

The Cultivation of the Spirit of Labor and the New Generation of the Era

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Abstract: Labor is the most fundamental and core human activity, the mode of human existence, and it creates the prerequisite for human survival and development. The spirit of labor is the fundamental force for national prosperity and rejuvenation. In the new era, with various social ideologies interacting and influencing each other, many young university students are losing their ideals and beliefs, have a weak sense of social responsibility, and lack resilience. Based on the new historical context, conducting labor education, promoting the spirit of labor, and fostering labor values in contemporary university students is not only an important means for these young people to strengthen their mental resilience and achieve independence, but it is also the fundamental guarantee for "realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and "cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation".

Keywords: Spirit of Labor; Labor; New Generation of the Era; National Rejuvenation.

I. LABOR AS A MODE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Labor is the mode of human existence, the source of human wealth and happiness, and creates the fundamental prerequisites for human survival and development. "Labor is the source of wealth, and also the source of happiness. All beautiful dreams of mankind can only be realized through honest labor;... All the brilliance in life can only be forged through honest labor" (Xi, 2013). In the historical journey towards the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, contemporary university students are knowledgeable, energetic, ideologically vibrant, and creative. They are the hope of the nation and the people, and they will inevitably become the "new generation of the era, capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation". This new generation must possess not only abundant knowledge, skills, and wisdom but also a noble spirit of labor, a passion for labor, and a correct value system regarding labor. Universities, in fulfilling their great mission of "cultivating socialist builders and successors who develop morally, intellectually, physically, aesthetically, and in labor", must, alongside providing ideological and political education, emphasize the shaping and cultivation of university students' labor spirit and labor values.

II. CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS OF MULTICULTURAL IDEOLOGIES ON THE LABOR VIEWS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE NEW ERA

The advancement of reform and opening-up, along with the deepening of economic globalization, has led to remarkable development in China's economy, an increasingly rich pool of social resources, and a significant improvement in people's living standards. Simultaneously, Western ideologies have continuously infiltrated our society, introducing individualism, materialism, and hedonism into daily life. Narrow extremism, utilitarian pragmatism, vulgar consumerism, and refined egoism have become prevalent values among young people, seriously affecting the value orientation and choices of university students regarding labor in the new era.

Specifically, the impact manifests as follows:

First, the secularization of labor leads to the loss of ideals and beliefs. Currently, as China is in a critical period of achieving a moderately prosperous society, people's lives have generally become wealthier. However, young university students have relatively weak attitudes toward labor. They no longer revere and respect labor as their parents did. Labor is no longer seen as a sacred and glorious activity, nor are laborers held in high regard. Secular viewpoints, such as "It's better to marry well than to work well" or "I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh on a bicycle", have gained recognition among many young students. The spirit of self-reliance and creativity that comes from labor is largely absent among university students, and labor is seen merely as a means to pursue material benefits and improve their living conditions. Additionally, in today's highly information-driven and entertainment-focused society, a hedonistic culture has flourished, leading many students to become immersed in sensory pleasures and the satisfaction of consumer desires. Virtual cyberspace has become their preferred domain for gaining value and achieving ideals. Under the influence of modern consumer culture, students are caught in the cycle of "creating desires—seeking fulfillment", leaving them devoid of ideals and beliefs.

Second, the utilitarianism of labor leads to a weakened sense of social responsibility. Influenced by individualism, pragmatism, and other social ideologies, a significant portion of students born in the 1990s and 2000s exhibit a clearly utilitarian attitude toward labor values. They are predominantly focused on their own interests, with a strong sense of individualism, while their sense of responsibility towards the country and the community has weakened. In life, they are more concerned with perfecting and improving themselves to secure good jobs and achieve personal career goals. In their studies, they prioritize knowledge that is perceived as more profitable or "useful", and when choosing careers, they favor jobs with better salaries. Currently, many university students prefer high-paying positions in foreign enterprises rather than working where the country needs them most. Centered on an individualistic value orientation, many students pursue self-interest, focusing on how society can respect and satisfy them, rather than fulfilling their duties to society. Collective responsibility, social obligation, and the spirit of hardship and social contribution are all relatively lacking.

