Nova Science

Vol. 01 | Issue 5 | 2026

Journal of Psychology & Education

ISSN: 3134-7460

Nova Science Press, HK

Issue Overview

Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

This issue of *Journal of Psychology & Education* brings together five articles that examine education, culture, psychology, technology, and philosophical reflection from both practical and theoretical perspectives. The issue opens with a practice-based study on primary school mental health education, which explores how the integration of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education can support children's psychological development through a school-based “1511” collaborative education system.

The issue then turns to rural aesthetic education in multi-ethnic regions, using paper-cutting art at Daping Middle School as a case to show how intangible cultural heritage can be incorporated into art teaching, campus culture, and the cultivation of a strong sense of the Chinese national community.

A third contribution offers a philosophical study of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, focusing on the internal relationship between the overman, the last man, and eternal recurrence. In the field of education policy, another article examines practical pathways for coordinating burden reduction and quality improvement in primary and secondary schools under China's Double Reduction policy, emphasizing homework redesign, classroom improvement, after-school services, home-school collaboration, and evaluation reform.

The issue concludes with a study of the ethical governance of generative-AI deep synthesis, analyzing authenticity crises, personality replication risks, content labeling, traceability, AI agents, and accountability. Together, these contributions reflect the journal's interdisciplinary orientation and demonstrate how educational practice, cultural inheritance, philosophical inquiry, policy reform, and technological ethics can jointly contribute to a deeper understanding of human development, social responsibility, and educational innovation.

Published by Nova Science Press, HK

Table of Contents

Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

Note. Page ranges refer to this complete issue PDF, including the cover and front-matter pages.

Published by Nova Science Press, HK

Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

Nurturing the Mind Through the Five Domains of Education: A Practice-Based Study of Primary School Mental Health Education From the Perspective of Integrated Education

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.66581/bmdgw658

Received 11 June 2026 • Accepted: 21 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Cheng, F. (2026). Nurturing the Mind Through the Five Domains of Education: A Practice-Based Study of Primary School Mental Health Education From the Perspective of Integrated Education. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 18.

Published by Nova Science Press, HK

Abstract

Primary school is a critical period for personality formation, emotional development, and the cultivation of psychological literacy. Mental health education is therefore not an auxiliary activity, but a foundational mechanism for implementing the fundamental educational task of fostering virtue. Traditional models of primary school mental health education often rely on isolated psychology lessons and remedial intervention after problems occur. Such models tend to fragment educational resources, narrow the range of learning contexts, and emphasize correction rather than daily psychological nourishment. This practice-based study, written from the perspective of a frontline primary school mental health teacher, takes the integration of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education as its organizing framework. Drawing on the school-based "1511" collaborative education system, it examines how moral education can shape psychological values, intellectual education can reduce learning anxiety, physical education can strengthen resilience, aesthetic education can nourish emotional life, and labor education can cultivate responsibility and positive energy. Through top-level institutional design, integrated five-domain classroom practice, home-school-community collaboration, and technology-enabled education, the study proposes a comprehensive, regularized, and developmentally nourishing model of primary school mental health education. The model aims to address practical difficulties in grassroots mental health work and to support the coordinated physical and psychological development of every child. It also provides a practical reference for improving the quality of primary school mental health education in the new era.

Keywords: five-domain integration; primary school mental health education; 1511 education system; home-school-community collaboration; child-centered education

Introduction

The Guidelines for Mental Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (2012 revision) clearly state that mental health education should be integrated into the entire process of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education, and should follow the principles of whole-staff, whole-process, and all-round education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012). With the continued deepening of basic education reform, the coordinated development and integration of the five domains of education have become a central orientation of quality education. Mental health education is no longer an auxiliary task separated from subject teaching; rather, it is a foundational project that runs through all five domains and supports the comprehensive development of students.

