

An Exploration into the Transformation of University Talent Cultivation Models and Connotation Construction in the New Era

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Abstract: The new era has raised higher value expectations and more profound quality requirements for higher education. University talent cultivation is undergoing a comprehensive transformation from scale expansion to quality improvement, from knowledge-based to competency-based, and from one-way indoctrination to subjective construction. This transformation is by no means a mere change of methods, but a systematic reshaping involving educational philosophy, institutional frameworks, and cultural ecology. As the internal foundation of this transformation, connotation construction focuses on returning to the original essence of fostering virtue through education and the deep generation of a quality culture. This paper explores the logical path, core dimensions, connotation implications, coupling mechanisms, and practical dilemmas, revealing the dialectical relationship in which model transformation and connotation construction are mutually reinforcing and serve as two-way drivers for each other. On this basis, it proposes future practical approaches, offering a theoretical reference for deepening university educational reform in the new era.

Keywords: New Era; University Talent Cultivation; Model Transformation; Connotation Construction; Fostering Virtue through Education

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1. Introduction

Contemporary China is simultaneously undergoing the profound interweaving of the grand national rejuvenation strategy, once-in-a-century global changes, and the new technological revolution. The development of the Party and the people's cause requires successive generations of socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. Facing this "unprecedented great undertaking" and coping with unprecedented risks and challenges, deepening the transformation of the talent cultivation model and striving to build a high-quality education system have become urgent requirements for serving the overall national strategy^[1]. In 2023, China's gross higher education enrollment rate reached 60.2%, establishing the world's largest higher education system, which is now advancing toward high-quality universalization^[2]. Its core proposition has shifted from "whether one can attend university" to "what kind of university one attends and what kind of education one receives." This shift signifies a fundamental displacement in society's expectations of universities: they are no longer merely required to output human resources equipped with specialized knowledge, but are more urgently expected to cultivate a new generation capable of leading the future, possessing sound

personalities, and shouldering great responsibilities. At the same time, the explosive growth of knowledge, the accelerating iteration of artificial intelligence, and the disruptive transformation of learning methods have plunged the traditional cultivation model characterized by one-way knowledge transmission into a deep crisis of legitimacy. Students' channels for acquiring information are unprecedentedly diverse, teachers' authority is no longer built upon a monopoly on knowledge, and if classrooms still rigidly adhere to lecturing, listening, memorizing, and testing, it becomes very difficult to activate the mind, cultivate character, and spark creativity.

Against this backdrop, the transformation of the talent cultivation model has become the core barrier to university reform, while connotation construction constitutes its value foundation and quality assurance. The two are not mutually separate task sequences, but rather two sides of the same process of change: if transformation lacks solid connotation support, it easily degenerates into a piling up of techniques or a renovation of slogans; if connotation lacks the carrier and activation of model innovation, it may remain stuck at the conceptual level, unable to be transformed into real educational effectiveness. This paper attempts a systematic theoretical exploration of the two, clarifying the logic and dimensions of transformation and the deep structure of connotation construction, discerning the coupling and interaction mechanism between them, and, based on reflection on practical dilemmas, proposing reconstruction paths, with the aim of providing rational understanding for the deep-level reform of the university talent cultivation system in the new era.

2. The Logical Path of Talent Cultivation Model Transformation

The transformation of the university talent cultivation model is not a sudden whim, but the inevitable result of the confluence of threefold logic: historical evolution, theoretical development, and practical reflection.

From the perspective of historical logic, higher education has gone through the liberal arts cultivation of a select few top talents in the elite stage, the mass training of applied professionals in the popularization stage, and is now moving toward the comprehensive literacy enhancement of all citizens in the universalization stage. In this historic leap, the cultivation model must shift from mere knowledge transmission to student-centered comprehensive quality development^[3]. The educational functions of universities are constantly differentiating and reorganizing, and tensions persist between knowledge transmission and character cultivation, general education and specialized training, social service and cultural inheritance. The student body in the universalization era is more diverse, and their developmental needs are no longer limited to obtaining a diploma or a specific skill, but rather pursue self-realization, social identity, and the holistic construction of life's meaning. This inevitably requires breaking through the past cultivation model characterized by standardization and homogenization, moving toward a more flexible, open, and personalized form of education.

