

Opportunities and Challenges for Primary and Secondary Art Teachers in China under the Global Framework of Art Education

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of globalised integrated art education and progressive rollout of national aesthetic education policies in China, primary and secondary art teachers have transcended the confines of local classroom teaching. They have become core practitioners facilitating cross-cultural artistic exchange and systematic cultivation of public aesthetic literacy worldwide. Deep integration of diverse global artistic cultures, accelerated international dissemination of Chinese traditional arts, and widespread digital aesthetic education have jointly created unprecedented professional development opportunities for art educators at the basic education stage in China [1]. Nevertheless, multiple tangible barriers hinder their long-term career growth, including divergent pedagogical philosophies between Chinese and Western art education systems, insufficient cross-cultural competence and foreign language proficiency among teachers [2], severe urban-rural imbalance in educational resources [3], heavy non-teaching administrative workloads, and slow digital transformation of grassroots art teaching practices. Drawing on authoritative domestic and international academic literature, this paper constructs a dual analytical framework from international and domestic perspectives. It systematically elaborates on favourable developmental opportunities, dissects prominent practical dilemmas facing Chinese primary and secondary art teachers, and proposes targeted development strategies aligned with the demands of modern global aesthetic education. The findings offer practical references for teachers' sustainable professional growth and the ongoing institutional reform of basic art education nationwide.

Keywords: Global art education landscape; Chinese primary and secondary art teachers; teacher professional development; developmental opportunities; practical challenges; educational equity.

1. Introduction

Global educational exchange has expanded dramatically over the past two decades, rendering art and aesthetic education an indispensable medium for cross-national cultural communication and mutual recognition of civilizational values [4]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has long prioritized coordinated global art education development, encouraging all member states to design localized art curricula while participating in the construction of worldwide diversified aesthetic education systems [4]. Domestically, central and local educational authorities in China have issued landmark policies including the National Initiative for Aesthetic Education Integration and revised Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards. Aesthetic education has also been formally incorporated into junior high school entrance examinations, substantially elevating the strategic weight of primary and secondary art education within China's basic education architecture [5].

Since the early 2010s, UNESCO has released successive iterations of global guiding frameworks for art education development, which explicitly frame art education as a core strategic instrument to strengthen national cultural soft power and enable equal dialogue among diverse global civilizations [6, 4]. Guided by these international institutional guidelines, most countries worldwide are advancing integrated reforms that connect local art teaching practice with cross-border educational collaboration. Against this international macro backdrop, centring research on Chinese primary and secondary art teachers embeds China's grassroots frontline teaching realities within the overarching global art education development framework, forming the core theoretical rationale for this paper's research scope.

Currently, Chinese primary and secondary art teachers stand at the intersection of global open art education trends and nationwide domestic educational reform. On the positive side, flourishing cross-border artistic exchange platforms, rising global popularity of traditional Chinese national art forms, and cutting-edge digital art education resources have vastly diversified channels for teachers' self-improvement and external cultural dissemination [7]. On the negative side, structural divergences between Eastern and Western art teaching philosophies, inadequate English and cross-cultural learning competencies among teachers [2], uneven regional distribution of educational resources [3], and deep-rooted shackles of exam-oriented education logic collectively impede sustainable long-term development for most grassroots art educators [8]. In light of these contradictory developmental realities, this study focuses on primary and secondary art teachers, analyses their opportunities and challenges through international and domestic dual lenses, and proposes viable optimised solutions to resolve existing developmental bottlenecks.