Primary school students are highly malleable in psychological development, tend to express emotions concretely, and remain strongly dependent on adult guidance. For these reasons, conventional approaches that rely only on specialized psychology courses or problem-centered interventions cannot sufficiently nourish students' inner worlds or cultivate their positive psychological qualities at the root. Contemporary primary school students grow up in increasingly complex environments and face more visible difficulties, including academic anxiety, interpersonal timidity, weak emotion-regulation ability, insufficient frustration tolerance, and biased self-understanding. Some schools still approach mental health education through a pattern of "more intervention than prevention," "more form than effect," and "more isolated action than whole-system integration." In such cases, mental health education is confined to psychology classes and individual counseling, while the broader psychological value of the five domains of education remains underused (Yu & He, 2023; Wang & Guo, 2021).

From the perspective of frontline psychological education, the five domains of education are highly compatible with mental health education. Moral education nourishes psychological character; intellectual education can reduce learning-related anxiety; physical education offers channels for releasing negative emotions; aesthetic education enriches emotional and spiritual life; and labor education strengthens responsibility, perseverance, and frustration tolerance. The integration of the five domains is therefore a central pathway for transforming school mental health education from passive correction to active nourishment.

Guided by the school philosophy that "when a hundred flowers bloom, spring fills the garden" and by a child-centered educational foundation, our school has built a "1511" mental health education system. In this system, "1" refers to one top-level design, "5" refers to the integration of the five domains of education, the second "1" refers to a collaborative mechanism linking school, family, and community, and the final "1" refers to the ultimate goal of comprehensive student development. Through years of practice, the school has embedded mental health education into the whole process of the five domains, into multiple scenes of campus life, and into home-school-community collaboration. This paper analyzes the internal educational logic, practical difficulties, and implementation pathways of primary school mental health education from the perspective of five-domain integration, with the aim of providing a practice-based reference for improving primary school psychological education and cultivating students' positive psychological qualities.

The Internal Educational Logic of Five-Domain Integration and Primary School Mental Health Education

Moral Education as Value Formation: Consolidating the Ideological Foundation of Mental Health

Moral education is the core of virtue-oriented education and the spiritual support of mental health education. Sound psychological development requires positive value guidance, moral cultivation, and an active attitude toward life. At the primary school stage, moral education helps students build rule awareness, develop affection for family and country, and cultivate kindness. These processes can correct undesirable psychological tendencies such as selfishness, defiance, and passivity while fostering confidence, kindness, tolerance, and perseverance. Mental health education that is detached from moral guidance can address surface emotional problems, but it cannot build a stable psychological core. From the perspective of five-domain integration, moral education and mental health education should be deeply connected. Moral education can guide the heart, while emotional education can warm the heart. Through moral cultivation, students gradually develop accurate understandings of self, others, and society, thereby reducing the conditions under which negative psychological emotions emerge.

Intellectual Education as Cognitive Activation: Reducing Psychological Anxiety in Student Growth

Intellectual education is a central part of school life and a major source of psychological pressure for students. Academic stress, classroom frustration, self-doubt about ability, and excessive competition are common causes of anxiety, school aversion, and inferiority among primary school students. Traditional intellectual education tends to emphasize knowledge

transmission and score improvement while neglecting students' learning experiences and psychological feelings. This easily places students in a passive learning state and reinforces self-doubt. Under the framework of five-domain integration, intellectual education should break away from score-only thinking and attend to students' psychological development. By building a classroom ecology that respects children's minds, accommodates differences, and encourages growth, schools can reduce academic anxiety. Growth-mindset cultivation, differentiated instruction, and positive reinforcement can help students experience learning in a relaxed and confident way, thereby enabling intellectual development and psychological nourishment to support each other.

