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A Practical Study on Integrating the Philosophy of "Life as Education" into General Education in Application-Oriented Universities: A Case Study of Chongqing College of Mobile Communication

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Abstract

"Life as Education" is the core of Tao Xingzhi's educational thought and holds significant implications for the reform of general education in application-oriented universities. Since its establishment, the General Education Department of Chongqing College of Mobile Communication has integrated this philosophy into its general education framework, establishing a system of "extracurricular practice-based learning + on-campus educational ecology". Externally, using multidisciplinary courses as vehicles, the college connects knowledge with life through activities such as agricultural labor and intangible cultural heritage practices. Internally, relying on the college's residential college system, labor education, and coordinated volunteer activities, a closed-loop educational system is achieved. This practice realizes the unity of knowledge activation and competency cultivation, providing a valuable reference for general education in application-oriented undergraduate institutions.

Keywords: Life as Education; Tao Xingzhi; General Education; Chongqing College of Mobile Communication; Practice-Based Education

Tao Xingzhi's proposition of "Life as Education" constitutes a cornerstone of modern Chinese educational thought. Criticizing the model of "rote learning," he advocated for "Life as Education, Society as School, and the Unity of Teaching, Learning, and Doing," emphasizing the symbiosis between education and life—life as the source of education, and education as a necessity of life. The concept of "using life to educate, educating for life" breaks the constraints of the classroom and directly

targets the goal of cultivating new individuals equipped with both life skills and a sense of responsibility. This philosophy also provides a fundamental guideline for general education at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication. In an era where higher education focuses on cultivating application-oriented talents, Tao Xingzhi's thought becomes even more valuable. General education aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals, which highly aligns with the core tenet of "the symbiosis of life and education." However, the current problem in some universities' general education—the disconnect between classroom and life—is precisely the malady Tao Xingzhi criticized. Particularly in the transmission of traditional culture, only practical experience can achieve spiritual internalization, a concept consistent with the epistemology that "doing is the beginning of knowing." Over eleven years of dedicated practice, Chongqing College of Mobile Communication has integrated "Life as Education" into its curriculum, practices, and campus culture, building an educational system that "bridges on-campus and off-campus experiences and links the classroom with life." This approach transforms educational philosophy into tangible outcomes, providing a vivid model for the reform of general education in higher education institutions.

I. The Practical Philosophical View of Tao Xingzhi's Life Education

Mr. Tao Xingzhi, as a "great people's educator," advanced a theory of life education that is not merely a set of educational methods but a practical philosophy deeply rooted in Chinese soil, integrating Eastern and Western thought and oriented

towards reality. To deeply understand the value of the "Life as Education" philosophy in contemporary general education, it is first necessary to clarify its philosophical foundations—specifically, how Tao Xingzhi, drawing on dialectical and historical materialism, reconstructed the dialectical relationship between life and education, theory and practice. This practical philosophical perspective constitutes the soul of the general education reform at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication.

(I) The Ontology of "Life as Education": The Dialectical Unity of Life and Education

Although a student of John Dewey, Tao Xingzhi turned Dewey's "Education as Life" on its head, proposing "Life as Education." This reversal is not merely a play on words but a revolution in educational ontology. He stated: "Give education to life, use life to educate, and educate for the needs of life to move forward and upward." This means that life is no longer the external environment of education but constitutes the very substance and entirety of education. From an ontological perspective, life is the root and foundation of education: life determines education—its origins, purposes, content, and methods are all determined by life; simultaneously, education transforms life, as good education can guide life towards a higher realm of "moving forward and upward." This monistic dialectical thinking breaks the binary opposition between "knowledge" and "action," "school" and "society" in traditional education, establishing an educational worldview centered on life. As Professor Wang Hongxia

asserts, Tao Xingzhi defined the essence of education as "returning to the lifeworld and transcending it," which is the first principle of his practical philosophy.

