

The Internal Mechanism and Practical Pathways for Integrating China's Excellent Traditional Culture into Labor Education in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Within the overarching mandate of fostering virtue and cultivating individuals capable of meeting the demands of the new era, labor education in universities occupies a study-defining and structurally central position. China's excellent traditional culture contains labor-related concepts, value orientations, and pedagogical wisdom that correspond, at a foundational level, with the purposes of labor education in higher education. On closer inspection, the issue is not the simple addition of cultural content to an existing curriculum. It is a deeper coupling between cultural essence and the education system, in which each reinforces the other. A closer analysis of the link between cultural formation and labor education suggests two tightly connected dimensions of integration: value infusion and conceptual alignment. These dimensions clarify how traditional culture can support high-quality labor education. On this basis, the present study argues that traditional cultural resources should be more fully mobilized to strengthen the substantive foundations of labor education. This approach aims both to improve educational quality and to promote the revitalization and intergenerational transmission of traditional culture. It also offers a theoretical reference and practical guidance for innovation in university labour education.

Keywords: Excellent traditional Chinese culture; Labor education in higher education institutions; Internal mechanisms; Educational approaches; Moral cultivation and talent development

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1. Introduction

Labor education is an integral part of holistic education. It carries a pedagogical duty to cultivate moral character, sustain respect for labor, and strengthen practical competence. Under continuing educational reform, university labor education has moved beyond narrow skill training. It has taken a broader orientation that aligns value formation, the development of comprehensive capacities and spiritual nourishment^[1]. Across China's long cultural history, a distinctive ethos of labor gradually took shape. It emphasizes diligence, pragmatism, dedication, respect for work, and the unity of knowledge and action. This tradition offers substantial educational resources and durable pedagogical insight for labor education in higher education. Integrating this cultural inheritance into university labor programs could renew the value base of labor education through engagement with traditional practices. It could also enrich curricular content and improve teaching approaches.

Crucially, such integration may shift labor education beyond technical training alone and towards the cultivation of values.

2. The internal mechanism for integrating China's outstanding traditional culture into labor education in higher education institutions

Traditional culture should be understood not as an external addition to labor education, but as an internal driver of its high-quality development. Across three linked dimensions—value orientation, educational philosophy, and spiritual inheritance—it worked in concert with labor education. This synergy sustained its continued development and gave its trajectory firmer substance.

2.1. Mechanism of value empowerment: Strengthening the value foundation of labor education in moral education and talent development

The labor-value concepts condensed within China's fine traditional culture furnish higher-education labor education with a localized and foundational value basis, and, in a rather direct way, respond to the current tendencies toward utilitarian calculation and superficial practice in this domain ^[2]. Throughout the long course of traditional Chinese culture, the central proposition that “the well-being of the people lies in diligence; through diligence, they shall never be impoverished” has been consistently affirmed, with labor treated as the basis of human subsistence and, no less importantly, as an essential ground for moral self-cultivation. What is refused within this line of thought is the one-sided disposition of belittling labor or pursuing ease for its own sake; in its place, a traditional value framework took shape—one that esteems moral worth and gives pride of place to industriousness. Within traditional educational settings, labor refers not only to physical exertion. Equally, it functioned as an important pathway for shaping character and tempering human sentiments. Ancient formulations such as “passing down knowledge through farming and reading” and “integrating knowledge with action” brought intellectual and physical labor into relation, while also linking moral formation with concrete practice, thereby giving rise to a relatively integrated educational paradigm in which labor was expected to cultivate virtue, expand wisdom, and strengthen the body (a triadic orientation deeply embedded in traditional pedagogy).