Physical Education as Psychological Strengthening: Building a Resilient and Healthy Mental State

Physical condition and psychological condition are closely related. A healthy body provides a physiological basis for mental health, and physical activity is an effective vehicle for releasing negative emotions and cultivating stress tolerance. Primary school students experience large emotional fluctuations, accumulate negative feelings quickly, and often lack mature channels for emotional expression. As a result, they may experience emotional suppression and psychological imbalance. Physical education is interesting, practical, competitive, and cooperative. Through movement, students can release stress, express emotions, and strengthen willpower. Through team competition, they learn cooperation, tolerance, acceptance of winning and losing, and the ability to face setbacks. Physical education therefore helps improve psychological vulnerabilities such as isolation, fragility, and fear of difficulty, while cultivating optimism, resilience, and perseverance.

Aesthetic Education as Emotional Nourishment: Enriching the Inner World of Students

Aesthetic education is an important educational carrier for healing the mind and cultivating temperament. It has distinctive value for emotion regulation, aesthetic development, and self-identity among primary school students. Children at this stage are emotionally delicate and highly responsive to beautiful and meaningful experiences. Painting, singing, drama, handicrafts, and other artistic activities provide channels for emotional expression and psychological release. They help students discharge pressure, transform negative emotions, and experience inner healing. Regular aesthetic education can cultivate calmness, optimism, and openness, while enhancing students' aesthetic perception and self-recognition. In the process of discovering, creating, and sharing beauty, students gradually build a positive psychological foundation.

Labor Education as Psychological Empowerment: Cultivating Positive Psychological Energy

Labor education emphasizes practical experience, willpower training, and responsibility formation. It is an important pathway for addressing problems such as fragility, self-centeredness, and weak stress tolerance among primary school students. Many children today grow up in relatively favorable living conditions and lack sufficient labor experience and frustration experience. They may therefore show weak frustration tolerance, limited responsibility, and insufficient interpersonal empathy. Labor practice enables students to experience effort and harvest through hands-on work, learn tolerance and sharing through cooperation, and build perseverance through overcoming difficulties. It can correct undesirable psychological states such as impatience, timidity, and passivity, and can cultivate stable, healthy, and positive psychological defenses.

Practical Difficulties in Five-Domain Integrated Psychological Education in Primary Schools

Fragmented Educational Concepts and Weak Awareness of Integration

Many primary schools still regard the five domains of education and mental health education as separate tasks. Teachers often assume that mental health education is the exclusive responsibility of psychological teachers, while subject teachers, moral education teachers, and teachers of physical and aesthetic education may lack the initiative to embed psychological education into their teaching. Moral education tends to focus on behavioral norms, intellectual education on academic achievement, physical education on fitness training, aesthetic education on artistic skills, and labor education on practical tasks. These domains often operate independently rather than interactively. At the same time, some schools still overemphasize intellectual education while undervaluing mental health education and integrated development. As a result, psychological education lacks stable daily carriers, and its effects become fragmented and superficial.

Limited Integration Pathways and Insufficient Educational Carriers

In concrete teaching practice, the integration of the five domains and mental health education often lacks systematic and routine pathways. It tends to remain at the level of scattered thematic activities rather than being deeply embedded in classroom teaching, daily management, and campus life. Many subject classrooms still focus primarily on knowledge transmission and skill training, with insufficient attention to students' emotional states, psychological experiences, and growth mindset. Activities in the five domains may also lack clear psychological targets. They are not always designed around common psychological issues among primary school

students, such as anxiety, inferiority, timidity, and interpersonal conflict. This weakens the nourishing value of the five domains and reduces the actual effectiveness of integrated education.

Incomplete Collaborative Mechanisms and Weak Educational Synergy

Mental health education is a systematic project that requires coordinated action from schools, families, and society. At present, many school-based models of five-domain psychological nourishment remain confined to the campus. Home-school-community collaboration is often incomplete. Some parents lack an understanding of the psychological value of the five domains and of scientific parenting. They overemphasize academic performance while overlooking children's psychological development and comprehensive literacy. Family education may therefore be simple, rough, or inconsistent with the school's mental health work. Meanwhile, high-quality social resources for psychological education and five-domain practice are not always effectively connected with school education. This weakens the consolidation of school outcomes and produces disconnection among family, school, and community actions.

