

Based on Regular Script: The Integration and Mutual Advancement of Normativity and Aesthetics in Calligraphy Aesthetic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

Shanshan Yuan *

Department of Changchun Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, China

* Corresponding author Email: 110130558@qq.com

Abstract: In accordance with the Guidelines for Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools and the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era, calligraphy education in primary and secondary schools now embodies comprehensive educational values encompassing technical training, aesthetic cultivation, and cultural inheritance, rather than being limited to basic handwriting instruction. Current regular script (kaishu) teaching suffers from evident misconceptions: either it is overly instrumentalized, prioritizing technique over aesthetics; or artistic individuality is pursued prematurely, out of step with students' foundational abilities. The core issue lies in the separation of the inherent unity between writing norms and calligraphic aesthetics. Regular script, with its rigorous formal rules and upright temperament, aligns with the cognitive and physical-psychological developmental patterns of primary and secondary school students, serving as a high-quality vehicle for aesthetic education. Combining traditional calligraphy theory with frontline teaching practice, this paper establishes a pedagogical logic of "uprightness as the foundation, innovation as extension, symbiosis throughout the process, and differentiation by educational stage," breaking the binary opposition between normativity and creativity. It constructs a feasible hierarchical teaching pathway, providing theoretical support and practical reference for the optimization of regular script aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools.

Keywords: Regular Script; Calligraphy Aesthetic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools; Writing Norms; Calligraphic Aesthetics; Cultural Education.

1. Character Cognition: The Foundation of Cultural Inheritance and Personality Cultivation

Chinese characters are not merely linguistic symbols for daily communication; they constitute the core vehicle sustaining the continuity of Chinese cultural lineage. In the preface to *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters), Xu Shen remarked: "Indeed, writing is the foundation of the classics and arts, and the beginning of governance. The ancients bequeathed it to posterity, and posterity thereby apprehend antiquity" [2]. Chinese characters carry millennia of cultural accumulation—the natural cognition, wisdom of life, and ethical concepts of our ancestors are all embedded within their formal structures. It can be said that character writing instruction in primary and secondary schools is, in essence, the most elementary form of traditional cultural enlightenment.

Unlike Western alphabetic scripts, the most distinctive feature of Chinese characters is the unity of form and meaning: character shapes embody unique cultural connotations as well as profound humanistic sentiments. For instance, the character *ren* (benevolence), a core concept of Confucianism, is a typical associative compound composed of "person" and "two," whose form directly expresses the ethical meaning of mutual affection and coexistence among human beings. Through repeated writing and formal analysis, students imperceptibly absorb the influence of benevolence and courtesy. Similarly, the characters for river, lake, and sea all share the water radical, reflecting how ancient people

categorized natural phenomena through character forms and demonstrating elementary inductive thinking and natural cognition. This indicates that if calligraphy classes focus solely on writing practice while neglecting cultural explanation of characters, the educational value of calligraphy instruction will be significantly diminished. Writing practice is precisely the most intuitive and effective means by which students experience Chinese character culture.

In light of current policy requirements for aesthetic education, calligraphy instruction in primary and secondary schools should integrate both technical training and cultural interpretation of characters. Regular script, with its balanced structure and clear forms, directly manifests the beauty of Chinese character configuration and semantics, serving as a practical medium through which primary and secondary school students can understand, appreciate, and transmit Chinese character culture.

Regular script writing is a practical activity consonant with the cognitive and physical-psychological development of students at this educational stage. According to child cognitive development theory, "students in the early grades of primary school think primarily in concrete, imagistic terms, with underdeveloped abstract logical reasoning, and their cognitive activities rely heavily on intuitive images and hands-on practice" [3]. Regular script writing transforms abstract character symbols into concrete actions of brush holding, stroke execution, and character composition—simple, controllable, and intuitively comprehensible—fully matching the cognitive characteristics of young learners and ideally suited as foundational content for calligraphy introduction and character cultivation in primary and

secondary schools.