At the level of university practice, the central aim of labor education is to guide students toward a scientific understanding of labor, to cultivate an orientation that esteems labor, participates in it actively, and stresses practice, and, at the same time, to correct the mistaken tendency to seek comfort and remain detached from lived reality. Precisely at this point, the labor-value concept carried by China's traditional culture shows a close correspondence with the internal requirements of labor education in the new era ^[3]. By returning students' understanding of labor to its cultural roots, it becomes possible to reconstruct that understanding from the ground up, thus amending the one-sided and overly utilitarian misconceptions about labor that are held by some young people today (misconceptions that, if left unaddressed, easily narrow labor to mere instrumental gain). In the traditional Chinese view of labor, greater weight is placed on labor's moral character, its humanistic substance, and its practical orientation. Also, under the blue is labor's function in elevating personal cultivation and generating social value. In that sense, this value tradition speaks directly to the weakness of value guidance in current university labor education ^[4].

2.2. Conceptual alignment mechanism: Achieving the logical unity of traditional wisdom and modern education

In the contemporary period, labor education in higher education institutions is oriented, at its most basic level, toward students' all-round development across the moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor domains. At the center of this orientation lies the linkage of theory and practice, together with the cultivation of students through concrete experience, with diverse labor practices being mobilized to strengthen overall competence. Within traditional Chinese labor culture, educational tenets such as “the unity of knowledge and action” and “investigating things to acquire knowledge” have long been upheld; abstract moral instruction detached from practice is explicitly disfavored, whereas a hands-on and disciplined

orientation toward action is repeatedly affirmed. In that sense, the tradition aligns closely with the contemporary stress in labor education on practice, experiential learning, and internalization ^[5].

As a major bearer of China's labor culture, the traditional ethos of farming and reading offers a consequential resource for education. Its core model, learning through reading to understand principle and cultivating the self through labor, ties knowledge acquisition to practical work. In doing so, it challenges a rigid separation between mental and manual labor. This point aligns closely with contemporary labor education, which likewise seeks to soften rather than reproduce that divide.

This traditional model also corresponds to current educational demands. In university labor education, intellectual, physical, and service-oriented labor must be integrated rather than taught in isolation. The farming-and-reading ethos is broadly consistent with that aim. Its value commitments also remain relevant. The craftsmanlike ideal of striving for excellence and dedication to work, the civic responsibility captured in the maxim that every citizen bears responsibility for the nation's prosperity or decline, and the labor virtues of diligence, thrift, and perseverance all accord with the goals of university labor education. These goals include fostering professional commitment, social responsibility and resilient character among students ^[6].

At the level of educational logic, traditional labor wisdom emphasizes the internalization of ideas through action. Moral character is shaped, and practical capacities are strengthened, through sustained participation in labor. Contemporary university labor education similarly favors immersive and continuous forms of learning rather than short, episodic interventions. The correspondence is therefore not merely rhetorical. It extends across process, principle and educational rationale. Because this alignment is so substantial, the integration of traditional culture into labor education need not stop at symbolic reference or superficial borrowing. It may instead support a deeper synthesis between traditional educational wisdom and the modern educational system.

2.3. Mechanism of spiritual nurturing: Enriching the ethical core of labor education

Over the course of long historical experience, the Chinese nation has formed a labor ethos marked by diligence and pragmatism, the craftsman's exacting pursuit of excellence, responsibility grounded in dedication, frugal self-discipline, and an exploratory, innovation-oriented spirit. Taken together, these strands constitute an integrated system of traditional labor values, one that supplies substantial cultural resources for fostering the labor ethos of contemporary youth ^[7].

