

# Cultivation of the Awareness of “Autonomy Within Rules” Among College Students in the New Era: A Brief Analysis of the Innovative Paths for Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** In the new era characterized by accelerated technological iteration and the collision of diverse values, the contradiction between college students' personalized development and social rule constraints has become increasingly prominent, posing a major challenge to talent cultivation in colleges and universities. This paper takes Confucius' thought of “doing as one pleases without overstepping the rules” as its cultural foundation and combines Freud's “id-ego-superego” personality theory to analyze college students' cognitive and value biases regarding rules, as well as practical dilemmas such as insufficient self-discipline and disconnection from implementation mechanisms. It demonstrates the value of cultivating the awareness of “autonomy within rules” from three dimensions: the state, colleges and universities, and individuals. Furthermore, it proposes practical strategies for ideological and political work in colleges and universities from the aspects of optimizing the educational content of ideological and political work, innovating educational methods, and deepening the integration of management and education, so as to provide a path for cultivating high-quality talents with both rule awareness and independent capabilities.

**Keywords:** College students in the new era; Autonomy within rules; Rule awareness

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## 1. Introduction

With the full penetration of digital technology and the profound transformation of social structure, the ideological concepts and behavioral patterns of college students in the new era have shown distinct personalized characteristics. They are eager to demonstrate their self-worth through independent expression and choices, hoping to become independent individuals with their own thoughts, propositions, and identities. However, they also have to face constraints from multiple rules, such as national laws and regulations, college rules and

systems, and class collective norms. As a result, they often fall into the practical confusion of how to balance personalized development and rule-abiding.

Confucius' thought of "doing as one pleases without overstepping the rules" is not only the highest realm of personal cultivation, but also guides contemporary college students to understand the relationship between freedom and rules. True autonomy refers to dynamic development within the framework of rules, which is the unity of "doing as one pleases" and "not overstepping the rules." From a psychological perspective, Freud's personality structure theory explains college students' cognitive and practical biases towards rules. Among the three personality dimensions, the "id" follows the pleasure principle and pursues the immediate satisfaction of desires; the "ego" follows the reality principle and undertakes the important responsibility of reconciling the desires of the "id" with the constraints of the external environment; the "superego" follows the moral principle and represents the internalization of social norms, ethical standards, and collective values <sup>[1]</sup>. College students are in a critical period when their personalities are moving towards maturity. The imbalance between the impulsiveness of the id, the insufficient regulatory ability of the ego, and the normative requirements of the superego often becomes the deep psychological root cause of their cognitive biases towards rules and irregular behaviors in practice.

As the main front for moral education and talent cultivation, colleges and universities need to guide students to understand the value of rules, cultivate their independent thinking and practical abilities, and realize "autonomy within rules" through ideological and political work. This is not only related to students' growth, but also affects the national talent strategy, social order, and national rejuvenation. Based on this, this paper combines the ideological and behavioral characteristics of college students and the actual work of ideological and political education in colleges and universities, analyzes the current situation of rule cognition and practice, demonstrates the importance of cultivating "autonomy within rules," and explores the innovative paths of ideological and political work.

## **2. Current situation of college students' cognition and practice of rules in the new era**

### **2.1. Cognitive level: Coexistence of cognitive biases and value biases**

College students in the new era have diverse and convenient channels for accessing information. However, multi-channel access has not been fully transformed into in-depth cognition. Instead, problems such as uneven information quality, fragmented content, and one-sided interpretation have led to widespread biases in college students' understanding of rules.

In terms of cognitive depth, most students only stay at the level of memorizing rule provisions, without understanding the underlying value logic and social functions. For example, in the cognition of laws and regulations, the awareness rate of college students regarding the Civil Code and Criminal Law exceeds 85%, but their understanding of applicable scenarios, legislative intentions, and legal responsibilities is insufficient. Some students, for instance, know that campus loans are risky, yet they are unaware of the provisions related to illegal lending crimes behind them and the consequences of overdue payments. Some even hold the wrong idea that there will be no problem as long as they do not take the initiative to default <sup>[2]</sup>.

