

The Value Implications and Practical Paths of Integrating the Yan'an Spirit into College Students' Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract: The Yan'an Spirit is an important component of the spiritual lineage of the Communist Party of China and a valuable red educational resource for ideological and political education in universities in the new era. University students are the vital force in the cause of national rejuvenation. Deeply integrating the Yan'an Spirit into the ideological and political education of university students has profound value in implementing the fundamental task of cultivating morality and talent, consolidating the ideals and beliefs of young people, and improving the effectiveness of ideological and political education. Currently, the integration of the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education in universities still faces practical problems such as superficial classroom integration, weak student initiative in practice, and insufficient red-themed education on campus. Based on this, this paper, grounded in the educational principles of ideological and political education, explores practical paths from three dimensions: student-centeredness, classroom teaching, and campus culture, to help young people in the new era grow into new talents capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation.

Keywords: Yan'an Spirit; College students; Ideological and political education; Value implications; Practical approaches

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1. Introduction

The Yan'an Spirit, forged by the Communist Party of China during the Yan'an Revolution, is a great revolutionary spirit, a continuation and development of the great spirit of Party founding, and a vital red educational resource for ideological and political education in universities in the new era. Its encompassing political beliefs, thought processes, a people-centered approach, and a fighting spirit highly align with the core objective of moral education in universities. In the context of the new era, ideological and political education for university students faces numerous challenges, including the impact of diverse social trends and insufficient innovation in educational models. There is an urgent need to enrich educational content and

innovate educational forms by leveraging high-quality red spiritual resources. Systematically and deeply integrating the Yan'an Spirit into the entire process of ideological and political education for university students, exploring its unique educational value, and addressing current shortcomings in educational work are important measures to enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education in universities and cultivate correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values among young people. This has significant theoretical and practical implications.

2. The value and implications of integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education for college students

The Yan'an Spirit carries the red gene of the Communist Party of China's century-long struggle, possessing both profound historical significance and distinct contemporary characteristics. Deeply integrating it into the ideological and political education of university students is not merely a simple promotion of red culture, but rather a process of cultivating character and shaping the soul. This not only enriches the content of ideological and political education in universities and solidifies its foundation, but also precisely addresses the ideological dilemmas of contemporary youth, building a strong spiritual foundation for their growth and development, and demonstrating unique and diverse educational value.

2.1. An important support for enriching the content of ideological and political education and consolidating the foundation for cultivating talents in universities

Ideological and political education is a core curriculum that shapes young people's thinking and guides their growth, and its educational effectiveness depends on high-quality, vivid, and timely content. At present, the ideological and political education system in colleges and universities has been increasingly improved; however, some teaching content suffers from problems such as excessive theoretical emphasis, insufficient concrete materials, and weak relevance to the times, which tend to result in superficial learning and shallow understanding among students. The Yan'an Spirit, born out of arduous revolutionary practice, has accumulated a wealth of authentic revolutionary historical facts, vivid figures' stories, and scientific ideological concepts. It encompasses multiple educational dimensions—including political conviction, ideological conduct, people-oriented commitment, and the spirit of struggle—and can greatly enrich the content carriers of ideological and political education in higher education.

As a crucial link in the century-long spiritual lineage of the Party, the Yan'an Spirit connects revolutionary history with the development of the new era. It embodies the early practical achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism and aligns with the core requirements of ideological and political education in the new era. Integrating it into ideological and political education can break the monotonous and dry theoretical framework of traditional teaching, injecting red vitality and practical warmth into the education. It transforms abstract ideological and political theories into perceptible, understandable, and practicable spiritual qualities, further improving the content system of ideological and political education in universities and consolidating the foundation for cultivating morality and character.

2.2. The practical need to correct young people's ideological cognition and consolidate the foundation of their ideals and beliefs

University students in the new era have grown up in an environment of material abundance and information

diversity. While generally positive and progressive in their thinking, they support the leadership of the Party and actively participate in the construction of a strong nation, they also face complex ideological challenges. The intertwining of globalization and fragmented online information has led to the continued infiltration of undesirable ideologies such as hedonism, materialism, and individualism. Historical nihilism is constantly eroding young people's sense of identification with revolutionary history and the spirit of the revolution, resulting in some university students exhibiting problems such as blurred ideals and beliefs, a weak sense of struggle, wavering political stance, fear of difficulties, and prominent utilitarianism. These issues have become a pressing problem for ideological and political education in universities.