(II) The Methodology of "Unity of Teaching, Learning, and Doing": The Unity of Knowledge and Action Centered on "Doing"

The core methodology of Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy lies in the "Unity of Teaching, Learning, and Doing." Criticizing Wang Yangming's view that "knowledge is the beginning of action," he proposed that "doing is the beginning of knowing, and knowing is the achievement of doing," eventually forming the dialectical developmental view of "doing-knowing-doing." He emphasized: "How a thing is done is how it is learned; how it is learned is how it is taught; regarding the thing, it is doing; regarding oneself, it is learning; regarding others, it is teaching." Here, "doing" is not merely physical labor or blind action but a creative practice of "laboring with the mind while using the hands." It contains three indispensable elements: action, thought, and the generation of new value. "Doing is the beginning of knowing, and knowing is the achievement of doing" – this epistemology shifts the starting point of education from books to practice, from static reception to dynamic creation. His assertion that "action is the mother of thought" profoundly reveals the foundational significance of practice for the generation of theory, making education a living process of "unity of knowledge and action."

(III) The Field Theory of "Society as School": The Complete Liberation of Educational Space

If "Life as Education" is the ontology and "Unity of Teaching, Learning, and Doing" is the method, then "Society as School" is the spatial expansion of the practical philosophy. Tao Xingzhi used a vivid metaphor: "To release a caged bird into the sky to soar freely is to extend everything in the school into nature." He rejected the myth of the traditional school as an isolated unit of education, advocating that the entire society (villages, cities, factories, fields) serves as the venue for education. The philosophical significance of this proposition lies in the fact that education is no longer a privileged activity confined by walls but a universal practice of self-transformation and self-improvement by the people within the vast expanse of social life. It reflects Tao Xingzhi's respect for the people's status as subjects and highlights the people-oriented and practical nature of his educational philosophy.

Therefore, Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy of life education is a philosophy centered on life as the core, employing "doing" as the method, and utilizing society as the field, aimed at cultivating "authentic individuals" possessing life skills, creativity, and the spirit to transform society. It fundamentally corrects the traditional educational drawbacks of "valuing knowledge over action" and "detachment from life," providing the most profound theoretical resources for the reform of general education in contemporary application-oriented universities. Chongqing College of Mobile Communication, standing precisely at this philosophical height, systematically translates the "Life as Education" philosophy into actionable educational practices.

II. Construction of a Pluralistic Model for Extracurricular General Education Practice

Tao Xingzhi's "Life as Education" philosophy, emphasizing the symbiosis of education and life, provides the fundamental guideline for general education at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication. Within the context of cultivating application-oriented talents, our general education core courses adhere to this philosophy, aiming to "understand life through economic thinking" and "cultivate character through ethical practice."

(I) Economics Course: Cultivating the Ability of "Applying Knowledge to Serve Society" in Daily Life

Departing from theoretical indoctrination, the course establishes a standardized process of "research-practice-seminar." Instructors lead interdisciplinary student teams to engage in rapeseed farming activities in Hechuan's farmlands. Students participate in cutting, transporting, and threshing rapeseed using traditional tools. Guided by farmers, students move from unfamiliarity to proficiency, appreciating the value of labor and the hardships of people's livelihoods, while enhancing the inclusiveness of general education through collaboration. After the labor, teachers and students move to a supermarket to investigate the "rapeseed oil industry chain," recording information on brands like (Jin Long Yu). They discover that genetically modified rapeseed oil is approximately 80% of the price of non-GMO oil, with older consumers focusing on price and younger ones on quality. In the

classroom, teachers deconstruct abstract concepts like "supply and demand" and "cost-benefit" using the research findings, making economic principles tangible and relatable through lived experience. During seminar sessions, students express their views based on economic principles. This model of "Unity of Teaching, Learning, and Doing" vividly exemplifies Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy that "action is the mother of thought." Through their own "doing" (labor, research), students encounter genuine difficulties and questions (price differences, consumption preferences), which then drive "learning" (discussion, analysis) and "teaching" (instructor guidance, seminars), ultimately achieving the mutual construction of knowledge and action. This interdisciplinary integration cultivates students' general abilities to solve life problems using multidisciplinary knowledge.

(II) Philosophy Course: Practical Shaping of Humanistic Spirit and Value Identity

