmation and deep-level cognition.

The cultivation of virtue and beauty molds countless Chinese people, symbolizes the soaring sky of a nation standing among the world’s nations, represents the prosperity of the nation, the abundance of the people, and provides a sense of fulfillment for society as a whole. It embodies the national situation, the social atmosphere, the harmony of the people, and a global revolutionary trend. Promoting beauty and virtue, innovating the educational system, improving social norms, establishing cultural confidence, highlighting key talents, and achieving common prosperity. In light of the complex situation in global education, the “China Education Modernization 2035” issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, as well as the UNESCO report “Learning to Be: A Pathway to Survival” that envisions education prospects for 2050 and beyond, both regard the beauty of life and the sense of well-being and happiness for the people as important evaluation indicators [6].

Under the impact of various cultures around the world, “insufficient beauty and virtue will lead to damage to virtue”, which in turn results in a lack of cultural confidence, an increase in crime rates, and distortions in the market economy. These issues stem from a lack of beauty and virtue. At its root, it is the failure to carry out the new wave of educational reforms in beauty and virtue in basic education in the new era. When leaders in society embody both virtue and talent, and when society as a whole embodies beauty, the society becomes harmonious. The President Xi clearly pointed out at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Universities that “the foundation of universities lies in cultivating virtue and nurturing talent”, and “we must insist on making the cultivation of virtue and nurturing of talent a central focus, integrate ideological and political work throughout the entire process of education and teaching, and realize comprehensive and all-round nurturing of students, striving to create a new situation in the development of China’s higher education.” It can be seen that beauty and virtue, as the focal points of today’s educational reforms, have attracted the attention of many scholars and educators. The urgent question of where the solution lies for the practical issues in rural aesthetic education remains to be answered. The dialectical unity of beauty and virtue provides an answer.

Therefore, the purpose of education in the new era is “cultivating virtue through beauty”. In the face of the issues concerning rural aesthetic education in Wuhan and even nationwide, it needs to be transformed into addressing the common social phenomena of left-behind children and single-parent households among rural children. Through innovative forms of aesthetic education, it can address the lack of self-confidence, family affection, and cooperative awareness among rural school children under such social circumstances and establish a balanced and comprehensive teaching approach that promotes the independent development of individual personalities. “Aesthetic education”, as the cornerstone of “fostering virtue through education”, and the unity of beauty and virtue as the foundation for talent cultivation, the purpose of basic education in the new era should be to achieve the dialectical unity, mutual transformation, and promotion of beauty and virtue.

### **3. Dialectical Unity of Beauty and Virtue**

#### ***3.1 Prioritize Personal Growth before Fostering Talent.***

The core value and fundamental purpose of the connotative development of higher education is to promote the comprehensive and harmonious development of individuals. Putting people first is the ultimate goal of higher education reform and development. The core of the scientific outlook on development is putting people first, so the people-oriented concept has become a shared value consensus in society, reflecting the deep laws of social development and highlighting the unprecedented dignity and value of human beings, which has profound philosophical significance. Starting from historical materialism, Marx and Engels scientifically pointed out that the essence of human beings is the sum of all social relations, clarifying that humans are realistic beings with both natural and social attributes, engaged in practical activities. The comprehensive development of individuals is the fundamental value orientation of Marxism. The connotative educational concept of putting people first takes people as the fundamental driving force of development, with the core goal of promoting and achieving the comprehensive and free development of individuals, making the promotion of comprehensive human development the starting point and ultimate goal of social development. Therefore, “prioritizing personal growth before fostering talent” is of utmost importance. Only by discovering beauty, loving oneself, and loving life can one be friendly towards others, which represents “virtue”, and then achieve “success.”