Insufficient Professional Support and Lagging Technology Integration

Grassroots primary schools often face shortages of professional mental health teachers, and many teachers lack the capacity to conduct integrated psychological education. Subject teachers may not have enough knowledge of mental health education to identify psychological elements within their classrooms or to carry out scientifically grounded integration. At the same time, although educational technology has developed rapidly, many schools still rely on traditional psychological education models. Artificial intelligence–based evaluation, big-data monitoring, virtual-reality psychological experiences, and other modern tools are insufficiently used. Consequently, schools cannot yet dynamically monitor students' psychological states or provide

individualized and precise intervention. The attractiveness, precision, and effectiveness of five-domain integrated psychological education need further improvement.

Practice-Based Exploration of Primary School Psychological Education From the Perspective of Five-Domain Integration: The "1511" Education System

Establishing One Top-Level Design to Build a Whole-School Educational Framework

To address the separation between five-domain education and mental health education, as well as the looseness of the overall educational system, our school has developed a systematic top-level framework for mental health education based on child-centered education. The school adheres to the educational idea of "protecting children's hearts, nourishing the mind, and promoting comprehensive development." It has established a mental health education leadership group jointly led by the Party secretary and the principal, and has formed a six-level collaborative team consisting of the leadership group, professional mental health teachers, homeroom teachers, subject teachers, class psychological monitors, and parent committee members.

This structure clarifies the educational responsibilities of different positions and forms a work pattern in which school leaders coordinate overall planning, the moral education office organizes implementation, mental health teachers provide professional guidance, and all staff participate throughout the process. The school has also incorporated five-domain psychological nourishment and mental health education into its overall development plan and annual priorities. Management systems, curriculum implementation systems, crisis intervention systems, and home-school collaboration systems have been improved to ensure that integrated mental health education is normalized and standardized.

At the same time, the school upholds the original intention embodied in the phrase "when a hundred flowers bloom, spring fills the garden." It respects the developmental differences of every student, rejects homogeneous education, and emphasizes individualized, mind-nourishing support. In this way, students with different personalities, traits, and psychological states can receive educational nourishment suited to their growth needs.

Deepening Five-Domain Integrated Practice to Achieve Whole-Field Psychological Nourishment

Moral education shapes the soul and strengthens a positive psychological foundation. The school embeds psychological nourishment into moral education activities, campus culture, and ideological-political elements in subject teaching. It focuses on core psychological needs such as adaptation at the beginning of the semester, interpersonal communication, and character development. The school regularly organizes adaptation-week activities at the start of term and designs engaging moral education scenes that correspond to children's developmental characteristics. These activities help students adjust their psychological states and adapt quickly to school life. The school has also created a child-centered campus culture through immersive scenes such as playful floor games and voice-activated flower lights. These settings enrich students' recess life, reduce academic fatigue, and help them develop a sunny and relaxed mindset. Regular selections of "civilized youth" and "smiling ambassadors" establish confident, positive, and kind student models, guiding students to form positive character and healthy psychological cognition.

Intellectual education opens the mind and reduces academic anxiety. The school has developed a child-centered classroom model that respects students, encourages growth, and

nourishes the mind. It moves away from tense and oppressive classroom atmospheres and optimizes classroom design around encouragement, praise, and positive interaction. A positive classroom reinforcement mechanism helps students experience learning as meaningful and enjoyable in an atmosphere of recognition and respect. The school also builds a graded mental health curriculum that corresponds to the psychological characteristics of lower, middle, and upper primary grades, so that the developmental concerns of different age groups can be addressed more precisely. A monthly "no-homework day" provides students with space to release psychological pressure and relax physically and mentally. Meanwhile, the school promotes an AI-supported classroom evaluation system and integrates growth-mindset training into subject teaching. Through challenging tasks and process-oriented positive evaluation, students are guided to face learning difficulties constructively and to strengthen their capacity to tolerate setbacks.