From the perspective of theoretical logic, the development of cognitive science and learning theories continuously refreshes people's understanding of the educational process. Constructivism reveals that knowledge is not a passively received object but a product of the learner's active construction in context; holistic education theory emphasizes the overall participation of cognition, emotion, will, and body; theories of embodied cognition and situated learning point out that learning is deeply embedded in concrete practices and cultural contexts. These theoretical consensuses fundamentally shake the traditional foundations of "teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and classroom-centered," prompting the center of gravity of education to shift from the performance of "teaching" to the generation of "learning," and from information transmission to the co-construction of meaning. Simultaneously, the laws governing education's internal and external relations also indicate that education must adapt to social development and promote the all-round development of individuals. The critical thinking, collaborative ability, cross-cultural understanding, and ethical sensitivity required by current society are very difficult to cultivate in a closed, linear, and shallow transmission model.

From the perspective of practical logic, the accumulated drawbacks of the traditional cultivation model are increasingly apparent. A cultivation system centered on knowledge delivery tends to lead to the suspension of student subjectivity, the weakening of higher-order thinking, and superficial value guidance; excessively rigid disciplinary divisions and standardized evaluation mechanisms suppress personality development and cross-disciplinary integration; the teacher-student relationship degenerates into a knowledge transaction, severely compressing the space for spiritual communication and personality inspiration. When society's demands for students' comprehensive qualities become increasingly multi-dimensional, while the

actual cultivation effectiveness falls short of expectations, the practical field inevitably generates an intrinsic impulse for self-transcendence, forcing a model transformation. Therefore, the transformation of the talent cultivation model can be seen as a collective effort for the return of educational subjectivity, a deep swing back from instrumental logic to humanistic logic, with its fundamental aim being the reconstruction of education's concern for the whole person.

3. The Core Dimensions of Talent Cultivation Model Transformation

The transformation of the talent cultivation model is not a piecemeal repair but a multi-dimensional reconstruction encompassing objectives, curriculum, teaching, organization, and evaluation, with each dimension nested within the others to form an organic whole.

First, the reshaping of cultivation objectives. Traditional cultivation objectives were often reduced to the mastery of knowledge points and the training of skills, fragmenting the wholeness of the person. The cultivation objectives of the new era must return to the fundamental task of “fostering virtue through education,” take the core socialist values as the guiding principle, and distill a core competency framework that combines patriotism and sense of belonging, a global vision, innovative spirit, and practical ability. This kind of objective is no longer a static list of specifications but a continuously generated ideal vision of personality, encompassing both deep cultural identity and ethical commitment, as well as general competencies like cross-disciplinary thinking, critical judgment, collaborative communication, and more. The elevation of objectives requires the cultivation process to shift from “processing” to “growing,” providing a value anchor for the subsequent transformation of other dimensions. This reshaping of objectives also requires us to integrate, in practice, the value guidance of “cultivating people through aesthetics and culture,” achieving deep-level shaping of students' values through the synergy of aesthetic education and ideological and political education ^[4].

Second, the reconstruction of the curriculum system. The curriculum is the carrier of cultivation objectives. The curriculum system under transformation must break down disciplinary barriers and departmental boundaries, constructing a modular structure of “integration of general and specialized education, cross-penetration.” General education must not degenerate into a patchwork of introductory courses serving as mere decoration; instead, it should be committed to intellectual enlightenment and cultural cultivation, guiding students to form a deep understanding of classic readings, value inquiries, and cutting-edge issues. Specialized education needs to eliminate outdated and redundant content, strengthen methodology transmission and problem orientation, and engage in high-level interaction with industrial practice and scientific research. Most importantly, curriculum-based ideological and political education, as an educational concept of value integration, should not be misinterpreted as a simple addition of political discourse. Instead, it must permeate all curriculum elements with educational values—like salt dissolving seamlessly into water—through the intrinsic spiritual dimension of knowledge, the humanistic care within disciplinary history, and the ethical considerations in professional practice, thereby achieving the organic unity of knowledge transmission, ability cultivation, and value guidance. Furthermore, utilizing big data and artificial intelligence technologies to promote precision in ideological and political education can provide more scientific effectiveness evaluation and personalized pathway references for implementing curriculum-based ideological and political education ^[5].

