

Inheritance and Innovation: The Paradigm Shift and Future Direction of Modern Moral Education Curriculum in China

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Abstract: The establishment and development of modern moral education curriculum in China represent a process of continuous self-renewal accompanying national transformation and social change. Evolving from the late Qing Dynasty's "Self-cultivation" course, through the Republic of China era's exploration of "Civics," to the reconstruction of the modern moral education system after the founding of New China, this journey reflects not only the modernization of the educational system but also deeper demands of national spirit shaping and cultural identity construction. This paper delves into the three fundamental paradigm shifts achieved-value, content, and pathway-analyzing their intrinsic logic and manifestations. Building on this historical analysis, the paper discusses profound implications for current educational reform, proposing future development paths focused on maintaining cultural subjectivity, deepening practice-oriented education, and cultivating core competencies.

1. Introduction

The construction of the modern moral education curriculum system in our country has undergone a long historical process. It is not only a reflection of the profound social changes in modern China, but also an important part of the modernization transformation of national education. Since the independent course form of the "Self-Cultivation Course" emerged, through the exploration of civic education, and with Marxism theory as the ideological foundation for the practice of New Democratic moral education courses, it was finally established after the socialist transformation of New China. As the core carrier for transmitting cultural values and shaping the national character, the changes in the institutional form, value core and practical methods of school moral education courses revolve around serving the central tasks of the country, and are a response to the questions of "for whom to cultivate, what to cultivate, and how to cultivate". Systematically reviewing the historical course of the occurrence and development of our modern moral education curriculum, summarizing the historical tasks it has accomplished, and deeply analyzing the three paradigm shifts realized by the modern moral education curriculum, can help us deeply understand the internal logic of China's moral education education moving from tradition to a complete modern curriculum system, and provide historical references and directional inspirations for the construction of moral education courses in the new era.

2. The Historical Mission of School Moral Education Curriculum

2.1. Citizen Education Goes Beyond Traditional Feudal Ethics

In 1904, the Qing government promulgated the "Regulations for Establishing Schools" (the "Kai Bu School System"), which officially established the "Self-Cultivation" course, marking the first time that moral education was separated from the traditional Confucian educational system and became an independent course category with dedicated teaching time, specific educational goals, clear teaching content, and fixed textbooks. However, the educational content of the "Self-Cultivation" course was mostly excerpted from traditional classics such as the "Four Books" and the "Book of Filial Piety",

although it had the form of modern curriculum teaching, it was wrapped in the soul of traditional feudalism. Feudal morality centered on the "Three Obediences and Five Constants" as its moral core, emphasizing the rationality of feudal monarchical rule, and its ultimate goal was to cultivate loyal "subjects" and "subjects" who were loyal to the Qing Dynasty and to maintain the shaky feudal rule.

In 1912, Cai Yuanpei became the Minister of Education. His "Five Education Simultaneously" policy laid the foundation for the educational reform during this period. Civic moral education was regarded as the "core", leading the "Self-Cultivation" course to transform from traditional moral training to modern citizen cultivation. The focus of moral education shifted from the feudal ethics centered on "loyalty to the monarch" to modern citizen "public morality" oriented towards the nation-state. Civic education emphasized citizens' responsibility to the country, participation in public affairs, and identification with the common values of the nation. The transformation from "private morality" to "public morality" was the core symbol of the modernization of moral education, and it was an important force that transformed it from a tool for maintaining the old order to a force for building a new society and consolidating national identity.^[1] The comparison between traditional moral education and modern moral education curricula is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison between Traditional Chinese Moral Education and Modern Moral Education Curriculum

Comparison Dimension	Traditional Moral Education	Modern Moral Education Curriculum
Value Basis	Patriarchal ethics, hierarchical order	State-society orientation, civic equality
Core Content	Three Guides/Five Constants, Confucian Classics	Civic public virtue, public ethics
Educational Objective	Loyal subjects, scholar-officials	Modern citizens, bearers of social responsibility
Teaching Method	Classical exegesis, memorization	Systematic instruction, practical experience

2.2. The Abandonment of National "Public Morality" Education

In 1922, the "Renxu Education System" was established, and the school's moral education courses were renamed from "Self-cultivation Class" to "Citizenship Class". The emergence of the "Citizenship Class" was the result of the state's administrative power responding to the widespread citizen education trend in society. The "Citizenship Class" curriculum has modern enlightenment significance. The educational purposes, educational policies, and curriculum goals at that time all mentioned the guiding ideology of citizen education. The "Citizenship Class" aimed to cultivate citizens with "public morality", expanding the field of moral education from the private domain to the public space. Liang Qichao once expounded in his grand work "New Man Theory" that "public morality" fundamentally serves as the ethical foundation for "the formation of a group and the establishment of a state".^[2]