2. Developmental Opportunities for Chinese Primary and Secondary Art Teachers under Global Art Education Context

2.1. Opportunities Derived from the International Educational Environment

2.1.1. Rising Global Market Demand for the International Promotion of Traditional Chinese Fine Arts

China's growing comprehensive economic and cultural international standing has rendered classic Chinese traditional art forms — ink painting, regular and cursive calligraphy, paper-cutting, shadow puppetry and numerous intangible folk cultural heritages — mainstream learning content in global formal art curricula, overseas children's aesthetic training programmes and cross-border international study tour courses [9]. Overseas Confucius Institutes, international bilingual schools and emerging cross-border online art education platforms face persistent shortages of qualified Chinese art teachers proficient in traditional artistic techniques and indigenous Chinese aesthetic connotations. This market demand generates new career pathways for domestic primary and secondary art teachers, including short-term overseas teaching placements, hosting international offline art workshops, and leading cross-continental student art study tours. Meanwhile, Western mainstream art education academia has gradually abandoned its long-standing overemphasis on European and American modern art systems and begun to recognise the unique aesthetic value embedded in Chinese freehand brushwork and blank-space compositional logic. This shift grants competent Chinese art teachers greater discourse to participate in global art education seminars and international art exhibitions [10]. Despite these promising international prospects, nearly all high-quality cross-border employment and research resources are concentrated in elite urban schools in first-tier and provincial capital cities. Rural art teachers suffer from limited information access and tight institutional funding constraints, making it extremely difficult for grassroots instructors to join these international initiatives and share the developmental dividends brought by global cultural export [3].

2.1.2. Global Digital Art Education Accelerates Teachers' International Professional Development

Breakthroughs in information technology including internet infrastructure, AI generative painting software, digital illustration tools and cloud-based virtual art museums have dismantled geographical barriers that once restricted traditional art education delivery [1]. Drawing on open international online research platforms, Chinese primary and secondary art teachers can systematically absorb advanced Western modern art teaching methodologies and interdisciplinary artistic creation frameworks developed by overseas educators. Concurrently, teachers can leverage mature domestic online art teaching resources to promote Chinese national-style fine arts and intangible heritage courses to global learners, achieving win-win cross-border curriculum co-development and transnational educational resource sharing [9]. Digitalisation drastically lowers the threshold for international academic communication, allowing grassroots art teachers to engage in global art

education construction without costly overseas exchange programmes [7]. Nevertheless, stark urban-rural digital infrastructure disparities cannot be overlooked: most rural primary and secondary schools lack adequate digital teaching equipment and systematic digital skill training opportunities, largely excluding rural teachers from accessing convenient global digital art resources and associated international developmental benefits [3].

2.1.3. Institutionalised Construction of Regular International Art Exchange Platforms

Within the contemporary global education landscape, various international children's art competitions, bilateral Sino-foreign teacher training programmes, transnational offline art exhibitions and specialized art education academic forums have become normalized worldwide. These events build stable platforms for Chinese art teachers to showcase original artworks, conduct in-depth academic dialogue and receive systematic professional further education [4]. Active participation in global art exchanges broadens domestic teachers' artistic horizons, enables absorption of diverse advanced teaching models from international peers, and disseminates distinctive Chinese aesthetic education philosophies globally, facilitating mutual advancement of individual career growth and the internationalisation of Chinese culture. Regrettably, participant quotas for most international art activities disproportionately favour elite urban schools. Rural art teachers are constrained by insufficient institutional funding, rigid staffing regulations and strict internal school performance evaluation systems, resulting in extremely low chances of being admitted to international exchange initiatives [11].

2.2. Opportunities Brought by Domestic Educational Policies and Market Environment

2.2.1. Preferential National Policies Improve Art Teachers' Social and Occupational Status

A comprehensive suite of supportive domestic policies — the integration of aesthetic education into high school entrance examinations, the nationwide Double Reduction policy, the official rollout of revised Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards, and the Intangible Cultural Heritage on Campus Programme — have fundamentally reversed art subjects' long-standing marginalized position within China's basic education system [5]. Local educational authorities across provinces and cities have increased financial investment in art faculty recruitment, disciplinary research and periodic teacher professional training, streamlining institutional channels for art teachers regarding public establishment recruitment, professional title promotion and annual merit evaluation. However, policy implementation varies sharply across regions with differing economic capacities. Remote rural areas face insufficient fiscal budgets for art education and shortages of approved teacher staffing quotas, meaning many preferential promotion policies fail to deliver anticipated positive outcomes at grassroots rural schools [11].