Physical education strengthens the mind and cultivates resilience. The school follows the principle that physical education can strengthen the heart and nourish the mind. In addition to regular physical education classes, it offers whole-school rope skipping, basketball, physical fitness training, and various sports clubs to meet students' diverse movement needs. Open campus sports equipment allows students to exercise whenever appropriate, release negative emotions, and regulate their psychological states through movement. Sports festivals, parent-child sports meetings, and other regular activities enable students to learn cooperation, accept winning and losing, and face challenges through competition and teamwork. These practices improve psychological vulnerabilities such as fear of difficulty, fragility, and timidity, while cultivating optimism and perseverance. Regular physical-activity homework further extends

school education into family life and helps exercise become a daily strategy for mood regulation and physical-psychological health.

Aesthetic education nourishes the heart and enriches students' inner worlds. The school explores a "aesthetic education plus psychology" pathway and incorporates the idea of art-based emotional healing into daily aesthetic education. Through handicrafts, Chinese painting, drama performance, and other artistic courses, students gain channels for emotional expression and pressure release. Artistic creation helps them express inner feelings and transform psychological distress. The school regularly organizes art festivals, modeling activities, class choruses, outdoor public-interest performances, and other distinctive aesthetic activities. These activities nurture students' minds through aesthetic experience and enhance self-identity and emotional resonance. A teacher-student guitar club and other artistic display platforms encourage students to express themselves confidently, improve social competence through cooperative performance, and overcome social timidity. The selection of "smiling ambassadors" promotes a sunny, confident, and optimistic spirit, using student models to create a positive campus psychological atmosphere.

Labor education strengthens the mind and cultivates positive psychological energy. The school actively explores a "labor education plus psychology" model and uses labor practice to strengthen willpower and cultivate positive attitudes. It offers distinctive labor courses such as life skills, handicraft weaving, and campus plant care, guiding students to improve self-care ability, patience, and perseverance through hands-on work. Campus labor festivals, food festivals, and other regular practical activities enable students to experience growth and confidence through learning, practice, operation, and sharing. Such activities enhance adaptability and life stress tolerance. Campus volunteer service and community public-interest labor further guide students to develop responsibility and tolerance through serving others and contributing to the

collective. These practices can improve self-centeredness, social isolation, and emotional indifference, while fostering an active, responsible, and upward-oriented psychological state.

Improving One Collaborative Mechanism to Build Home-School-Community Synergy

Deepening home-school collaboration. The school has built a regular home-school education platform focused on key issues such as parent-child communication, emotion management, academic anxiety, and habit formation. It periodically organizes parent lectures on scientific parenting and parent-child communication skills, popularizes mental health knowledge, and corrects the misunderstanding that education should focus only on academic achievement. Parent open days, family reading activities, and parent-child cultural and sports activities build bridges for parent-child interaction, improve family relationships, and create a warm family education environment. Online mini-programs and home-school applications provide dynamic communication channels, allowing teachers to provide timely feedback on students' school-based psychological states and developmental performance and to respond to psychological problems that appear at home.

Expanding social educational channels. The school actively connects with communities, hospitals, courts, and professional psychological institutions to construct a broader system of social education. It works with communities to organize mental health public lectures and volunteer activities, thereby expanding students' psychological practice spaces. It also connects with professional medical institutions and psychological research organizations to establish graded referral channels for psychological crisis, providing professional intervention and clinical support for students with special psychological needs. Experts in psychology are periodically invited to the school for guidance, lectures, and supervision, which improves professional quality.

Visits to museums and science and technology museums further broaden students' horizons, enrich their spiritual world, strengthen environmental adaptability, and enhance psychological tolerance.