To achieve the dialectical unity of beauty and virtue, it is necessary to adhere to the correct direction of education and respect the role of “individuals”. In higher education, “individuals” encompass both the teacher community and the student community. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the construction of the teaching staff and emphasize the improvement of teachers’ beauty and virtue. Teachers’ words and actions have a significant impact. Only when teachers possess good cultivation of beauty and virtue, as well as innovative abilities, can they enhance the quality of talent cultivation and nurture highly qualified innovative and applied talents required for the development of a modern society. In aesthetic education, teachers should lead by example, combining aesthetic education with moral education, actively exploring and innovating teaching methods to enhance the innovative capacity of aesthetic education. Education should be focused on students, caring for them, protecting them, and respecting their subjectivity and individual development needs. It is important to emphasize innovative thinking, establish and utilize the role of innovative thinking in the development of higher education, and promote students’ diversified development and comprehensive growth. Moreover, education should be oriented towards the goal of promoting human civilization progress, encouraging students to study diligently, and improving their humanistic and scientific qualities. By prioritizing students’ needs and providing a supportive environment, education can foster their creativity, thereby promoting their diversified development and comprehensive growth [7].

### ***3.2 The Connotative Development and Reform of Beauty and Virtue.***

The connotative development of beauty and virtue focuses on improving quality as its core, which is a common issue faced by higher education worldwide. Currently, China has become an education powerhouse, but it is not yet an education powerhouse in terms of quality. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously enhance the quality of talent cultivation in accordance with the changing times. Higher education bears the important task of national rejuvenation and social progress. With the development of socialist market economy, the arrival of the knowledge society, and the accelerated process of building a moderately prosperous society with Chinese characteristics, the demands placed on higher education have become diverse. This has led to an increasingly prominent contradiction between the quality of talent cultivation in higher education and the demands of society for talents, as well as a growing disparity between the upgrading of industrial structure and the current disciplinary settings in education. These issues have rendered higher education unable to adapt to social development and intense international competition. Therefore, it is necessary to take the path of connotative development of beauty and virtue to improve the quality of talent cultivation.

In response to the frequent social pressures and contradictions related to various psychological issues, the key lies in the lack of ability to discover the beauty of social life. Therefore, basic education should emphasize the connotative development of beauty and virtue, focusing on overall development and playing a promoting role in the lifelong growth of the educated population, rather than pursuing “false prosperity” in basic education based on short-term achievements and indicators.

### ***3.3 Tailoring Measures to Local Conditions to Address Imperfections and Rectify Imbalances***

Unequal distribution of resources in basic education is a challenge and pain point in educational modernization. Enhancing the ability to integrate resources is crucial in the development of beauty and virtue. Conducting meticulous and scientific calculations on various components of basic education, scientifically formulating education development plans that are suitable for the local area and even taking into account local customs and practices, and allocating educational resources reasonably. Scientifically reallocating resources within nearby schools to address issues such as resource waste and idle resources, and utilizing advantageous resources in the most efficient manner to improve resource utilization. Human resources are an important component of educational resources, so it is necessary to prioritize people-oriented approaches to promote resource integration and planning. Actively developing diverse models of higher education, striving to attract various social resources and private capital into the field of higher education, and promoting models such as joint-stock education and comprehensive education.

Therefore, “tailoring measures to local conditions to address imperfections and rectify imbalances” emphasizes the importance of high-quality beauty and virtue education rather than superficial formalism. It focuses on the “therapeutic effect” to address the problem of unevenness in basic education, rather than relying on “ingredients” and “instruction manuals” as the guiding indicators for improving products.