2.2.2. Surging Domestic Social Demand Diversifies Teachers' Professional Development Tracks

Driven by rising public emphasis on comprehensive quality-oriented education in China, parents and social institutions generate robust market demand for national-style aesthetic courses, innovative creative art tutoring and extracurricular intangible heritage interest activities [12]. Beyond routine compulsory classroom teaching tasks, primary and secondary art teachers can independently develop featured school-based art curricula, establish campus art clubs, design diversified campus cultural and creative events, and participate in local intangible heritage inheritance teaching projects. This breaks the singular fixed model of classroom teaching and enables multi-dimensional improvement of personal professional capabilities. Furthermore, the nationwide national-trend cultural revival boom positions traditional Chinese calligraphy and folk fine arts as core teaching content for basic aesthetic education, granting teachers skilled in indigenous Chinese art irreplaceable core competitive advantages within the domestic education market [9]. Unfortunately, funding and venue resources required for customized school-based curriculum development are concentrated in economically developed coastal and central urban regions, while rural teachers lack essential supporting resources to expand diversified teaching practices [3].

2.2.3. Perfecting Domestic Educational Resource System Facilitates Teachers' Lifelong Professional Improvement

China's educational authorities have constructed a nationwide integrated online art teaching research platform, high-quality expert open-class resources and complete digital painting teaching material libraries. These resources enable urban and rural art teachers alike to conveniently access premium teaching materials and join synchronous nationwide online teaching research activities [5]. Local education bureaus regularly organize mandatory continuing education training, new curriculum standard interpretation seminars and cross-city mutual teaching research exchanges to continuously update teachers' pedagogical theories and upgrade practical teaching skills. Even so, severe teacher shortages force most rural art teachers to undertake multiple cross-disciplinary teaching assignments. Heavy daily teaching workloads leave barely any spare time for teachers to participate in systematic online academic training and self-directed improvement learning [3].

3. Realistic Dilemmas Restricting Primary and Secondary Art Teachers' Development under Global Art Education

3.1. Difficulties Stemming from International Cross-cultural Cooperation

3.1.1. Fundamental Conflicts between Chinese and Western Art Education Philosophies

Western mainstream art education adopts a student-centred teaching logic that prioritises learners' free artistic creation, individualized emotional expression and divergent thinking cultivation, without standardized fixed scoring benchmarks, and places emphasis on experiential learning throughout the teaching process [13]. In contrast, China's traditional basic art teaching has long been influenced by exam-oriented educational inertia, placing excessive weight on fixed model copying, standardized technical drills and unified aesthetic evaluation centred on final artwork outcomes. Such inherent conceptual divergence leaves most domestic art teachers struggling to adapt to open international classroom teaching models, creating frequent adaptability obstacles during cross-border curriculum cooperation and overseas collaborative teaching projects.

3.1.2. Deficient Cross-cultural Literacy and English Language Competence

Most Chinese primary and secondary art teachers have solid painting skills from formal fine arts training. However, few get structured cross-cultural teaching training, so they lack sufficient knowledge of global modern art trends and overseas cultural backgrounds.[8]. In addition, widespread deficiencies in professional art English capabilities, mastery of specialised artistic terminology, oral English teaching proficiency and English academic document reading skills prevent teachers from deeply engaging in international academic seminars, applying for overseas teaching postings and publishing research papers in global academic journals, severely restricting their space for international career advancement [2].

3.1.3. Inadequate Capacity to Transform Traditional Chinese Arts for International Popularization

Many Chinese art teachers excel at traditional Chinese painting and folk intangible heritage crafts but cannot creatively adapt native Chinese art into easy-to-teach lessons matching international learning styles and aesthetics [9]. They mostly only pass down basic techniques without modernizing traditional art, which prevents Chinese traditional aesthetic culture from smoothly integrating into global diverse art education frameworks [14].