Anchoring One Ultimate Goal to Support Lifelong Student Development

The ultimate goal of the school's five-domain psychological nourishment model is to move beyond fragmented education and realize a transformation from problem intervention to whole-staff nourishment, and from isolated instruction to whole-field immersion. The desired outcome is to cultivate children who are inwardly enriched, confident, resilient, kind, and comprehensively developed. Through years of practice, the school has used the deep integration of the five domains and the coordinated work of school, family, and community to address common problems such as academic anxiety, interpersonal timidity, emotional dysregulation, and weak frustration tolerance. Students' positive psychological qualities have improved, and the campus atmosphere has become warmer and more harmonious.

For long-term development, the school will continue to optimize three areas. First, it will deepen interdisciplinary integration by developing project-based psychological theme courses and virtual-reality psychological experience courses. Second, it will strengthen technology-enabled education by building an intelligent mental health management platform and using data to support dynamic monitoring and individualized intervention. Third, it will improve long-term evaluation mechanisms by including psychological education outcomes and five-domain integration in teacher assessment and school development planning. These measures will help ensure that mental health education proceeds regularly and with high quality.

Reflection and Prospects

Primary school mental health education from the perspective of five-domain integration is a long-term, continuous, and immersive educational exploration. Mental health education should not function merely as an isolated "emergency station" for psychological problems. It should become a continuous source of psychological nourishment that runs through the whole process of the five domains and every part of campus life. Through the implementation of the "1511" system, our school has addressed the fragmentation, formalization, and limited effectiveness of traditional psychological education. It has promoted psychological nourishment through the five domains and across the whole campus, enabling every student to bloom in a diverse educational environment and giving practical meaning to the educational vision of "listening to the sound of every flower blooming."

At the same time, grassroots practice shows that there remains substantial room for improvement. Cross-disciplinary integrated curricula are not yet fully developed; the depth of technology-enabled education remains insufficient; home-school-community collaboration needs to become more precise; and differentiated education for students with diverse needs must be further strengthened. In the new era, the psychological development needs of primary school students are more varied, and psychological education faces new opportunities and challenges. Primary school mental health educators should remain committed to child-centered education, respect the laws of student development, and continuously deepen pathways of five-domain integration.

In the future, the school will continue to optimize the "1511" education system, deepen the integration of the five domains and mental health education, innovate educational carriers, enrich

educational forms, improve collaborative mechanisms, and strengthen technology-supported practice. By putting students first, respecting individual differences, and protecting every child's inner world, the school will use the five domains of education to nourish the mind and accompany students' growth. In doing so, it will promote the high-quality development of primary school mental health education and help every child grow into a psychologically enriched, upward-looking, and comprehensively developed person.

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Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

An Analysis of the Use of Paper-Cutting Art in Art Education and Campus Culture in Rural Secondary Schools in Multi-Ethnic Regions: A Case Study of Daping Middle School in Wanshan District

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI:https://doi.org/10.66581/z1m36478

Received 08 June 2026 • Accepted: 15 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Li, H. (2026). An Analysis of the Use of Paper-Cutting Art in Art Education and Campus Culture in Rural Secondary Schools in Multi-Ethnic Regions: A Case Study of Daping Middle School in Wanshan District. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 48.

Published by Nova Science Press, HK

Abstract

Chinese paper-cutting, a nationally recognized form of intangible cultural heritage, integrates aesthetic, folkloric, pedagogical, and cultural values. As such, it provides rural primary and secondary schools with a locally grounded resource for strengthening aesthetic education and sustaining the transmission of outstanding traditional Chinese culture. Daping Middle School in Daping Dong, Tujia, and Miao Township, Wanshan District, Tongren, Guizhou Province, is situated in a multi-ethnic cultural environment shaped by Dong, Tujia, Miao, Han, and other communities. Although the school has access to rich local heritage resources, it also faces structural constraints, including limited rural art education resources, discontinuities in ethnic cultural transmission, and an insufficiently distinctive campus culture. Drawing on a four-year school-based practice, the school has developed the "Yijian Yunyi" Paper-Cutting Club, compiled the first volume of Wanshan District Daping Middle School Paper-Cutting Course, and established a three-dimensional instructional system that integrates foundational classroom instruction, club-based advancement, and campus-cultural immersion. Traditional paper-cutting has been incorporated into regular Grade 7 art instruction and connected with local Nuo culture, ethnic customs, revolutionary culture, campus life, anniversary themes, and graduation culture. Using this curriculum as a case, the present study examines the implementation model of paper-cutting instruction in a rural multi-ethnic junior high school, analyzes its value for art education and campus culture development, identifies current limitations in curriculum development, classroom implementation, and cultural transformation, and proposes targeted optimization strategies. The study offers a practical reference for intangible-heritage-based aesthetic education, the cultivation of a strong sense of the Chinese national community, and the development of distinctive campus culture in comparable rural multi-ethnic schools.