#### 4. Principles and Laws of Beauty and Virtue

The issue of rural aesthetic education teaching is based on the principles of beauty and virtue. Starting from the planning of a person's entire life, it transforms the discovery of self-beauty and the discovery of beauty in life into motivation for work and learning. In a world where everything is beautiful, how can there be a lack of virtue? Beauty and virtue, being complementary and transformative, follow their own laws and achieve dialectical unity. More precisely, beauty and virtue themselves have inherent contradictions. The operational law of the development of beauty and virtue lies in finding points of harmony within these contradictions. In the current stage, in the context of globalization and the close connection between virtue, talent, and material wealth, seeking virtue may require sacrificing some material gains. However, in the long run, the individual can achieve their maximum personal and social value. When conflicts arise between an individual's maximum value in their subjective desires and the maximum social value based on beauty and constrained by virtue, resolving this contradiction becomes a problem that education needs to address and is also where its principles and laws lie. In an era where material wealth often takes precedence, the key to formulating principles lies in how we can overcome tangible "talent" with intangible beautification as the noble wealth of virtue.

##### 4.1 Principle 1: Discovery of Beauty, Compensation of Virtue

The balance between fame and fortune can effectively resolve the contradiction between virtue and individuals. When virtue is compensated with recognition and rewards, it facilitates the transformation of contradictions. It means that tangible material can be converted into intangible, higher-level material wealth, which is both virtue and fame. The loss of material, or "talent", is transformed into a form of personal wealth that holds greater value and is not material-oriented, namely, personal banking. Intangible virtue can be converted into more low-level material, or "talent", but virtue is a time-sensitive wealth that can either increase or disappear over time. On the other hand, the transformation of low-level material "talent" into high-level virtue requires non-equivalent exchanges, even with risks and losses, as determined by the market's own laws. When beauty and virtue become a form of market currency, the educational reform concept of beautifying virtue and cultivating character has achieved preliminary results. However, in the current stage of advanced non-equivalent exchange, improvement still needs to be achieved through guidance and compensation, namely, the "compensation" of virtue. Meanwhile, schools need to further examine the transformation of their systems, and society needs to establish corresponding reward norms. This is Principle 1, which states that the ultimate goal of education is the combination of virtue and talent, but the qualification line for education must parallel beauty and virtue, leading to a life that is free and joyful.

##### 4.2 Principle 2: Reduction of Individuals

Education, as the lever of social wealth, can be balanced through the simplest method of reducing individuals, which is inflation. This can be achieved through the popularization of general education and the gradual accessibility of high-end education in a tiered manner. When inflation reaches the expected market value, the reduction of individuals takes place. The emergence of a large number of talents will inevitably lead to a higher and broader demand for assessment based on beauty and virtue. At this point, when the two are equivalent, material wealth can be transferred and disappear, while intangible wealth as a personal attribute will have stronger market circulation.

The developmental laws of beauty and virtue emphasize principles as rigid guidelines, with education as the lever, and are regulated by the state through macro-level control. This increases the accumulation of talents and the motivation of high-level talents. At the same time, the formation of a social atmosphere of beauty and virtue promotes a certain way of thinking and ultimately achieves the educational goal of combining beauty, virtue, and talent, thus realizing comprehensive human development alongside freedom and equality. Beauty and virtue serve as constraints, which can be mathematically described as fitting a smooth curve to a discrete set of individuals under the best principles that are most suitable for contemporary conditions. Outliers and other points that do not contribute to the overall image are not considered, and there can be more than one best principle, but the results achieved are consistent.

Therefore, different regions and conditions can be transformed under the same constraint conditions within a unified framework, which can be described mathematically as a proportionality coefficient. In other words, the state formulates unified principles and regulations at a national level, while localities

can add additional constraints and make self-adjustments and allocations in a rational and accurate manner without changing the overall goal.

It is evident that under the powerful conditions of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is particularly important to dialectically unify and coordinate the beauty and virtue according to local conditions. The reform, development, and adaptation of beauty and virtue will take a firm, confident, and powerful step forward in the education reform of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and usher in a more open educational landscape. Resolving the practical issues in rural aesthetic education will contribute to further harmonious development and stability in society. In today's culturally vibrant world, this becomes even more crucial. "Integration of urban and rural, cultural self-confidence" is the path that basic education should take, namely, "being a good person first and then learning to excel".

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