The value of regular script training extends far beyond writing well; it lies in cultivating the mind and rectifying conduct. Standard sitting posture, brush-holding method, and stroke rhythm first discipline students' external behavior, helping them establish a sense of rules. The process of sustained, focused writing calms restless dispositions, achieving the effect of nurturing the mind through art and cultivating virtue through practice. In the *Shu Pu* (Treatise on Calligraphy), Sun Guoting proposed that "in the beginning stage of composition, one should seek only balance and uprightness" [4]. This injunction demands not only formal correctness but also a composed mind free from impetuosity during the initial learning phase. For students in lower grades, cultivating mental disposition and forming good habits is far more important than developing elegant brush technique.

2. Aesthetic Characteristics of Regular Script: The Foundation for Cultivating Orthodox Aesthetics in Primary and Secondary Schools

2.1. The Natural Origin of Chinese Character Aesthetics

The aesthetic attributes of Chinese characters are not extrinsic decorations added post hoc; they are rooted in the observation and synthesis of all things in nature by the ancients. From oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions onward, Chinese characters have inherently embodied aesthetic principles of symmetrical balance, alternating density, and the interplay of void and substance, serving both practical and aesthetic functions. In his *Jiu Shi* (Nine Dynamics), Cai Yong of the Eastern Han dynasty asserted that "calligraphy originates from nature" [5], precisely identifying the aesthetic source of calligraphy: the art draws from nature, with yin and yang generating each other and void and substance corresponding reciprocally. The patterns of transformation inherent in the natural world are ultimately transposed into variations in brush and ink lines, forming the aesthetic foundation of Chinese calligraphy.

The "Eight Principles of Yong," traditionally used as an introduction to classical calligraphy studies, encompasses the eight fundamental strokes of Chinese characters within the single character yong, integrating stability and variation, motion and stillness, and void and substance. It fully demonstrates the most elementary formal beauty of Chinese characters and serves as a classic model for aesthetic enlightenment in calligraphy for primary and secondary school students [6]. From the perspective of children's cognitive development, students in the middle and upper primary grades begin to transition from concrete perception to abstract comprehension, gradually becoming able to appreciate basic aesthetic principles such as balance, rhythm, and harmony. This constitutes the golden stage for cultivating calligraphic aesthetic competence.

In the classroom, simple comparative analysis of character forms can guide students to perceive the beauty of Chinese characters: the character for mountain, with its steady horizontal and vertical strokes and static dignity, conveys the imposing grandeur of lofty peaks; the character for water, with its flowing, fluid lines, manifests the beauty of natural movement; the character for forest, with multiple wood components layered in artful arrangement, creates a vivid

spatial resonance. Long-term engagement in character form appreciation and normative writing training helps students activate aesthetic perception and cultivate a positive, traditional system of calligraphic aesthetics.

2.2. Developmental Lineage and Core Aesthetic Value of Regular Script

Regular script, also known as true script or standard script, takes its name from the meaning "serving as a model and normative standard"; it is the standardized orthodox form of Chinese characters. Regular script emerged in the late Han dynasty, evolving from clerical script by eliminating the latter's sweeping flared strokes and regularizing character structure. During the Wei-Jin period, it was refined and perfected by Zhong Yao and the Two Wangs (Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi), establishing an aesthetic tone of warm brushwork and elegant qi-vitality. It reached its apex in the Tang dynasty, when its system of rules matured and great masters such as Ouyang Xun, Yan Zhenqing, Liu Gongquan, and Zhao Mengfu emerged, forming the richly varied and rigorously ruled paradigm of Tang regular script. Regular script inherits the dignified, balanced structural order of seal and clerical scripts from above, and anticipates the dynamic brushwork of running and cursive scripts from below—complementing one another, with stillness and motion in balance. With high legibility, clear brushwork rules, and moderate, upright qi-vitality, regular script is the calligraphic style most suitable for core instruction in primary and secondary school calligraphy classrooms.