However, the "Citizenship Studies" merely has the form of civic education but fails to truly transform the essence of civic education into the thoughts of young people. In the educational practice of "Citizenship Studies", the concepts of "state" and "citizen rights" it promotes are merely abstract political concepts from the West. This is in great disconnection with the semi-colonial and semi-feudal social reality of China at that time, as well as the urgent demands of the vast majority of the people for solutions to issues such as survival, land issues, social equality, etc. In the actual Chinese context, it appears extremely weak and ineffective.

The moral education course of the New Democratic Revolution is completely different from the "Citizenship Studies" education. Under the influence of Marxist theoretical thought, in specific revolutionary practices, it transformed national moral education from an abstract ideal into values

and specific behaviors directly related to the fate of the country. The school's moral education course was closely combined with social practice, broke free from the shackles of formalism, and truly realized the construction of a socialist moral education course that combines theory with practice. Through organizing students to participate in land revolutions, conducting social surveys, and engaging in production labor and other practical activities, "public morality" was internalized, and national citizens in line with the times and society were cultivated..

2.3. Systematic Construction of Moral Education Curriculum System

After the completion of the socialist transformation of New China, the modern moral education curriculum system in China led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) was established. This curriculum system gradually improved and standardized the organization of moral education courses, including curriculum objectives, teaching syllabus, teaching plans, classroom management, curriculum evaluation, and teacher training, evolving from a single subject form of moral education to a relatively complete curriculum system.

The socialist transformation laid the groundwork for the construction of the school moral education curriculum system. The establishment of the ideology of the new regime provided ideological preparation for the new moral education curriculum system. The socialist transformation of the education system provided the framework basis for curriculum setting, and the legalization and policy-based approach to moral education provided the normative standards for the curriculum. Ultimately, China's modern moral education curriculum system was formed, with Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought as the fundamental guiding ideology, and the "five loves" public morality (loving the motherland, loving the people, loving labor, loving science, and caring for public property) as the core content. Its basic structure consists of: political courses as the core subject courses, moral education elements permeating into various subjects to form indirect moral education courses, and labor education as an important activity course in moral education.

The modern moral education curriculum system in China inherits the basic core of new democratic moral education and achieves integration in three aspects: in form, it integrates the modern curriculum teaching organizational form developed from the "self-cultivation course" and civic education courses; in content, it integrates communist moral theory, ideological and political education experience in liberated areas, and the requirements for the construction of social ethics; in method, it integrates classroom teaching, practical participation, and labor production.

3. The Triple Paradigm Shift in Moral Education Curriculum

3.1. Transformation of Value Paradigm: From "Family-Oriented" to "Social-Oriented"

The value foundation of traditional Chinese moral education is "familial ethics". It is a complete set of moral norms system constructed based on the scale of blood relationship closeness and the prototype of family order. It extends the "filial piety and fraternal love" principles followed in the family's father-son, brother-sister, and husband-wife relationships through the ethical analogy mechanism of "transferring filial piety to loyalty" to the political domain of the state, thereby forming a hierarchical social order of "king-kings, minister-ministers, father-fathers, and son-sons". Under this value paradigm, the core task of moral education is to cultivate individuals' absolute obedience to the authoritative power of the family's patriarchal system, and through the reinforcement of the role ethics of "loyalty and filial piety", maintain the feudal ruling pattern of "family-state-similarity".

The modern moral education curriculum has completed the value shift from family-oriented to social-oriented, expanding the scope of moral education from the individual's "private morality" cultivation to the "public morality" training linked to the state and society. The ultimate standard for measuring an individual's morality is no longer limited to their cultivation in the family patriarchal ethical relationship, but more pointed to their moral cultivation, responsibility assumption and practical contributions in national independence, state construction and social public life. This value paradigm transformation is not only a reflection of the moral concepts in China's transformation from traditional agricultural civilization to modern industrial civilization, but also an inherent requirement

for building modern nation-states and consolidating social consensus.^[3]

This value shift is very clearly reflected in the "Five Loves" public morality established in New China (loving the country, loving the people, loving labor, loving science, and loving public property). "Loving the country" replaces the traditional "loyal to the monarch" concept with loyalty and dedication to the ethnic community and modern state; "loving the people" expands the object of moral concern to all citizens, establishing a new ethical relationship of equality and mutual assistance; "loving labor" popularizes the concept of labor being glorious throughout society, giving labor a moral significance of creating the world; "loving science" eliminates feudal superstition and guides citizens to pursue truth and respect knowledge; "loving public property" cultivates individuals' sense of responsibility for collective assets, and incorporates the maintenance of public interests into moral evaluation.