Keywords: multi-ethnic regions; rural junior high school; paper-cutting art; art teaching; school-developed curriculum; campus culture; intangible cultural heritage transmission

Introduction

Policy Orientation Toward Aesthetic Education and Intangible Cultural Heritage Transmission

In recent years, Chinese educational policy has repeatedly emphasized the need to strengthen school aesthetic education and to bring intangible cultural heritage into campus life. Policy documents such as Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era and implementation guidance on intangible cultural heritage in schools require primary and secondary schools to draw on local, rural, and ethnic cultural resources when developing school-based aesthetic curricula. These policies encourage the integration of traditional folk art into classroom teaching so that aesthetic education can nourish students' inner lives while enhancing cultural confidence and ethnic identity (Ministry of Education, 2020). Among folk art forms, paper-cutting is especially suitable for rural schools because it is widely known, inexpensive, technically accessible, and adaptable to ordinary classroom conditions. In ethnic regions, education aimed at fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community also requires schools to transform local multi-ethnic cultural resources into integrative teaching materials, guiding students of different ethnic groups to understand cultural coexistence, mutual appreciation, and common development.

Practical Limitations in Aesthetic Education in Rural Multi-Ethnic Junior High Schools

Rural junior high schools in mountainous multi-ethnic areas of Southwest China commonly face shortages in aesthetic education resources. These shortages include insufficient professionally trained art teachers, limited standardized art materials, distance from museums and art institutions, and narrow channels for students to access high-quality art learning. At the curricular level, nationally unified art textbooks often privilege urban visual experience and do not always connect with the everyday life, ethnic customs, or local knowledge of Dong, Tujia, and Miao students. As a result, students' motivation for art learning can be weak. Many students also have only limited knowledge of their own ethnic heritage and of traditional Chinese folk art, leading to an intergenerational discontinuity in cultural

transmission. Meanwhile, campus culture in rural schools is often homogeneous and lacks distinctive cultural media that correspond to local ethnic characteristics and adolescent development. These limitations constrain the integrated educational effects of moral education and aesthetic education.

Regional and Institutional Basis of the Case School

Daping Middle School is located in Daping Dong, Tujia, and Miao Township, Wanshan District. It is a typical rural junior high school whose students include adolescents from Dong, Tujia, Miao, Han, and other communities. Local cultural resources include Tujia Nuo opera, Miao paper-cutting patterns, Dong brocade motifs, and other forms of folk visual art. These resources provide distinctive cultural material for the development of a paper-cutting curriculum. The school's paper-cutting club has operated steadily for four years and has accumulated a substantial body of classroom examples and student works. The school also offers regular paper-cutting school-based lessons for Grade 7 students with no prior training, supported by a seven-unit modular teaching guide. This structure links basic classroom learning, advanced club-based creation, and campus cultural display, thereby forming a replicable model of paper-cutting education in a rural multi-ethnic setting.

Research Significance

Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to research on intangible-heritage-based aesthetic education in rural junior high schools in Southwest China. It addresses the relatively underdeveloped intersection of paper-cutting skills, multi-ethnic local culture, rural junior high school art instruction, and campus culture development. By analyzing one school's curriculum development logic, the study clarifies how traditional folk art can support "fivefold education" and the cultivation of a strong sense of the Chinese national community in ethnic regions. It also adds a rural multi-ethnic perspective to the theory of school-based folk-art curricula.