### **2.2. Practical level: Dual constraints of insufficient self-discipline and implementation loopholes**

In the practice of abiding by rules, college students generally show a disconnect between cognition and behavior, with irregular behaviors becoming normalized and diversified. This not only reflects their insufficient

self-discipline but also exposes loopholes in the implementation of rules in colleges and universities.

From the perspective of individual students, the drive of the pleasure principle of the “id” in Freud’s personality theory is the main internal cause of irregular behaviors. As the most primitive and instinctive part of personality, the “id” is not restricted by the reality principle or moral norms, and its sole goal is to pursue the immediate satisfaction of desires. This psychological characteristic is more evident in practice: college students often ignore rule constraints to pursue short-term comfort or convenience.

From the perspective of rule implementation in schools, the relaxed and formalized implementation of rules, as well as the “one-size-fits-all” approach, have further weakened the binding force of rules and become important external factors for the frequent occurrence of students’ irregular behaviors. Some colleges and universities focus more on formulating rules than on implementing them. When dealing with irregular behaviors, they mainly rely on verbal warnings and critical education, lacking substantive disciplinary measures, which makes it difficult to form an effective deterrent.

It is worth noting that college students’ practice of abiding by rules is even weaker in collective scenarios. In classes, student clubs, and volunteer activities, some students lack a sense of collaboration and responsibility and do not comply with arrangements, such as being late, leaving early, or changing procedures. This reflects the cognitive dislocation of students between individual autonomy and collective rules: they equate autonomy with doing whatever they want, ignoring that autonomy must be based on abiding by rules and safeguarding collective interests <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3. The importance of cultivating the awareness of “autonomy within rules”**

#### **3.1. National level: Serving the talent strategy and facilitating high-quality development**

Currently, China is in a critical period of realizing the second centenary goal. To promote high-quality development, build an innovative country, and achieve industrial upgrading and transformation, a large number of high-quality talents with both strong rule awareness and efficient independent capabilities are urgently needed.

From the perspective of the rule of law construction, “autonomy within rules” is the core of citizens’ legal literacy and the foundation of governing the country by law. A society under the rule of law requires builders who understand, abide by, and apply the law, rather than rebels who ignore rules. Only when college students understand and abide by the law can they transform innovative ideas into legal practices and avoid crossing the legal line. In the field of science and technology, scientific research and innovation must comply with intellectual property rules to avoid infringement. In the economic field, entrepreneurship must abide by market, tax, and employment rules to achieve the healthy development of projects <sup>[4]</sup>.

From the perspective of industrial upgrading, the awareness of “autonomy within rules” is an essential quality to adapt to the high-end, green, and intelligent transformation of industries. With the optimization of China’s industrial structure, all industries have higher requirements for rule implementation and independent innovation: they need to abide by industry standards and operating norms to ensure orderly production and operation, while also requiring independent thinking and innovation to promote the upgrading of technologies and services. For example, in the manufacturing industry, technical workers must abide by process and quality rules while identifying problems and optimizing processes. In the service industry, practitioners must abide by service and moral rules while providing customized services <sup>[5]</sup>. As a talent reserve for industries, college students with the awareness of “autonomy within rules” will abide by rules while daring to innovate, injecting

vitality into industrial upgrading, and facilitating the country's high-quality development.

### **3.2. School level: Creating an educational atmosphere and improving the quality of talent cultivation**

Schools and classes are important arenas for college students' growth. The cultivation of the awareness of "autonomy within rules" is not only related to individual students but also of great significance for creating an educational atmosphere, improving the quality of talent cultivation, and enhancing class cohesion.

From the perspective of the educational environment, the awareness of "autonomy within rules" is the foundation of building a harmonious and vibrant campus. When students exert their independent awareness to participate in campus culture, academic research, and social practice under the premise of abiding by rules and regulations, they can not only ensure campus order but also add vitality to the campus. For instance, in campus culture construction, students independently plan art festivals and academic salons under the rule of "positive and healthy content," which enriches their lives and improves their abilities. In class, students independently ask questions and discuss under the rules of "abiding by discipline, respecting teachers, and active interaction," which improves learning efficiency and creates a good classroom atmosphere.