The course "The World Initiated by Socrates and Confucius" uses Confucian filial piety as its core carrier, focusing on the essential idea that "filial piety is the root of virtue" and extending to the ethical dimension of "respecting the elderly in one's own family and extending it to the elderly of others." It establishes a teaching pathway of "theoretical explanation—social practice—cultural integration," realizing the contextualization of ethical education. Breaking classroom boundaries, the course organizes faculty and students to visit the Heping Rehabilitation Nursing Home in Hechuan District, transforming "filial piety" from a conceptual term in classics into

concrete actions. Centered on "emotional companionship," students engage in conversations, daily care, birthday wishes, and other activities. The tea-presenting ceremony becomes a key vehicle for ethical interpretation—the careful selection of tea leaves, the meticulous control of water temperature, and the attentive method of pouring—each step imbued with the meaning of "respecting elders," allowing students to grasp the ethical essence of "filial piety rooted in reverence." This process profoundly embodies Tao Xingzhi's practical methodology of "laboring with the mind while using the hands." Students do not passively receive ethical dogma; rather, through the process of "doing" (presenting tea, providing companionship) involving physical participation and emotional investment, they achieve a direct, experiential knowledge (qin zhi) of the abstract concept of "filial piety." As Tao Xingzhi stated, "the root of true knowledge is anchored in experience." In authentic social scenarios, students acquire the "true knowledge" of ethics, transforming traditional culture from symbols in books into a living faith.

(III) History Course: Dynamic Cultivation of Cultural Heritage and Innovative Ability

The history course conducts joint teaching activities with the Xia 砚 (Xiayan) Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum. Through experiences in traditional crafts like rubbings and pyrography, a three-dimensional educational model of "theory + skill + culture" is constructed. The course invites Master Huang, an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage, for on-site guidance. His extensive practical experience effectively

complements the teaching of university faculty. The rubbing group focuses on traditional patterns such as tigers, roosters, and monkeys, completing steps from moistening the paper, covering it with a cloth, tapping, and coloring under the inheritor's guidance. The pyrography group uses gourds as a medium, focusing on the critical aspect of "temperature control." This model of "inheritor-led practice and reflection" is an exemplar of Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy that "doing is the beginning of knowing." Students do not learn about intangible cultural heritage by listening to lectures in the classroom but directly enter the stage of "doing"—during tapping and pyrography, they encounter concrete difficulties ("how to control the temperature," "how to make the pattern clear"), which generate questions. The questions drive hypotheses (adjusting force, changing angles), which are then tested through repeated trials to reach conclusions, ultimately forming true knowledge of the craft. This is a practical unfolding of Tao Xingzhi's dialectical epistemology: "Action gives rise to difficulty; difficulty gives rise to doubt; doubt gives rise to hypothesis; hypothesis gives rise to experiment; experiment gives rise to judgment; judgment gives rise to new action."

III. Systematic Construction of an On-Campus General Education Practice System

Extracurricular course practice primarily addresses "how knowledge is activated," while the on-campus educational ecology undertakes the function of "how competencies are internalized." Relying on its residential college system, labor

education, and volunteer services, Chongqing College of Mobile Communication has established an on-campus educational closed-loop characterized by "community-based living + normalized practice + socialized service."

(I) Residential College System: A Core Hub for Community-Based Cultural Heritage

The residential colleges at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication serve as the core vehicle for the "second classroom" of general education. Utilizing the interdisciplinary mentor system, they integrate cultural heritage into daily life scenarios. The "Sanjiang Qihuang" Traditional Chinese Medicine Health Night Market, organized by Huaguo Residential College, attracted over 800 faculty and students for immersive participation. Physicians provided on-site pulses diagnosis and moxibustion services, while students engaged with TCM wisdom through activities like DIY herbal sachets and weaving wristbands based on the Five Elements. Regular activities such as sachet-making and tea tasting further deepen students' understanding of traditional culture. The essence of the residential colleges lies in the spatial practice of "Life as Education." This highly aligns with Tao Xingzhi's concept of "Society as School"—the residential college itself is a small society, and the cultural life students lead there (tea appreciation, sachet-making, consultations) constitutes the cultural education they receive. As Tao Xingzhi said, "the life one leads is the education one receives." Residential college life transforms cultural heritage from "passive

reception" to "active participation," enabling students to construct their cultural identity through daily life.

(II) Labor Education: Value Shaping through Normalized Practice

The campus lotus root digging activity, a core component of on-campus labor education, has been held annually since 2012 for 14 consecutive years, with over 15,000 student participants Cumulatively. It has been featured in China Education Daily. The college has designated a 3-acre practice base and established a three-dimensional assessment standard involving "practical operation + outcome report + peer evaluation," linking it to credits for the "Labor Education" course. Students form teams based on their residential colleges, collaborating in the muddy fields. Through the process of digging for lotus roots, they directly experience the dialectical relationship between "effort and harvest." This labor education practice profoundly embodies Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy of "laboring with the mind while using the hands." Students not only engage in physical labor ("using the hands") but also in mental labor ("using the mind")—they need to think about how to collaborate to improve efficiency, how to minimize damage to the lotus roots, and write reflection reports after the activity, elevating their labor experience into a conscious understanding of values like "the utmost honor of labor" and "team collaboration." This completes the spiral process Tao Xingzhi described as "action—knowledge—renewed action," achieving the internalization of value shaping.