3.2. Domestic Practical Difficulties within China's Basic Education System

3.2.1. Entrenched Exam-oriented Mindset Causes Formalised and Utilitarian Art Teaching

Despite repeated national policy advocacy for holistic quality-focused aesthetic education, numerous primary and secondary schools still set art examination grades, student competition awards and auxiliary enrolment performance as core teaching objectives. Driven by this utilitarian mindset,

art education overprioritizes repetitive skill drills rather than cultivating students' aesthetic sensitivity and creativity [12]. Pressured by school evaluation rules, most art teachers reframe lessons for exam training and cannot deliver personalized, life-linked, interdisciplinary art classes that fulfill aesthetic education's core goals [11].

3.2.2. Severe Imbalance of Art Education Resources across Urban and Rural Areas

Well-resourced urban K-12 schools have enough full-time professional art teachers, complete art facilities, and frequent domestic and international research exchange chances. In contrast, rural and mountainous art teachers usually take multiple subjects, suffer insufficient art materials and sustained formal training, and are cut off from premium local and global art education resources [3]. This growing resource divide widens urban-rural art teacher gaps and blocks rural educators' career growth.

3.2.3. Overloaded Non-teaching Administrative Chores Occupy Teachers' Research and Self-improvement Time

In daily school operations, primary and secondary art teachers are frequently assigned additional non-teaching auxiliary tasks including campus environmental decoration design, large-scale school art gala planning, publicity poster production and routine administrative paperwork assistance [12]. These miscellaneous off-curriculum assignments consume a large proportion of teachers' spare time originally reserved for teaching research, personal artistic creation and professional knowledge upgrading, triggering prevalent occupational burnout among art teachers and hindering continuous improvement of their comprehensive teaching literacy.

3.2.4. Lagging Interdisciplinary Design and Digital Teaching Transformation Capability

New national compulsory art curriculum standards require organic interdisciplinary integration between the art discipline and Chinese language, history, traditional culture and emerging digital art forms. Nevertheless, most domestic art teachers still adhere to a single technical teaching mode without relevant interdisciplinary curriculum design experience [9]. Meanwhile, AI painting tools and new media-based digital art teaching have gained global and nationwide popularity, yet a considerable number of middle-aged and senior art teachers remain attached to traditional hand-drawing teaching methods with low digital literacy, unable to keep pace with the general digital transformation trend of contemporary aesthetic education [7].

4. Optimized Development Strategies for Primary and Secondary Art Teachers in the Global Art Education Era

4.1. Individual Level: Improve Comprehensive Literacy to Adapt to Globalized Art Education Requirements

Art teachers should take the initiative to systematically learn Chinese and Western art education theories, dismantle rigid inherent traditional teaching stereotypes, and strike a scientific balance between standardised technical training and cultivation of students' innovative creative capacities [13]. Teachers need to utilise diversified online learning resources to consolidate professional English vocabulary and specialised art terminology, voluntarily join international online art teaching research and cross-border academic communication activities to expand global educational horizons [2]. Furthermore, continuous learning of digital painting and AI-assisted art education tools helps teachers strengthen interdisciplinary curriculum design competence and realise innovative integration of traditional Chinese art inheritance and modern digital artistic expression [1]. Critical Reflection: This self-improvement framework relies heavily on uninterrupted spare learning time, accessible paid online training resources and stable foreign language learning channels. Rural art teachers, however, bear heavy multi-subject teaching loads with limited free time, while remote regions face constraints on internet access and affordable high-quality online learning resources. Reliance solely on individual voluntary learning fails to narrow urban-rural gaps in international literacy, and risks further

entrenching existing developmental disparities by disproportionately benefiting resource-sufficient urban teachers [3].

4.2. School Level: Build Multi-dimensional Growth Platforms and Reduce Redundant Non-teaching Burdens

School administrations should set up regular Sino-foreign art teaching exchanges, invite domestic and international art education specialists for lectures and skill training, and create official overseas study and international competition opportunities for excellent art teachers [4]. Reasonable workload planning can reduce teachers' redundant administrative work, reserving time for research, creation and professional training. Moreover, urban-rural school pairing schemes need full implementation to share premium art resources and support rural teachers' long-term growth [11].