The core essence of the Yan'an Spirit aligns perfectly with the ideological cultivation needs of contemporary youth. A firm and correct political direction guides university students to clarify their political stance and strengthen their ideals and beliefs; a pragmatic ideological line cultivates a truth-seeking, rigorous, and diligent attitude in scholarship and conduct; the principle of wholeheartedly serving the people fosters a sense of dedication, responsibility, and patriotism in young people; and the spirit of self-reliance and hard work can dispel negative attitudes such as complacency and apathy among youth. Integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education can precisely counteract the erosion of various erroneous ideologies, help university students replenish their spiritual "calcium," correct ideological and cognitive biases, establish correct values, and build a strong ideological defense against unhealthy trends.

2.3. The contemporary requirements for continuing the red lineage and carrying forward the Yan'an spirit

"The Yan'an Spirit has nurtured generations of Chinese Communists and is a valuable spiritual asset of our Party"^[1]. The generational inheritance of the red spirit is the spiritual support for the sustainable development of the Party and the country, and college students are the core subjects of red inheritance and the continuation of the cause, and the backbone of national rejuvenation. As the main battlefield for talent cultivation and ideological guidance, colleges and universities shoulder the core mission of continuing the red bloodline and cultivating new people of the times.

Integrating the Yan'an Spirit into the ideological and political education of university students essentially involves systematically and regularly guiding young students to deeply understand revolutionary history, appreciate the revolutionary spirit, and inherit the red gene. This fosters a profound understanding of the original aspiration, mission, and fine traditions of the Communist Party of China throughout its century-long struggle. Under the nurturing influence of this ideological and political education, young students can internalize the Yan'an Spirit and put it into practice, integrating their personal ideals into the overall development of the nation and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. They will cultivate a spirit of responsibility and hard work, develop a style of perseverance, and grow into new-era youth who are politically steadfast, morally sound, highly capable, and courageous in taking responsibility, injecting lasting youthful energy into the construction of a strong nation and the cause of national rejuvenation.

3. The real-world dilemmas of integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education for college students

Currently, universities have gradually begun to value the ideological and political education of the revolutionary spirit and have started to explore ways to integrate the Yan'an spirit with ideological and

political education. However, in terms of actual educational effectiveness, the integration is still in a superficial stage, with multiple problems such as insufficient integration in the classroom, insufficient student participation, and a weak campus immersion atmosphere, which restricts the full release of the educational value of the Yan'an spirit.

3.1. Insufficient integration of classroom teaching hinders the effectiveness of ideological and political education

Universities during the Yan'an period were an important practice field for the Yan'an spirit. Mao Zedong once wrote the educational policy of "firm and correct political direction, hard-working and simple work style, flexible and mobile strategy and tactics" for the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University^[2]. The ideological and political education classroom in universities in the new era should continue to be the core carrier for integrating the Yan'an spirit into ideological and political education. At present, the integration of the two classrooms generally suffers from fragmentation, formalism, and indoctrination, and has failed to form a systematic education system. On the one hand, the teaching content is superficial and scattered. The knowledge points of the Yan'an spirit are mostly interspersed in various core ideological and political courses. There is a lack of unified teaching design and overall planning. Teachers mostly simply list the spiritual connotation and pile up basic knowledge points. They have not deeply sorted out the historical context, theoretical logic, and practical value of the Yan'an spirit, nor have they built its internal connection with Marxist theory, the four histories education, and the mission of youth in the new era. This has led to students' one-sided cognition and scattered memory, making it difficult to form a systematic theoretical cognition.

On the other hand, classroom teaching models need innovation and optimization. Influenced by traditional teaching methods, some ideological and political education teachers primarily employ theoretical lectures, focusing on summarizing knowledge points and explaining exam points to systematically complete teaching tasks. In teaching the Yan'an Spirit, the emphasis is often on the systematic output of theoretical knowledge, failing to fully consider the cognitive patterns, learning characteristics, and classroom participation needs of contemporary university students. Diverse teaching elements such as classroom scenario simulations, case studies, interactive debates, and immersive experiences are rarely included. Students mostly passively listen and receive knowledge, making it difficult to deeply trigger emotional resonance and value identification. Learning often remains at a superficial level of exam-oriented memorization, resulting in low knowledge retention after class. This weakens the immersive and long-term educational effect of the Yan'an Spirit classroom to some extent.