In some universities, current labor education reveals a noticeable imbalance: emphasis falls largely on skill training and the completion of practical tasks, whereas the cultivation and inward assimilation of the spirit of labor receive far less sustained attention. The consequence is plain enough. Student participation often remains at a surface level, which in turn obstructs the formation of stable labor-related qualities and a durable spiritual consciousness. Into precisely this pedagogical gap, traditional labor ethos can be brought—with real corrective force, that is—by adding cultural depth to labor practice. Central here is the traditional craftsman spirit, which prizes dedication, perseverance, and an unrelenting commitment to excellence; through that normative orientation, students are steered away from impulsive and utilitarian dispositions and toward rigorous academic integrity and professional ethics. Equally, the longstanding tradition of frugality, advocating restrained consumption and moderate expenditure, helps students adopt sustainable labor values and consciously resist extravagance. At another register, the practical disposition associated with a hands-on spirit works against tendencies such as unrealistic ambition and empty rhetoric visible among some students. Once traditional labor principles are threaded through all parts of the educational process, students can apprehend their spiritual core through direct participation and, by way of that engagement, shape personal character. What follows is a tighter coordination between labor practice and spiritual cultivation. The ethical scope of university labor education is thereby broadened, and a mutually reinforcing dynamic emerges in which culture nourishes the spirit, while spirit, in turn, animates labor practice ^[8].

3. Practical approaches for integrating China's outstanding traditional culture into labor education in higher education institutions

A marked consonance characterizes the internal logic linking China's outstanding traditional culture with labor education in higher education institutions. Under the conditions of the new era, such institutions can further this integration through calibrated refinement of the curriculum system, broader extension of educational scenarios, and the cultivation of a corresponding cultural atmosphere, thus bringing about a deeper level of integration and a more effective form of functional synergy between the two.

3.1. Reconstructing the curriculum system: Achieving deep integration of traditional culture and labor education courses

The curriculum constitutes the principal operational carrier of labor education and, at the same time, the primary route through which traditional culture can be meaningfully embedded within it. For labor-related courses in higher education, a single-track or narrowly instrumental design is insufficient. Course development should instead draw on the labor-education resources embedded in China's fine traditional culture. Universities should therefore reframe the curriculum as a whole, deepen the integration of traditional culture with labor education, and ensure that cultural formation runs through every stage of teaching.

At the curriculum-planning stage, universities should first undertake a systematic review of traditional labor-cultural resources. This review should identify and consolidate core elements, including the culture of farming and scholarship, the spirit of craftsmanship, the virtues of diligence and frugality, and the principle of practical action. These resources should then be organized according to teaching content and delivery modes, rather than presented as isolated cultural references. On this basis, universities can embed them in compulsory labor-education courses, elective modules, and themed lectures, thus forming a three-tier structure of foundational, extended, and advanced courses^[9].

In the foundational tier, the central task is to convey traditional labor values and strengthen students' basic understanding of labor. In the extended tier, teaching should place greater emphasis on traditional skills and the spirit of labor, enabling students to develop a broader understanding of labor's meanings. In the advanced tier, priority should shift to cultural innovation, with sustained attention to the cultivation of students' capacity for innovation in labor-related practice.

Across the whole process of course development, universities should refine both teaching content and instructional logic. Without such work, the curriculum risks becoming a fragmented collection of cultural materials. The key requirement is deeper integration between the substance of traditional labor culture and the knowledge system of modern labor education. At the theoretical level, labor education should incorporate analysis of traditional labor philosophy, labor ethics, and labor values. This approach would help build a labor-theory framework with distinctive local characteristics.

3.2. Creating diverse scenarios: Developing an immersive cultural labor education platform

Labor education realizes its pedagogical aims through practice. Practice-based settings, varied in form and intensity, create the conditions in which students can internalize traditional culture as a durable orientation and translate it into stable patterns of conduct. Beyond the conventional classroom, universities can integrate on-campus and off-campus resources into a coherent practice platform. Such a platform links classroom teaching, campus life, and social participation. Within it, students can come to recognize the value of traditional culture through sustained engagement in labor activities and, in that process, cultivate sound dispositions towards labor.