Third, the transformation of teaching paradigms. Teaching reform is the most direct manifestation of the model transformation. Traditional lecture-based teaching cannot meet the requirements of cultivating high-level abilities and must shift towards inquiry-based teaching centered on problems, experience-based teaching centered on projects, and interactive teaching centered on dialogue. Teachers' roles should change from knowledge authorities to learning designers and spiritual interlocutors, and classrooms should transform from monologue spaces into learning communities. Meanwhile, digital technology, as a “ubiquitous” variable, has profoundly reshaped the boundaries of learning. The integration of online and offline learning ecosystems makes autonomous learning and precise assistance possible, but it is necessary to be vigilant against the fragmentation and isolation brought about by technology. The true transformation of teaching paradigms does not lie in the dazzling equipment, but in the shift of the teacher-student relationship from asymmetrical domination to symbiosis among subjects, thereby achieving the integration of cognitive stimulation and spiritual impact.

Fourth, innovation in organizational forms. The rigid professional class and single departmental structure are no longer capable of meeting the demands of interdisciplinary cultivation and personalized growth. New grassroots educational

organizations are constantly emerging. Modern college systems emphasize coexistence between teachers and students, shared reading of classics, and integration of life, attempting to create a close academic and spiritual community beyond the disciplinary structure. Interdisciplinary platforms, future colleges, and industrial colleges, on the other hand, form flexible learning units based on major issues, providing students with a multi-disciplinary perspective and real-world experience. The essence of organizational innovation lies in breaking the excessive regulation of educational logic by administrative logic, allowing the system to once again serve the growth rhythm of individuals and build a flexible, open, and softly-bounded educational ecosystem.

Fifth, reform of the evaluation mechanism. Evaluation is the baton that controls the direction of change. Transformation requires a shift from the one-dimensional score evaluation dominated by terminal exams to a multi-dimensional, evidence-based developmental evaluation. A student growth portrait should be constructed, including academic performance, quality development, and behavioral records, and multiple evaluation subjects such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and social evaluation should be introduced to form a dynamic feedback and improvement loop. Special attention should be paid to the concept of value-added evaluation, focusing on students' efforts and growth amplitude from different starting points, and avoiding violent comparisons based on standardized scales, thereby releasing the growth potential of every student. Only in this way can evaluation be elevated from a tool for punishment and ranking to a beacon for promoting reflective growth.

4. The Essential Implication and Multi-Dimensional Unfolding of Connotation Construction

If model transformation is the visible face of educational reform, then connotation construction is its invisible skeleton and soul. Connotation construction is a continuous response to the fundamental question of "what is good education," and its essence points to the deep self-awareness of the university's mission to foster virtue through education and the intrinsic generation of a quality culture.

Conceptual connotation is the spiritual source of connotation construction. Amidst the clamor, the university must reconfirm its *raison d'être*: not merely a knowledge factory or a career springboard, but a spiritual temple for truth-seeking, cultural heritage, and personality cultivation. This requires reforging the "spirit of the idea" of what makes a university a university, balancing academic freedom with social responsibility, and internalizing the fostering of virtue through education as the value axis for all activities. If the guiding philosophy is vacillating or shallow, all technical improvements will be like duckweed without roots.

Institutional connotation is the rigid guarantee of connotation construction. It involves the improvement of the modern university governance system, requiring academic power and administrative power to be properly positioned and organically coordinated, fostering an institutional environment that stimulates the creative tension of teachers and students. When professional title evaluation favors research over teaching, talent titles proliferate excessively, and managerialism continuously erodes grassroots autonomous space, the system will be alienated into a force that dissolves the original aspiration of fostering virtue through education. To cultivate connotation, it is essential to strengthen the educational orientation of institutional supply, so that teachers can teach with peace of mind and students can study with tranquility, making rules a bulwark that protects, rather than depletes, educational ideals.