From the perspective of class construction, "autonomy within rules" is the key to enhancing cohesion and cultivating collective responsibility. Class cohesion relies on the balance between individual autonomy and collective rules: it requires students to exert their autonomy to contribute to the class, while also requiring them to abide by rules to protect collective interests. For example, a class in a certain university organized a social practice activity themed on rural revitalization. Under the rules of "safety first, division of labor and cooperation, and obedience to arrangements," students independently chose tasks according to their majors and interests. This not only ensured compliance with rules but also allowed them to demonstrate autonomy, enabling the successful completion of the task and closer relationships within the class<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **3.3. Individual level: Promoting sound personality and realizing growth and success**

The awareness of "autonomy within rules" is an essential quality for college students to adapt to society and serve the country, and more importantly, it is an inherent need for personal growth and the healthy development of personality. From the perspective of personality development, "autonomy within rules" is a manifestation of the maturity of the ego's regulatory ability in Freud's personality theory. It is an ideal state for balancing the desires of the id and the norms of the superego, and a core feature of a sound personality<sup>[7]</sup>.

In terms of academic development, it can improve the efficiency and capabilities of contemporary college students. Under the rules of academic norms, learning discipline, and assessment requirements, students independently set plans, choose methods, and expand fields. This helps them avoid blind learning, perfunctory work, and passive response, and explore learning paths based on their own foundation, interests, and career plans. For example, in professional learning, under the rules of credit requirements and thesis standards, students independently select elective courses, participate in scientific research projects, and read cutting-edge literature. This deepens their professional understanding, improves their scientific research and innovation capabilities, and lays a foundation for their career or further study<sup>[8]</sup>.

In terms of career development, "autonomy within rules" is a guarantee for college students to quickly adapt to the workplace and achieve promotion. The workplace requires both compliance with rules and independent innovation. Autonomy without rule awareness tends to lead to willfulness, while rule-abiding behavior without independent ability easily results in mechanical execution. College students with the awareness



of “autonomy within rules” can quickly become familiar with and abide by workplace rules. At the same time, they proactively solve problems, optimize methods, and put forward suggestions within the framework of rules, enabling them to stand out in competition.

## **4. Innovative paths for ideological and political work in colleges and universities**

### **4.1. Optimizing the educational content system of ideological and political work**

#### **4.1.1. Building an integrated content of “traditional wisdom + modern theory”**

Taking Confucius’ traditional thoughts, such as “doing as one pleases without overstepping the rules,” as the entry point, explore the wisdom of rules and autonomy, individuals and collectives in the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Transform the relevant expositions in *The Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius* into cases for ideological and political work, so that students can understand the cultural foundation of rule awareness. At the same time, further integrate modern psychological knowledge, such as Freud’s personality theory, analyze the psychological mechanisms behind cognitive biases towards rules and rule-breaking behaviors, and help students establish the cognition that rule constraints are the guarantee for independent development. For example, the course “Ideology, Morality and the Rule of Law” sets up a special topic on “traditional self-cultivation and modern personality,” comparing Confucius’ self-cultivation cases with the analysis of college students’ rule-breaking psychology to realize the integration of tradition and modernity<sup>[9]</sup>.

#### **4.1.2. Strengthening “hierarchical, classified + scenario-based” rule education**

Develop a hierarchical and classified rule education system based on the characteristics of students in different grades and majors: for lower-grade students, focus on basic campus rules and common legal knowledge, including attendance, dormitory safety, and introductory academic integrity; for middle-grade students, emphasize professional ethics and industry norms, and explain research integrity, professional ethics, and industry standards in combination with their majors; for senior students, highlight social rules and workplace guidelines, including the application of laws and regulations, labor contract standards, and workplace etiquette. Meanwhile, create scenario-based modules: sort out rule-breaking cases and response plans for high-frequency scenarios such as libraries, laboratories, group activities, and social practice, and use methods like scenario restoration, problem analysis, and rule interpretation to enhance the pertinence and practicality of education<sup>[10]</sup>.