Third, weak labor values lead to poor resilience. Most students born in the 1990s and 2000s are the only children in their families and have grown up under the loving care of their parents. The common experience of "having clothes put on for them and meals prepared" has been the norm in the upbringing of many only children. Most parents do not allow their children to participate in household chores or family labor; instead, they view academic achievement as their main task, with the goal of entering a good university as their sole focus. Everything else is secondary to this goal. Besides family education, labor education in schools is also deficient. During secondary school, under the pressure of entrance examinations, exam-oriented education remains the dominant model, with schools focusing on students' academic performance while neglecting labor education. At the university level, most universities focus on teaching, research, and talent cultivation, with labor education rarely included in the curriculum and seldom reflected in moral education or ideological-political theory courses. Given this state of labor education in both family and school contexts, many university students lack the spirit of labor, hold weak labor values, and harbor a bias against labor, particularly manual labor. The direct consequence of these weak labor values among students is their poor resilience in the face of setbacks. In today's information era, marked by the intermingling of various social ideologies, university students face pressures related to academics, relationships, and career choices, leading to feelings of confusion and anxiety, which negatively impact their development. More seriously, incidents of students committing suicide due to overwhelming academic tasks and severe employment pressures occasionally occur on university campuses. Such tragic incidents evoke deep sorrow and compel us to reflect: university education should not only be about imparting knowledge and skills, but also about nurturing students' resilience in challenging environments and shaping their ability to withstand setbacks.

Examining the historical context of the new era, how can we help those young people who have lost their ideals and beliefs, who have weak social responsibility, and who lack resilience to regain their mental strength? How can we help young people achieve self-reliance and independence? These are pressing questions that the education system, especially university education, must answer in the new era, as they are critical to fulfilling the historical mission of "cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation." Based on the new historical context, promoting labor education, fostering the spirit of labor, and nurturing labor values among university students is not only the driving force behind "realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", but also the fundamental guarantee for "cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation."

III. THE SPIRIT OF LABOR AS THE FUNDAMENTAL FORCE FOR NATIONAL PROSPERITY AND REJUVENATION

Labor is the practical process through which individuals create both the world and themselves, based on their consciousness and will; it is the foundation of human existence. Labor is the theoretical cornerstone of Marxist materialist historiography. From the discussions of "alienated labor", "material production labor", to "surplus labor", "wage labor", and "autonomous labor", we see that labor is the focal point and core of Marx's entire theoretical system. This reflects Marx's concern for the real fate of the working masses and his ideals for human liberation. Engels, in his essay "The Role of Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man", emphasizes that labor, along with nature, is the source of wealth; it transforms materials into wealth, but its role extends beyond that. "Labor is the first fundamental condition of all human life, to such an extent that we must say, in a certain sense, that labor created man himself" (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 988). Labor is the essential activity of humanity and the fundamental force driving social development and progress. In this sense, "any nation that stops working, let alone for a year, even for a few weeks, will perish, as every child knows" (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 473). The glory of labor and the greatness it creates are vital interpretations of the laws governing the progress of human civilization. As General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "Labor is the necessary path to all success. Currently, the people of all ethnic groups are full of confidence in striving for the goals of the 'Two Centenary Goals.' Ultimately, achieving these goals relies on hard work, honest labor, and scientific labor."

The spirit of labor is the fundamental force behind the splendid history of the Chinese nation and its rejuvenation. "The Chinese nation is a hardworking and creative people. It is through labor that we have attained historical brilliance; it is through labor that we have achieved today's accomplishments." Among China's traditional virtues, diligence and practicality are among the earliest formed, most widely spread, and eternally valuable. Ancient Chinese literature is rich with records that celebrate the nation's admiration for labor. For instance, the Peking Man used bricks and wood to create fire, establishing Chinese civilization; Shennong taught the people to farm; and Nüwa mended the sky, while Dayu tamed the waters. These examples clearly demonstrate the early love for labor within the Chinese nation and the efforts to build homes through hard work. Various texts also record the spirit of self-improvement and labor, such as the "I Ching", which states, "The movement of heaven is strong; a gentleman should strive unceasingly", emphasizing the importance of self-improvement and exploration. The "Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains" exemplifies the spirit of hard work and respect for labor. Faced with two imposing mountains, the old man never felt daunted but quietly took up a shovel alongside his descendants to carve out a path. Such records highlight the enduring spirit of perseverance, hard work, and struggle inherent in the Chinese people. Whether in the daily lives of ancient individuals or in the extensive cultural texts, the spirit of diligence is deeply embedded, having crystallized into a powerful national ethos over five thousand years of history. The history of Chinese civilization is fundamentally a history of the struggles of laboring people. Through their hard work and wisdom, the laboring masses have created a glorious historical civilization, enabling the Chinese nation to remain at the forefront of the world throughout thousands of years of development, standing proudly in the East.