In his *Liu Ti Shu Lun* (Discourse on Six Scripts), Zhang Huaiguan of the Tang dynasty described the characteristics of regular script as "all characters being genuine and correct, hence called true script" [7]. Here, "genuine and correct" may be interpreted on two levels: first, the forms are standard and normative, suited to daily writing and basic education with strong practical utility; second, the aesthetics are pure and centered, free from extreme, eccentric, or ostentatious expression, with a dignified and refined character. Compared with the unrestrained freedom of cursive script and the archaic simplicity of seal and clerical scripts, regular script centers on order, rationality, and harmonious beauty. Within its strict formal rules lie subtle, varied layers of brush and ink; its structures are regular without rigidity, and its forms are unified without losing natural vitality.

In the current online environment, various exaggerated and distorted "internet-famous" typefaces and deliberately eccentric, rule-breaking "ugly calligraphy" circulate widely, easily misleading primary and secondary school students whose discriminating abilities are not yet fully developed. The upright, elegant, and orthodox qualities of regular script can establish a clear, normative aesthetic yardstick for students, safeguarding the fundamental baseline of aesthetic education. Long-term study of regular script helps students correct the aesthetic tendency to show off novelty and cleverness, cultivating instead a gentle, restrained, composed, and refined artistic disposition.

3. The Aesthetic System of Regular Script and the Progressive Cultivation of Aesthetic Competence in Primary and Secondary Students

The general public often holds a one-sided, stereotypical view of regular script, regarding it as stiff, rigid, monotonous,

and lacking in artistry. In fact, the core aesthetic value of regular script lies in "motion within stillness" [8] and "harmony without uniformity" [9]: its overall qi-vitality is unified, yet its strokes and structures exhibit varied irregularities; it strictly observes rules, yet natural vitality dwells within the brush and ink; its character arrangements are orderly and uniform, yet rich formal variations are everywhere apparent. From the integrated perspectives of calligraphy studies, education, and philology, the aesthetic system of regular script can be decomposed progressively into brushwork, character structure, and overall composition—clear in hierarchy and proceeding from the elementary to the advanced, matching the progressive learning pattern of aesthetic cognition in primary and secondary school students. It is therefore suitable as core content for cultivating the calligraphic aesthetic literacy of young people.

Brushwork is the foundation of regular script aesthetic construction and the primary core of calligraphy instruction for beginning students. Its essential characteristic is the storing of force through hidden brush tips and inner strength contained within the bones of strokes. In Jiu Shi, Cai Yong established the core principle and brushwork norm of regular script: "conceal the head and protect the tail, with strength residing within the character" [10], which has served as an important theoretical basis for the transmission of regular script brushwork through the ages. Standard regular script brushwork follows the logic of entering the paper with reversed tip, spreading the brush with central tip, and withdrawing with returning tip. The entire stroke process is restrained and steady, fundamentally avoiding the problem of flat, rigid lines.

Legitimate regular script lines are not monotonous ink strokes of uniform quality; rather, they form natural "three bends in one wave" undulations at critical nodes such as the start, end, and turning of strokes, possessing vivid textural quality and aesthetic layers. In Bi Zhen Tu (Brush Formation Chart), Lady Wei's famous dictums—"the horizontal stroke is like a thousand li of battle clouds, faintly yet substantially possessing form" and "the vertical stroke is like a ten-thousand-year-old withered vine" [11]—precisely summarize the aesthetic features of basic regular script strokes: horizontal strokes are expansive and substantial in texture, while vertical strokes are strong, restrained, and firm beneath supple exterior. This endows simple strokes with both tangible textural quality and traditional brush-and-ink qi-vitality, constituting the most elementary aesthetic core of regular script.