### **4.2. Innovating the methods and carriers of ideological and political work**

#### **4.2.1. Promoting the integration of “theoretical teaching + practical experience” in teaching**

Change the one-way indoctrination mode in ideological and political classrooms and adopt a dual-track teaching model combining theory and practice. In the theoretical session, guide students to discuss rules and freedom, autonomy and responsibility through case analysis, group debates, and situational simulations. In the practical session, organize activities such as rule practice training camps and campus rule optimization proposal campaigns, allowing students to deepen their cognition through practice. For example, launching a library civilization co-construction project enables students to not only abide by rules but also independently put forward optimization suggestions, helping them understand the flexibility and necessity of rules<sup>[11]</sup>.

#### **4.2.2. Building a communication matrix of “digital technology + diverse scenarios”**

Rely on “WeChat, Weibo, and official apps” as well as “campus short video platforms” to develop micro-videos for rule education classes, which interpret laws and campus systems in the form of animations and situational

plays. Use VR technology to create simulated scenarios of rule-breaking behaviors, allowing students to experience the consequences of academic misconduct and workplace rule violations in an immersive way, thereby enhancing their respect for rules. At the same time, set up an online public opinion analysis column. In response to one-sided interpretations of rule-related events by self-media, organize teachers and students to write analytical articles, helping students improve their ability to distinguish right from wrong and correct erroneous cognitions <sup>[12]</sup>.

### **4.3. Deepening the integration of daily management and ideological and political work**

#### **4.3.1. Establishing a rule management mechanism of “flexible implementation + individual care”**

Reform the “one-size-fits-all” approach and promote a management model combining “rigid bottom lines + flexible elasticity.” Clearly define rigid bottom lines for core rules such as class attendance and academic integrity, and handle rule-breaking behaviors in accordance with regulations. For non-core rules such as participation in campus activities and leave applications, create a flexible space to accommodate students’ needs for internships, scientific research, and family matters. For instance, implementing a voluntary selection system for campus activities allows students to choose cultural, academic, and practical activities independently based on their own plans, replacing mandatory participation. The quality of participation is included in the comprehensive quality evaluation, ensuring the flexibility of rules while enhancing the educational effect <sup>[13]</sup>.

#### **4.3.2. Constructing an educational community of “class autonomy + ideological and political guidance”**

Take classes as units to build a platform for joint rule-making. Organize students to jointly formulate class conventions and activity disciplines, and infiltrate collective awareness education in the process. Select students with the quality of “autonomy within rules” as class cadres to play an exemplary role. Counselors participate in class affairs as “rule practice observers” and provide timely ideological and political guidance when problems arise. For example, during social practice activities in class, guide students to independently formulate safety rules and work division. When conflicts arise between individual needs and collective arrangements, counselors have in-depth talks with students to help them balance autonomy and collective rules <sup>[14]</sup>.

#### **4.3.3. Improving the guarantee system of “incentive guidance + targeted support”**

Try to establish an evaluation mechanism that incorporates rule-abiding performance, self-directed learning results, and collective contribution into assessment indicators. The evaluation results are linked to merit selection and scholarships to recognize outstanding students. For students with cognitive biases towards rules or insufficient self-discipline, try to establish a “one-on-one” support mechanism. Counselors and mental health education teachers jointly develop personalized plans and improve students’ cognition and behavior through in-depth talks and behavior training <sup>[15]</sup>.

## **5. Conclusion**

The cultivation of the awareness of “autonomy within rules” among college students in the new era is the key to resolving the contradiction between personalized development and rule constraints, and also an important path for colleges and universities to implement the fundamental task of “fostering virtue through education.” Currently, college students have cognitive and value biases towards rules, and their practice is constrained by

insufficient self-discipline and loopholes in rule implementation. The cultivation of “autonomy within rules” can provide support for the national talent strategy, the educational atmosphere of schools, and the growth of students. Ideological and political work in colleges and universities needs to optimize the content system integrating tradition and modernity, innovate the method carriers combining theory and practice, and deepen the collaborative mechanism of management and education, so as to guide students to achieve the unity of rule-abiding and independent development. Only in this way can we cultivate high-quality talents with both rule awareness and independent capabilities, and inject strength into the rejuvenation of the nation.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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