Labor achieves great feats and paves the way for a brighter future. Since the founding of New China 70 years ago, the Chinese nation has experienced a historic leap from standing up to becoming prosperous and strong. We have moved from "catching up with the times" to "leading the times", increasingly stepping onto the world stage. These remarkable achievements are attributed to a labor spirit characterized by courage and continuous self-renewal. Throughout the history of New China's development, our Party has always placed a high value on labor and the spirit of struggle. In 1958, Mao Zedong emphasized in his speech "On Educational Issues" that "education must be integrated with productive labor, and the knowledge of laboring people must be enhanced, while intellectuals must engage in labor" (Mao, 1967, p. 273). In 1978, Deng Xiaoping stressed at the National Education Conference that those educated should develop in moral, intellectual, physical, and cultural dimensions, becoming cultured laborers. In 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to guide students to respect labor and value hard work, aiming for them to engage in diligent, honest, and creative labor as they grow up. It is within this atmosphere of respect for labor and emphasis on hard work that socialism with Chinese characteristics has achieved remarkable accomplishments across economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological domains. By adhering to steadfast ideals and an indomitable spirit of exploration, we have created various spirits such as the Red Flag Canal spirit, the "Two Bombs, One Satellite" spirit, and the manned spaceflight spirit. In just over 40 years, the Chinese nation has performed miraculous transformations, turning one of the world's most underdeveloped countries into the second-largest economy, following only the United States. For decades, the Chinese

people have worked tirelessly, seizing every opportunity to labor diligently. While Western countries enjoy a five-hour workday, we have always held the belief that "every moment counts" and that "development is the hard truth." Over 70 years, through the hard work and collective effort of the entire nation, our economic strength, national defense capabilities, and technological prowess have greatly improved, transforming the face of the Party, the people, the military, and the nation, and enhancing the country's image significantly. The Chinese nation stands in a new posture in the East of the world.

IV. SHAPING THE NEW GENERATION OF THE ERA THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF LABOR

After proposing "cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation" in his report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the need for education in the new era to "cultivate socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education" (Xi, 2017). This is a precise answer to the primary educational question of "what kind of people to cultivate", revealing the core essence of the educational mission in the new era. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, which represents a new historical position for China's development", thus pointing out a new direction for the development of various undertakings in our country. Therefore, what are the specific connotations and characteristics of the new generation of the era? What new mission should China's education system undertake in the new era? Upon what spirit or form of education should the cultivation of the new generation be based? These are fundamental questions that we must confront and reflect upon during the process of cultivating the new generation of the era.

Based on General Secretary Xi Jinping's elaborations on the new generation from various perspectives and in different contexts, we can deduce the specific connotations and essential characteristics of this new generation. Broadly speaking, the new generation shoulders the mission of national rejuvenation; they are the strivers, pioneers, and contributors who will bring about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, the new generation should not only possess comprehensive qualities, such as rich knowledge and skills, strong psychological resilience, good moral character, and deep patriotism, but also the spirit of tenacity, selfless dedication, and unwavering ideals and beliefs. Higher education is a systematic endeavor, and we must follow systematic thinking to ensure the implementation of its core tasks, truly improving higher education in our country and cultivating talent for the new era. "To improve higher education in China and establish world-class universities, we must firmly grasp the core point of comprehensively enhancing talent cultivation capacity and use this to drive other work in universities" (Xi, 2016). Therefore, universities must carry out labor education in the process of talent cultivation, fostering a spirit of labor and passion for labor among contemporary university students, thus laying the foundation for the cultivation of the new generation. "Without the combination of education and productive labor for the younger generation, the ideal future society is unimaginable. Neither teaching and education that is detached from productive labor, nor productive labor without the simultaneous implementation of teaching and education can reach the height required by the present level of modern technology and scientific knowledge" (Lenin, 1984, p. 461).