3.2. The lack of students' subjective cognition leads to the problem of the disconnect between knowledge and action

Students are the core subjects of ideological and political education. The ultimate effectiveness of integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education depends on the degree of students' theoretical recognition and practical application. Currently, most college students suffer from a serious disconnect between theoretical understanding and practical action, resulting in insufficient intrinsic motivation for inheritance^[3]. First, students have a detached understanding of the historical context of the Yan'an Spirit. Contemporary college students have grown up in a privileged new era and have not experienced the hardships of the revolutionary years. They lack direct perception of the historical practices of the Yan'an

period, such as the blockade, the Great Production Movement, and the Rectification Movement. They generally regard the Yan'an Spirit as a historical concept detached from reality, making it difficult to establish emotional and value identification, and subjectively believing that it is irrelevant to their current studies, life, and development.

Secondly, students' initiative in putting the spirit into practice is severely lacking. Most students passively receive ideological and political education in the classroom, superficially memorizing the essence of the Yan'an Spirit to cope with course assessments, and rarely actively study historical materials or participate in revolutionary activities after class. When faced with practical carriers of practicing the Yan'an Spirit, such as revolutionary study tours, grassroots volunteer services, and revolutionary propaganda, their enthusiasm for participation is low, and their perfunctory attitude is prominent. They are unable to transform the core spirit of seeking truth from facts, hard work, and serving the people into daily behavioral norms, resulting in a disconnect between knowledge and action—"learning the spirit in the classroom but forgetting it in life"—making it difficult to realize the practical value of spiritual education.

3.3. Weak campus culture and lack of a long-term educational atmosphere

Campus culture is an important extension of ideological and political education, possessing a subtle and regular function of nurturing and educating students. It serves as a crucial auxiliary vehicle for deeply integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education. Currently, the construction of red campus culture in universities still has shortcomings. The construction of carriers for educating students about the Yan'an Spirit is insufficient, and the forms of dissemination are relatively singular, failing to create a comprehensive and regular immersive educational atmosphere. Offline, red propaganda elements related to the Yan'an Spirit are scarce in public areas such as campus landscapes, cultural corridors, teaching buildings, and dormitories. There is a lack of regular educational carriers such as special exhibition boards, dedicated areas for red reading materials, and revolutionary cultural landscapes. In campus cultural and sports activities, activities themed around the Yan'an Spirit account for a very low proportion. Specialized activities such as red dramas, themed lectures, knowledge competitions, and red study tours are conducted infrequently and have a narrow scope, failing to achieve regular implementation.

At the online level, there is still significant room for improvement in the educational platforms of new media on campuses. Official university WeChat accounts, Douyin (TikTok), Bilibili, and other mainstream online platforms for young people still tend to use traditional methods in promoting the Yan'an Spirit, with slow content updates and relatively limited presentation formats, primarily relying on text-based theoretical content. There is a lack of lightweight and engaging content, such as short videos, animated science videos, and documentary vlogs, that cater to the fragmented reading and visual viewing habits of young people, making it difficult to fully meet the online viewing preferences of contemporary youth and continuously attract their attention. Furthermore, the connection between online platforms and offline educational scenarios is not close enough, and a comprehensive, 24/7 online immersion education framework has not yet been established, which to some extent limits the dissemination and long-term impact of red-themed ideological and political education.

4. Practical paths for integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education for college students

In response to the current predicament of integrating the Yan'an Spirit into ideological and political education in universities, and based on the fundamental task of cultivating morality and fostering talent and the laws of youth development, educators need to focus our efforts precisely on three dimensions: the classroom as the main battleground, student subjectivity, and the campus educational environment, to promote the deep integration of the Yan'an Spirit with the ideological and political education of college students and ensure its effective implementation.

4.1. Optimize the classroom teaching system and consolidate the main position of ideological and political education

The ideological and political education classroom is the core vehicle for cultivating people with the Yan'an Spirit. It needs to be optimized in both teaching content and teaching models to break away from superficial integration and achieve a systematic and in-depth integration of the Yan'an Spirit and ideological and political courses. On the one hand, it is crucial to accurately align with textbooks and construct a systematic teaching content. Teachers need to base their teaching on the teaching positioning of each ideological and political course, accurately identify the points of convergence between the Yan'an Spirit and the course content, and achieve targeted integration. For example, in teaching "An Outline of Modern and Contemporary Chinese History," the focus should be on reviewing the revolutionary history of the Yan'an period and explaining the background and historical logic of the formation of the Yan'an Spirit; in teaching "An Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," the classic works and practical explorations of the Yan'an period should be combined to explain the theoretical achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism contained in the Yan'an Spirit; in "Ideological and Moral Foundations and Legal Basis," the focus should be on the character and connotation of the Yan'an Spirit to cultivate students' fighting spirit, people-centered sentiments, and moral character. Through overall design, a complete teaching logic system should be built to avoid fragmented knowledge points and enable students to systematically grasp the theoretical value and contemporary connotations of the Yan'an Spirit.