Resource connotation takes high-level faculty as the core fulcrum. The quality of the teaching staff directly determines the possible heights that talent cultivation can reach. Cultivating connotation means that faculty development must be placed as a strategic priority, with a comprehensive career-long support system established. Special emphasis should be placed on cultivating educational passion, teaching ability, and educational wisdom, fortifying the first line of defense in teacher ethics and conduct. Sound institutional supply should encourage the revival and vitality of grassroots teaching organizations (such as teaching and research offices and teaching teams), enabling them to become solid fortresses at the micro level that carry the mission of fostering virtue through education^[6]. Cultural connotation is the most enduring and resilient layer of connotation construction. Whether the air of the university is filled with the anxiety of short-term utilitarianism or the steadfastness of calm dedication, whether what flows between the podium and the seats is restless conformity or sincere exploration—these intangible cultural states profoundly influence educational effectiveness. Cultivating excellent academic

atmosphere and institutional culture is essentially about shaping a community character that takes scholarship as a vocation, reflection as a habit, and honor and disgrace as concerns. Cultivating people through culture means allowing the university spirit, permeating every blade of grass and every word and deed, to become a silent yet powerful educational force, enabling students to internalize it as their spiritual temperament through long-term immersion. This intrinsic quality cannot be rapidly produced, yet it endures the longest.

5. The Coupling and Interaction Mechanism between Model Transformation and Connotation Construction

There exists a profound coupling and interactive relationship between talent cultivation model transformation and connotation construction. The two form a dynamically evolving “double helix” structure, jointly propelling the spiraling ascent of educational quality.

Connotation construction provides value orientation and fundamental support for model transformation. The exploration of any model cannot suspend the value inquiry of “for what purpose we are transforming.” Without a firm educational philosophy, sound institutional guarantees, and a profound cultural soil, transformation can very easily slide into the pursuit of technical fads, falling into the hollow predicament of “new bottles for old wine” or even “new bottles with no wine.” For example, introducing a residential college system without corresponding mentor investment and spiritual community building, promoting curriculum restructuring without deep teacher understanding and institutional tolerance, or empowering education with technology without human warmth and ethical examination—the root cause of such formalistic transformations lies in the weak support of connotation. Connotation construction is precisely about injecting soul and laying a solid foundation for transformation, ensuring that every step of the change is oriented toward the person themselves.

Transformation practice, in turn, provides implementation carriers and feedback drivers for connotation construction. If advanced ideas remain confined to texts and slogans, not being transformed into perceivable, operable educational processes, they will ultimately wither. The transformation of the talent cultivation model is precisely the action field where conceptual connotations move toward reality. Through concrete practices such as goal reshaping, curriculum refinement, and teaching innovation, abstract connotation pursuits are given vivid representation. At the same time, the problems exposed, experiences accumulated, and reflections generated during the transformation process continuously feed back into the connotation system, prompting it to adjust, deepen, and self-transcend. Some universities, by reconstructing comprehensive evaluation systems for teaching contributions or integrating digital-intelligence technology into teaching quality management, have successfully realized a virtuous mutual feedback between institutional connotation and model transformation^[6].

The co-evolution of the two requires a kind of systemic integration thinking. Universities must transcend departmental silos and self-interested logic, constructing a collaborative governance framework that spans teaching, research, human resources, student affairs, and other domains. Centered on the core proposition of “how to cultivate people,” they must form a holistic “all-member, whole-process, all-round” educational pattern with convergent goals and synchronized actions. Any approach that severs transformation from connotation, emphasizes hardware over software, or pursues isolated bright spots while neglecting the systemic ecology will find it difficult to achieve a fundamental improvement in educational quality. This requires universities to adopt a system design approach, break down departmental barriers, and construct a new multi-party collaborative education system such as “Grand General Education + Small General Education + Specialized Education”^[7].

6. Conclusion

The transformation of the talent cultivation model and the connotation construction in universities in the new era is both a practical proposition answering the call of the times and a profound self-awareness returning to the true essence of education. The two are like the two wheels of a cart or the two wings of a bird; only by moving in coordination and exerting force in the same direction can educational quality be genuinely enhanced, enabling the university to become not only a place for knowledge transmission but also a forge for the spirit and a habitat for the soul. This undertaking is destined to have no endpoint. Only through continuous reflection and self-transcendence can universities truly shoulder the sacred responsibility of shaping the future and cultivate a new generation of well-rounded individuals capable of shouldering the great task of

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