Building upon normative brushwork, the structural system of regular script further enriches its aesthetic connotation, centered on the interplay of void and substance and the balance of upright and oblique. It embodies the philological principles of Chinese character spatial construction, whose core aesthetic rule is "treating white space as black" [12]. This principle constructs the balanced beauty of character structure primarily through the spatial handling of stroke density, interlocking and 避让 (avoidance and accommodation), and the echo of 留白 (reserved blank space). Ouyang Xun's Thirty-Six Rules of Character Structure systematically organized structural principles such as stacking, interlocking, facing and backing, and avoidance and accommodation [13], establishing a complete, learnable, and rule-based paradigm for the spatial aesthetics of regular script and providing a standardized basis for aesthetic instruction in regular script structure.

It must be clarified that the balanced beauty pursued in regular script structure is not mechanical, rigid equality or symmetry, but dynamic equilibrium and overall harmony shaped by the inherent features of each character form. Different schools of regular script develop distinctive aesthetic qualities within a unified framework of rules: for example, Ouyang Xun's style compresses the central area and extends principal strokes, producing an overall effect of crisp, lofty vigor; Yan Zhenqing's style features expansive outer contours and full inner strokes, conveying a dignified, imposing presence. Classic inscriptions through the ages, while adhering to the basic structural principles of regular script, manifest diverse formal variations, constructing the aesthetic tension of "harmony without uniformity" in character structure and providing rich material for students to perceive the aesthetic charm of regular script at different levels.

Upon the foundation of brushwork and character structure, composition—representing the overall aesthetic dimension of a complete piece—unifies the partial and holistic beauty of regular script and constitutes the key content for advanced aesthetic cultivation in regular script writing for primary and secondary students. Regular script composition is fundamentally characterized by orderly and dignified arrangement, while concealing the dynamic beauty of rising and falling qi-flow. Each character stands independently, rows and columns are evenly spaced, and the overall atmosphere is solemn and composed, making it highly suitable for practical writing contexts such as daily copying exercises and document transcription, possessing both aesthetic and practical value.

From the perspective of character form principles, Chinese characters inherently differ in stroke complexity and physical size. In the arrangement of a complete piece, these natural differences generate layered variations in brush weight, compositional density, and spatial void and substance, rendering the overall work neat and normative yet not stiff, dignified and regular yet replete with brush-and-ink spirit. In his Xu Shu Fa Lun (Sequel to Discourse on Calligraphy), Jiang Ji observed that "each character stands independently yet the breath flows through all" [14], precisely summarizing the core aesthetic trait of regular script composition. It reveals that on the basis of rigorous rules and regular forms, regular script possesses brush-and-ink qi-vitality and compositional interest that permeate the entire piece, fully constructing the complete aesthetic system of "motion within stillness" and "harmony without uniformity."

3.1. Multidimensional Empowerment of Regular Script for Adolescent Aesthetic Literacy

Regular script constructs a complete aesthetic system progressing through brushwork, character structure, and composition. As the standardized common script used through the dynasties, its character forms and spatial arrangements possess philological features of standardization and order. From the perspective of educational cognitive laws, the hierarchical characteristics of regular script—from concrete stroke observation to abstract qi-vitality comprehension, from basic technical acquisition to holistic aesthetic perception—closely match the progressive developmental pattern of aesthetic cognition in primary and secondary school students. This endows regular script with irreplaceable aesthetic educational functions in basic

education, capable of systematically cultivating students' comprehensive humanistic qualities across three dimensions: observational ability, aesthetic cognition, and moral cultivation.

In the practice of regular script aesthetic education, model rubbing (copying from exemplars) and tracing practice constitute the core instructional, serving as important vehicles for training students' visual observation and overall coordination abilities. Regular script copying is not mechanical reproduction of brush and ink; rather, it requires students to precisely identify the thickness, curvature, and tilt of strokes, and to carefully analyze structural relationships such as the height differences, interlocking, avoidance, and density of radicals. During writing, students must attend to the control of brush proportion, the normative structure of individual characters, and the coherent qi-flow of the overall composition. Compared with superficial daily visual perception, regular script training is highly refined and systematic. Long-term regular practice effectively develops students' ability to capture details, recognize formal differences, and coordinate overall layout. These higher-order perceptual and thinking abilities can be effectively transferred to academic study across all subjects and to daily life, realizing the auxiliary function of aesthetic education for intellectual education.