On the other hand, innovative teaching models are used to revitalize classroom education. The single-minded focus on theoretical instruction is abandoned in favor of a diversified and immersive teaching system. Case-based teaching is employed, using vivid examples such as the reclamation of Nanniwan, the Yan'an Rectification Movement, and the struggles of revolutionary predecessors as core elements, supplemented by red documentaries, film clips, and revolutionary songs to concretize abstract concepts. Interactive classrooms are created, incorporating thematic discussions, group debates, scenario simulations, and student sharing to guide students to actively consider the contemporary educational value and practical pathways of the Yan'an spirit. Comparative teaching is used, comparing the fighting spirit of the Yan'an period with the current ideological state of youth to guide university students in self-reflection and proactive improvement, effectively enhancing the attractiveness, appeal, and persuasiveness of classroom teaching.

4.2. Strengthen the mechanism of cultivating talents through practice and promote the deep integration of knowledge and action

Based on the students' central role, educators will strengthen their independent understanding and active practice of the Yan'an Spirit, address the disconnect between knowledge and action, and ensure that

ideological and political education is internalized and effectively implemented. First, educators will guide students to deepen their independent learning and solidify their theoretical identification. Educators will urge students to adopt a positive attitude towards learning in ideological and political classes, actively participate in classroom interactions, and systematically grasp the core connotations, historical context, and contemporary value of the Yan'an Spirit. Educators will encourage students to expand their learning channels after class, independently borrowing red monographs, studying Party history materials, participating in red reading groups, and utilizing online red exhibition halls, Party history learning platforms, and high-quality red video resources to gain a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the Yan'an revolutionary history, gradually establishing theoretical, emotional, and value identification with the Yan'an Spirit.

Second, educators will build diverse practical platforms to promote the implementation of the spirit. Adhering to the principle of combining theory with practice in ideological and political education, educators will guide students to internalize the Yan'an spirit and put it into practice. In daily study and life, educators will uphold a pragmatic style, be rigorous in scholarship, seek truth from facts, and abandon a frivolous and utilitarian mentality; educators will uphold their original aspiration of hard work and struggle, face academic and life challenges head-on, and avoid complacency and slackness; educators will practice the principle of serving the people and actively participate in public welfare practices such as campus volunteer service, community assistance, and rural teaching support. At the same time, educators will regularly organize red-themed study tours, leading students to the revolutionary holy sites and former revolutionary sites in Yan'an, immersing them in the noble character of revolutionary predecessors, allowing them to temper their will and cultivate their character through hands-on practice, truly achieving the unity of knowledge and action.

4.3. Optimize the campus cultural environment to achieve long-term immersive education

“Man creates environment, and the environment also creates man”^[4]. Relying on the campus cultural carrier, educators coordinate online and offline education positions, build a red education atmosphere that is all-weather and all-encompassing, and use the environment to nurture the thoughts of young people and help improve the quality and efficiency of ideological and political education. In the offline dimension, educators improve the hardware carrier and activity system of red campus culture. Upgrade the campus cultural landscape, set up special exhibition boards on Yan'an spirit and red culture windows in teaching buildings, corridors, dormitories, libraries and other areas, set up exclusive reading areas for red reading materials, and create an immersive red education scene. Regularly carry out red-themed activities, covering multiple dimensions such as art performances, knowledge education and practical lectures, hold red song competitions, red dramas, poetry recitations, Yan'an spirit knowledge competitions, theme speeches and other activities, form a student red lecture team, promote the Yan'an spirit to go out of the campus and into the grassroots, and let students deepen their spiritual understanding through extensive participation.

Online, educators are building a youth-oriented and regular new media education matrix. Utilizing university websites, WeChat official accounts, Douyin (TikTok), Bilibili, and other platforms, educators have established special columns for Yan'an Spirit ideological and political education, continuously pushing high-quality content such as theoretical articles, revolutionary historical materials, study tour reports, and red stories. Educators are innovating content presentation formats, creating lightweight and youthful works such as short videos, animated science popularization, youth lecture vlogs, and illustrated interpretations, catering to the fragmented reading habits of young people and enhancing content appeal. Educators are breaking

down the barriers between online and offline education, using online platforms to promote campus red activities and popularize red knowledge, and using offline practices to enrich online dissemination materials, forming a two-way interactive education pattern that allows the Yan'an Spirit to permeate the entire process of students' growth, continuously strengthening the effectiveness of ideological and political education.

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