4.3. Educational Administrative Department Level: Improve Supporting Policies and Balance Regional Educational Resource Allocation

Local educational authorities need to fully implement national preferential policies for art teacher cultivation and increase fiscal investment and professional training quotas tilted toward rural grassroots art educators to gradually narrow existing urban-rural art resource gaps [5, 11]. A comprehensive diversified teacher evaluation system compatible with integrated Chinese-Western art education philosophies should be constructed to abandon singular assessment benchmarks based on technical proficiency and competition awards; new evaluation indicators ought to centre on teachers' practical aesthetic teaching effectiveness, innovative curriculum development outcomes and tangible achievements in traditional cultural inheritance. Furthermore, national unified cross-border art education exchange platforms should be established to promote normalised international development of China's primary and secondary art education sector [6]. Critical Reflection: Balanced regional resource allocation policies are heavily reliant on local government fiscal capacity. Economically underdeveloped districts and counties lack sufficient special funds for aesthetic education, restricting policy execution. Even with national unified cross-border exchange platforms, without mandatory quota allocation rules prioritising rural schools, participation opportunities will continue to gravitate toward elite urban schools, drastically diminishing the equitable outcomes of resource balancing policies [3].

4.4. Practical Barriers Hindering Effective Policy Implementation

Despite the layered top-down policy frameworks designed to advance equitable global aesthetic education for all art teachers, structural administrative and economic barriers hinder full policy delivery at grassroots levels [11]. First, fiscal decentralisation places the burden of funding rural art education initiatives on financially constrained local county governments, which frequently divert allocated aesthetic education budgets to meet core compulsory teaching expenditure, leaving cross-cultural training, digital equipment procurement and international exchange subsidies underfunded [3]. Second, fragmented departmental governance creates coordination gaps between cultural bureaus, education authorities and school management committees; joint initiatives for Sino-foreign art communication and intangible heritage teaching often stall due to misaligned administrative accountability and separate budget management systems [6]. Third, rigid performance appraisal systems at school level incentivise administrators to prioritise measurable student competition awards and exam performance over long-term teacher internationalisation training, discouraging sustained investment in teachers' cross-cultural literacy development [11]. These embedded institutional frictions mean national equitable development policies cannot automatically translate into equal developmental access for rural art teachers without supplementary targeted supervision, special fiscal transfer payments and revised school accountability mechanisms.

5. Conclusion

The evolving global art education landscape delivers multiple developmental dividends for Chinese primary and secondary art teachers, covering global inheritance opportunities for traditional Chinese art, convenient resource benefits brought by digital education popularisation, and various institutional supports generated by favourable domestic educational policies. Nevertheless, uneven geographical distribution of high-quality educational resources prevents most grassroots rural art teachers from fully accessing these favourable developmental gains [3]. Concurrently, the industry as a whole remains constrained by multiple realistic obstacles, including conflicting Chinese-Western art education philosophies, insufficient cross-cultural comprehensive capabilities among teachers [2], persistent urban-rural resource imbalance, lingering adverse impacts of exam-oriented education inertia [11], and delayed progress in digital teaching transformation [7].

As core implementers of school aesthetic education and vital inheritors of Chinese traditional artistic culture, primary and secondary art teachers require coordinated support from three key stakeholders: consistent proactive improvement of comprehensive capabilities by individual teachers, systematic platform construction and workload reduction by affiliated schools, and complete policy guarantees alongside balanced resource distribution by superior educational administrative authorities. Only through coordinated tripartite collaborative efforts can domestic art teachers effectively seize precious developmental opportunities brought by global art education reform and break through diverse realistic developmental bottlenecks. While deepening localized domestic basic art education practice, Chinese art educators can actively engage in global collaborative art education construction and facilitate sustainable international popularisation of China's outstanding traditional aesthetic culture.

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