On campus, priority should be given to developing labor-practice resources by embedding traditional labor culture in everyday activities. These include campus housekeeping, voluntary service, and campus construction and maintenance. This approach can create an immersive setting for labor education. When students undertake routine tasks such as landscape maintenance, environmental cleaning and logistical support, values such as frugality and pragmatism can be

cultivated alongside practical competence. Here, these values are enacted in ordinary practice rather than presented as abstract slogans. Consistent with this, campus cultural programs and more focused activities can strengthen the educational setting. Traditional handicraft workshops, lectures on agrarian and scholarly culture, and labor-themed campaigns can all help shape a campus ethos that values and sustains long-standing labor traditions.

Beyond the classroom and campus, universities can broaden practical education through social practice, voluntary service, study tours and related activities. These forms can build a bridge between traditional culture and concrete labor experience. By collaborating with local intangible cultural heritage studios, traditional culture education bases, and rural revitalization sites, universities can support instruction in traditional crafts, immersion in agricultural culture, and public-interest initiatives centered on cultural transmission. Under such authentic working conditions, students can acquire traditional skills and develop a fuller understanding of the spirit of labor as it appears in practice.

Taken together, the construction of multi-layer practice scenarios helps alleviate the persistent disjunction between theoretical instruction and practical application, prompting a shift in students from passive knowledge reception toward active participation and experience-based learning. Through immersive labor activities, students' understanding of traditional culture is deepened; through the same process, that culture is further incorporated into their value structures and everyday practice. What emerges, ultimately, is a unity of knowledge and action through which the educational objective of cultivating both mind and body by means of labor—while shaping character through cultural immersion—may be realized.

3.3. Strengthening cultural immersion: Fostering a campus environment that values labor and culture

As a durable—though often understated—educational modality, cultural immersion exerts influence that is quiet in its outward form yet far-reaching in its eventual effects. Where the cultural ecology of the university campus is developed with sufficient quality, a deep coupling of traditional culture and labor education can be realized, thereby generating an educational outcome whose force is not ostentatious but enduring. In line with the internal logic through which education shapes culture, universities should foster a campus culture anchored in pragmatism, respect for labor, and a humanistic orientation, while extending traditional labor culture across the full spectrum of campus educational settings, so that environment, culture, and labor education are woven together organically rather than aligned in a merely procedural fashion.

As a foundational carrier of educational cultivation, the campus cultural environment warrants systematic shaping. Into public campus spaces—including landscape layouts, cultural corridors, bulletin areas, classrooms, and dormitories—elements of traditional labor culture may be carefully incorporated. Through visual presentation, sculptural forms, and cultural walls, traditional labor aphorisms, craft-spirit stories, and the cultural core of “farming and reading” can be rendered tangible and continuously present (not just ceremonially displayed). In this way, students gradually and almost imperceptibly encounter the influence of traditional labor culture within everyday study and living routines, a process that, over time, consolidates their value-based recognition of respecting labor and esteeming labor.

Within campus development, cultural activities constitute an indispensable pillar, which in turn makes necessary a long-term institutional arrangement for labor-culture education. Regular programming should therefore include activities such as themed class meetings focused on traditional labor culture, knowledge contests, essay and speech competitions, presentations on artisanal accomplishment, and demonstrations of traditional craft practices; through such activities, the spirit and core values attached to traditional labor can be communicated with greater continuity and force. At the level of student organizations, campus clubs can serve as an effective entry point: specialized associations centered on traditional handicrafts, farming-and-reading culture, and intangible cultural heritage preservation should be established, thereby encouraging students to organize relevant labor practices on their own initiative and to participate in them directly, with intrinsic motivation for preserving traditional culture and engaging in hands-on work that gradually takes shape.

4. Conclusion

Within higher education institutions, deeply embedding China's excellent traditional culture into labor education constitutes a crucial route for carrying out the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talent in the new era, while also pushing labor education toward substantive, practice-grounded development. At the same time, this integration serves as a concrete carrier for the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture. Beneath this coupling lies a discernible inner logic: convergent value orientations, mutually compatible educational concepts, and a shablu spiritual core, all of which rest on a comparatively solid scholarly basis.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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