3.2. Content Paradigm Shift: From "Classical Interpretation" to "Life Practice"

The traditional moral education curriculum focused on the core content of Confucian classics, and its teaching methods were highly dependent on memorization and annotation. It only regarded the acquisition of moral knowledge as the educational goal, which was seriously disconnected from daily life and could not achieve "integration of knowledge and action". When moral education was simplified to the mere simple indoctrination of fixed texts, it was difficult to have a good effect on shaping students' character and developing their behaviors.

The modern moral education curriculum has undergone a fundamental shift in content selection, expanding from classic texts to a wide range of social life and practice scenarios. The curriculum content is no longer limited to the interpretation of authoritative texts, but draws educational resources from the development process of society and national construction. It guides students to pay attention to social issues, participate in public affairs, experience values through labor, and cultivate a sense of responsibility in collective collaboration. Moral education has transformed from a static knowledge-acquisition activity to a dynamic life-experience process, extending from a closed classroom to an open social space.

Moral education courses are close to life practice and emphasize the contextual and experiential nature of character cultivation. True character is gradually formed through repeated judgments, choices, and practices in complex and real social situations. For example, the "Red Rock Ideological and Political Education" course developed in Chongqing organized students to visit red landmarks, participate in "walking ideological and political classrooms" and perform scenarios, allowing the red genes to "infiltrate silently" into students' hearts.^[4] This paradigm of moral education centered on life practice significantly enhances the appeal and effectiveness of moral education.

3.3. Paradigm Shift in Teaching Approach: From "One-way Instruction" to "Multidimensional Interaction"

The traditional teaching of moral education heavily relied on top-down authoritative lectures. The teacher was the main figure in moral education, while students were passive recipients of the teaching content. The "one-way instruction" approach in moral education largely ignored the subjective initiative of learners and did not take into account the internal cognitive construction process of learners.

Modern moral education courses have restructured their implementation paths, moving from "one-way instruction" to "multidimensional interaction". In actual classroom teaching, teachers use narrative materials closely related to students' life experiences and employ understandable and empathetic teaching language to make the moral classroom more vivid and persuasive. In this process, both teachers and students are active teaching subjects, participating in the negotiation and construction of moral meanings, jointly generating individualized understandings of moral issues, thereby internalizing values and moving from external discipline to self-awareness as the subject.

In addition, moral education has explored more interaction models. Its occurrence space has far exceeded the scope of school classrooms and extended to various club activities, social practices, and labor experiences. Students directly observe and participate in these moral-related activities, obtaining more comprehensive and open moral experiences, which are then internalized as moral

qualities.

4. The Development Direction of Modern Moral Education Curriculum

4.1. Upholding Cultural Subjectivity and Achieving the Modern Transformation of Traditional Culture

In the context of globalization, diverse value concepts collide and interweave. Modern moral education curriculum must be rooted in the fertile soil of national culture in order to strengthen its cultural foundation and exert strong appeal. Historical experience shows that truly viable moral education curriculum should critically inherit the country's traditional culture and, under the premise of upholding cultural subjectivity, carry out creative transformation, so that the excellent spiritual resources in traditional morality can be adapted to the expression of the contemporary context. The construction of contemporary moral education curriculum must be based on the excellent cultural traditions of the Chinese nation, while actively absorbing the outstanding achievements of human civilization, to form a moral education curriculum system with Chinese characteristics and embodying the spirit of the times.

Modern moral education curriculum should enhance the cultural and ethnic characteristics of moral education and promote a deeper and wider integration of Marxism with Chinese excellent traditional culture. Deeply explore and interpret the moral resources in Chinese excellent traditional culture, and attempt to integrate the essence of Marxist thought with the essence of Chinese excellent traditional culture. Explain Marxist principles in a language familiar to the Chinese people to make them more appealing, infectious and viable. Explore ways that young students can easily accept, and integrate these eternal moral spirits into the curriculum content and teaching activities, making them beneficial resources for nourishing students' spiritual world and shaping national identity.^[5]

4.2. Deepen the Practice-oriented Educational Philosophy and Establish a "Big Moral Education" Curriculum System

Moral education aims to cultivate the good character of young students. If one merely acquires moral knowledge but fails to translate it into practical actions, such moral education courses will be ineffective. To address this issue, relying solely on internal improvements in classroom teaching is insufficient. It is necessary to fundamentally establish and deepen the practice-oriented educational philosophy. Contemporary moral education courses should abandon the mindset that moral education is equivalent to specific class hours and textbook content arrangements. Instead, they should construct a "big moral education" curriculum ecosystem that integrates school education, family education, and social education. Break the boundaries of school education, integrate various resources, form collaborative educational forces, and achieve all-round education for everyone, throughout the process, and in all aspects.