From the perspective of formal aesthetic principles in calligraphy, the interplay of void and substance, the alternation of upright and oblique, the balance of density and spacing, and centered harmonious qi-vitality constitute the core of the traditional calligraphic aesthetic system. As the official orthodox script after Chinese character forms matured and stabilized, regular script boasts complete rules, standardized paradigms, and a systematic framework, serving as a foundational, normative aesthetic model suited to calligraphy aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools. Through systematic copying of classic inscriptions by great masters of successive dynasties—Ouyang Xun, Yan Zhenqing, Liu Gongquan, Zhao Mengfu, and others—students continuously perceive the formal rules and aesthetic core of traditional calligraphy, gradually establishing an aesthetic standard of upright elegance and orderly normativity, and forming stable, clear calligraphic aesthetic judgment.

Grounded in solid aesthetic accumulation through regular script, students can effectively distinguish deformed typefaces in the current online environment that deviate from traditional rules and feature bizarre, distorted forms. They can consciously resist impetuous, extreme adverse aesthetic orientations, and consolidate a foundation of calligraphic aesthetics rooted in orthodoxy, diligence, and dignified regularity.

The value of regular script aesthetic education is reflected not only in aesthetic and ability cultivation but also in alignment with the fundamental goal of fostering virtue through aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools, possessing the moral educational function of cultivating character and conduct. Sun Guoting proposed in *Shu Pu* that "when the will and qi are harmonious and peaceful, neither agitated nor harsh, then one's style and standards naturally extend far". This aesthetic state of calligraphy is both the core spiritual pursuit of traditional calligraphic creation and the central principle by which calligraphic aesthetic education nurtures students' mental and moral character.

Currently, primary and secondary school students face considerable academic pressure, and their dispositions are

prone to restlessness and anxiety. The artistic qualities of regular script itself—dignified stillness, restrained potential, and rejection of ostentation—render its practice an immersive process of calming the mind and cultivating the self. Regular script writing requires an upright wrist and centered brush tip, slow and firm execution, and concentrated, tranquil contemplation. Through long-term inscription study and practice, students gradually develop a character of gentle harmony, calm perseverance, and self-discipline, ultimately achieving the educational effect of simultaneous advancement in both calligraphic aesthetic literacy and personal moral quality.

4. Conclusion

Focusing on the practical problems of regular script instruction in primary and secondary schools, this paper investigates the core dilemma of the binary separation between normative training and aesthetic cultivation in teaching. Two deviations exist in current regular script pedagogy: either instruction degenerates into mechanical handwriting drills, weakening aesthetic and cultural functions; or artistic creation is pursued prematurely, resulting in weak foundational writing skills and biased aesthetic cognition among students.

Based on children's cognitive laws and traditional calligraphy theory, combined with frontline teaching cases, this study confirms that the formal characteristics of regular script match the developmental patterns of primary and secondary school students, and that regular script possesses multidimensional educational values including technical, aesthetic, cultural, and moral dimensions. The research clarifies the intrinsic connection between the static formal rules and dynamic aesthetics of regular script, dispelling the one-sided perception of regular script as rigid and inflexible. It constructs a hierarchical aesthetic system of regular script across the dimensions of brushwork, character structure, and composition, and distills a core pedagogical logic adapted to different levels, effectively resolving the teaching contradiction between normative writing and artistic innovation.

The practical teaching pathway proposed in this study can effectively consolidate students' writing ability, positively guide calligraphic aesthetics, and cultivate upright character, providing tangible theoretical and practical reference for enhancing the quality and efficiency of calligraphy aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools in the new era.

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