A. Elevating University Students' Ideological Realm through the Spirit of Labor

In the new era of economic globalization and cultural diversity, university students, deeply influenced by multicultural ideologies, often pursue material pleasures, indulge in opportunism, and seek something for nothing, lacking ideals and beliefs in life. Faced with this lifestyle among contemporary students, universities should use ideological and political theory courses as a platform for student development and consciously and systematically integrate the spirit of labor into their educational processes. Through labor education, university students should be made to recognize and understand the values that "labor is the most glorious, the most noble, the greatest, and the most beautiful." "Diligence leads to fulfillment, and happiness does not fall from the sky; a beautiful life is created through labor." Labor has always played a fundamental role throughout the various stages of human societal development. Since ancient times, people have recognized the importance of labor for human development, societal prosperity, and progress. For instance, the "Book of Rites (Dadai Liji)" records, "Cautious labor brings wealth." In "Guanzi", it is stated that "Labor is essential for the wealth of a nation." "Mencius" also records, "The effort of plowing is arduous, yet the people do it because it brings wealth." University students are the most vibrant group, each one filled with dreams, and their college years are the key period in their lives when they dream the most and dare to pursue their dreams. However, nothing in this world comes without

effort; all happiness and success are achieved only through sustained labor. Labor is the fundamental guarantee for the elevation and purification of university students' thoughts and the realization of their youthful dreams.

B. Cultivating University Students' Character through the Spirit of Labor

The spirit of labor, in essence, embodies a spirit of practical action, struggle, and innovation. In cultivating the new generation of the era, students should promote the virtues of diligence, courage, dedication, creativity, exploration, willingness to contribute, and the pursuit of excellence. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, our Party has placed great emphasis on promoting the spirit of labor, leading to the emergence of generations of model workers. "The spirit of model workers is reflected in 'dedication, striving for excellence, hard work, innovation, indifference to fame, and willingness to contribute'." The Soviet educator Anton Makarenko placed great importance on cultivating students through labor education and the spirit of labor, shaping their attitudes towards labor. He believed that by participating in productive labor, students could gain production knowledge and understand the economic, political, and moral significance of production technology. Labor, especially collective labor, has significant value. "Only by participating in collective labor can one hold a correct and moral attitude towards others—maintaining familial care and friendship for all workers" (Makarenko, 1957, p. 447). In his view, collective labor can guide students in their pursuit of a better future, working together with shared effort, actively laboring, striving together, and helping each other. Through labor, students can establish appropriate interpersonal relationships and develop a sense of responsibility in work, social mission, and collective honor. In his "Lectures on Children's Education", Makarenko emphasized that "Labor is forever the foundation of human life, the basis for creating human life and cultural happiness" (Makarenko, 1957, p. 445). Through labor education, using the spirit of labor to shape university students not only helps to cultivate communist moral character but also fosters a communist attitude toward labor.

Tempering University Students' Will through Labor Practice

The path to national rejuvenation is not without its challenges; we will undoubtedly encounter many obstacles and setbacks along the way. Therefore, as the new generation bearing the responsibility of national revival, it is essential for them to possess a resilient will. Honoré de Balzac once said, "Without great willpower, there can be no great talent." A strong will is the guarantee of success, guiding individuals to maintain their life goals, overcome difficulties, and achieve success. University students should "sow hope and reap rewards through labor, while also tempering their will and training themselves through work." Currently, many "post-90s" and "post-00s" students live in an era of relatively high material living standards, and their growth experiences have been relatively smooth, lacking the tempering that comes from life and labor. For a significant number of students, labor is perceived merely as a burdensome and exhausting task that provides little substantial benefit to their lives and studies. This misunderstanding of labor and the absence of labor practice lead to a lack of resilience in young university students, making them prone to yielding when faced with setbacks. Therefore, to change students' perceptions of labor and temper their wills, it is crucial to provide positive ideological guidance and encourage them to participate in labor practices, helping them to understand that labor is the source of all happiness and wealth. "We must promote the spirit of labor among students, educating and guiding them to admire and respect labor, understanding that labor is the most glorious, the most noble, the greatest, and the most beautiful, so that they can grow up to engage in diligent, honest, and creative work." The reason the Chinese nation has endured and thrived over thousands of years is its admirable quality of diligence and the strong will to overcome difficulties. "Labor exercises physical strength and intelligence, cultivates the basic abilities for survival and development, and sharpens character and personality, thereby showcasing the infinite possibilities for self-development" (Dong, 2010, p. 113). By tempering university students' will through labor practice, we not only assist them in overcoming various challenges and setbacks but also help cultivate their emotional connection to labor, ultimately enhancing their capacity for labor-related actions.

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