To build a "big moral education" curriculum system, it is necessary to strengthen external and internal connections within the school, and explore opportunities for practical courses outside the school. Schools can establish partnerships with communities, enterprises and institutions, cultural and historical venues, nature reserves, etc., and design curriculum-based, systematic social practice opportunities and volunteer projects. Taking the "museum-school pairing" mechanism established in Chongqing as an example, museum professionals and school teachers collaborate on specific educational themes to conduct collaborative teaching, allowing red resources to truly "come alive", enter students' hearts, and integrate into moral growth. The collaboration of "big moral education" courses can enrich moral education resources and extend moral practice.

"Big moral education" courses should closely combine with the actual development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Utilize information technology to empower the practice of moral education courses. Make good use of the new field of the internet space, utilize big data, artificial intelligence, virtual reality (VR), etc., to create virtual practice scenarios, develop online moral education course products, and guide students to distinguish right from wrong and temper their character in the complex online information environment. Build an open and interactive moral

practice scenario, allowing moral education to move from the classroom to life, from preaching to experience, and internalizing moral qualities in the heart and externalizing them in action.

4.3. Focus on Cultivating Core Competitiveness to Meet the Demands of The Times

The ultimate goal of moral education courses is to cultivate modern citizens who can adapt to and drive social development. In the face of increasingly complex global challenges, moral education courses should focus on cultivating students' core competencies. Core competencies refer to an individual's ability to comprehensively apply knowledge and skills to solve complex problems, and it is a key ability for adapting to personal development and social needs.

Moral education courses should prioritize the cultivation of young people's sense of social responsibility. By organizing students to participate in social services, community governance, etc., guide them to understand the interdependence between individuals and the national society in real social contexts, and thereby cultivate a sense of rule of law, public spirit, and ecological ethics. Research shows that continuous social service and community participation can significantly promote the generation of students' sense of social responsibility and civic consciousness.^[6]

Moral education courses should focus on cultivating young people's national identity. Through history education, traditional culture education, and national conditions education, help students understand the history, culture, and development path of the country, form a deep sense of national pride, cultivate patriotic feelings, and combine personal value pursuit with national development. Cultivate students' awareness of the community of shared destiny of mankind, respect cultural diversity, expand global vision, and improve cross-cultural communication skills.

5. Conclusion

The construction of the modern moral education curriculum system in our country was gradually accomplished during the profound transformation of modern Chinese society. From the establishment of the "Self-Cultivation Course" in the late Qing Dynasty, to the initial exploration of civic education, to the moral education practice under the guidance of Marxism during the New Democratic Revolution period, and finally to the final establishment of the modern moral education curriculum system after the socialist transformation of New China, this evolutionary process clearly presents the internal logic of China's moral education moving from tradition to modernity. Every transformation of the moral education curriculum is essentially a conscious response to the central tasks of the state and the propositions of the times. It revolves around the fundamental question of "for whom to cultivate, what to cultivate, and how to cultivate", and conducts institutional construction and practical exploration.

The modern moral education curriculum has completed three paradigm shifts: in terms of value orientation, it has achieved a leap from family-centered to society-centered; in terms of content organization, it has expanded from the memorization and annotation of classic texts to a broad social life; in terms of implementation paths, it has broken away from the inherent pattern of one-way indoctrination and turned to a multi-dimensional interactive model. These three transformations jointly promote the moral education curriculum from being closed to open, and from discipline to nurturing.

In the face of the diversified global value landscape and the practical needs of talent cultivation in the new era, how to achieve the creative transformation of traditional moral education resources while adhering to cultural subjectivity, how to truly implement the practice-oriented concept as a regularized curriculum system arrangement, and how to transform the core quality cultivation from target expression to operational curriculum practice, are the current topics that need to be continuously addressed in the construction of moral education curriculum. Grasping the dialectical relationship between change and constancy in historical experience can provide a clear direction for the reform and development of moral education curriculum in the new era.

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