(III) Volunteer Services: Cultivating Responsibility through Socialized Practice

Chongqing College of Mobile Communication has established a volunteer service system characterized by "two-level university/institutional coordination + digital management," extending general education into the social realm. The University-level Youth Volunteer Federation coordinates resources, while school-level associations conduct targeted services based on their disciplinary strengths. The "Zhiyuanhui" app enables comprehensive information management and articulation with the "Holistic Education" credit system. The university promotes diversified brand projects: establishing the "Huaguo" Volunteer Training School, advancing the "Rural Revitalization" special initiative, and co-building "Community Schools" with residential communities in Hechuan. Volunteer service is the most direct contemporary practice of Tao Xingzhi's "Society as School" philosophy. Students step out of the campus and into society. Through the act of "doing" by serving others and participating in social governance, they gain "experiential knowledge" (qin zhi) unattainable in the classroom. Encountering difficulties while interacting with diverse populations, they generate questions and learn to respond, completing their social development. This model of "learning through service" tempers students' sense of social responsibility, public spirit, and civic capacity in the crucible of authentic social life, embodying Tao Xingzhi's dedication, as expressed in the phrase, "Come with a heart dedicated to service, take not a single blade of grass."

IV. The Value Implications of General Education Practice at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication

The "off-campus and on-campus dual-wheel drive" general education system, constructed by Chongqing College of Mobile Communication with "Life as Education" at its core, has effectively addressed the challenges of traditional general education, namely "fragmented knowledge and ritualized practice," achieving a progressive development of "knowledge-practice-value." Its core value lies in its threefold response to Tao Xingzhi's practical philosophy. **First**, it practices the epistemology of "doing is the beginning of knowing," promoting knowledge activation. From the agricultural research in the economics course to the nursing home practice in the philosophy course and the intangible cultural heritage experience in the history course, our general education consistently adheres to the principle of "learning by doing." Students gain "experiential knowledge" through direct experience, which then serves as the basis for absorbing "secondhand knowledge" and "inferred knowledge," transforming abstract theory into applicable, perceptible practical wisdom. This is not just an innovation in teaching methods but a localized practice of Tao Xingzhi's "doing-knowing-doing" dialectical epistemology. **Second**, it implements the methodology of "laboring with the mind while using the hands," achieving value guidance. Whether it is the realization of "effort and harvest" in lotus root digging or the empathy of "helping others and helping oneself" in volunteer service, our general education refuses the separation of knowledge and action, consistently insisting on the "integration of hand and brain." Students achieve spiritual

sublimation ("using the mind") through physical exertion ("using the hands"), internalizing external knowledge into their own character traits, thereby achieving the unity of "scoring points and educating the person." **Third**, it expands the field theory of "Society as School," cultivating well-rounded individuals. Through the living community of the residential college system, the social classroom of off-campus practice, and the vast realm of volunteer service, our university has broken down the walls of traditional education. Students construct a comprehensive connection between "the individual and society" through diverse life practices, growing into application-oriented talents equipped with professional competence, life wisdom, and a sense of social responsibility.

V. Conclusion

The general education practice at Chongqing College of Mobile Communication represents both an inheritance and innovation of Tao Xingzhi's "Life as Education" philosophy and a contemporary transformation of its practical philosophy. Its core lesson is: The essence of general education is "to bring knowledge back to life," and the essence of life is practice. Only by extending the educational context to the social scene and integrating it into the practices of life, enabling students to personally "do" and actively "act," can they labor with their minds while using their hands, seek knowledge through action, and achieve self-realization through creation. Within the context of cultivating application-oriented talents, the university's exploration provides a replicable and

transferable practical experience for similar institutions and offers a vivid model for the contemporary transformation of Tao Xingzhi's educational thought. In the future, general education in higher education institutions needs to further deepen its integration with life and practice, constructing a more vibrant educational system through theoretical innovation and practical exploration, ultimately realizing the ultimate mission of education "to return to the lifeworld and transcend it."

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