Practical Significance

Using Daping Middle School's complete school-developed curriculum as the case, this paper summarizes a low-cost, feasible, and locally adaptive model of paper-cutting art instruction. The model provides comparable rural multi-ethnic schools with directly usable references for unit design, classroom practice, and the transformation of student works into campus culture. Paper-cutting lessons also create a platform for cultural exchange among students of Dong, Tujia, Miao, and Han backgrounds, while the use of student works in campus spaces helps the school form a distinctive cultural brand. In this sense, the curriculum integrates aesthetic education, moral education, and ethnic-cultural transmission.

Research Methods and Research Object

Research Methods

This study uses four main methods. First, the literature research method is used to review relevant studies and policy documents on intangible-heritage paper-cutting, rural aesthetic education, ethnic school-based curricula, and campus culture development. Second, the case analysis method is used to examine the seven-unit course structure of Wanshan District Daping Middle School Paper-Cutting Course (Volume I) and the four-year teaching practice of the "Yijian Yunyi" paper-cutting club. Third, textual analysis is used to analyze the school-developed textbook's unit design, class-hour arrangement, teaching objectives, creative themes, and achievement display system. Fourth, practice observation is used to reconstruct authentic teaching scenes from operational procedures, student works, and club-based outcomes in order to identify instructional strengths and remaining problems.

Research Object

The core objects of this study are the Grade 7 school-based paper-cutting art course and the "Yijian Yunyi" paper-cutting club at Daping Middle School in Daping Dong, Tujia, and Miao Township in Wanshan District. The research materials include the complete school-developed teaching guide, the

four-class-hour unit model, and the campus paper-cutting cultural display system. The analysis covers three application dimensions: art classroom teaching, campus cultural environment construction, and the development of students' comprehensive literacy.

Conceptual Definitions

Multi-ethnic rural junior high school refers to a rural lower-secondary school located in a township where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities, where the student body includes several long-settled ethnic groups, and where educational conditions remain relatively limited. In this paper, the term specifically refers to Daping Middle School in Daping Township, Wanshan District, Tongren.

Paper-cutting art refers to a traditional folk-art technique that uses scissors, carving knives, Xuan paper, and cutting mats to produce two-dimensional hollowed-out images through folding, drawing, cutting, carving, and unfolding. It includes negative carving, positive carving, single-color paper-cutting, combined cutting and carving, and flannel-based cutting. Its motifs include auspicious patterns, ethnic designs, and images drawn from everyday life.

School-based art teaching refers to an expanded art curriculum that is developed by a school on the basis of national art standards and local cultural resources. In this study, the school-developed textbook functions as the main teaching carrier and introduces all Grade 7 students to basic paper-cutting techniques.

Campus culture refers to the full range of cultural carriers within the school, including classroom teaching culture, student club culture, campus visual environment, festival and anniversary culture, and graduation-related affective culture. This study focuses on the visible and participatory campus culture generated through the transformation of paper-cutting works.

Feasibility and Distinctive Advantages of Integrating Paper-Cutting Into Art Teaching in Rural Multi-Ethnic Junior High Schools

Institutional Conditions: Low Cost and Compatibility With Rural School Resources

Rural junior high schools often face limited art budgets and a shortage of specialized teaching tools. Paper-cutting has a low threshold for classroom implementation and is therefore highly compatible with rural school conditions. Essential tools include pointed scissors, small carving knives, rubber mats, red Xuan paper, colored cardstock, pencils, and staplers. These materials are inexpensive, reusable, and easy to store. Flannel materials are also resistant to fading and convenient for long-term preservation. The classroom space required is minimal: ordinary desks can support the complete process of drawing, cutting, and carving without the need for a specialized art studio.

The school-developed textbook distinguishes material-use standards for beginners. A beginning student uses only one to three sheets of Xuan paper for a single task and one to two pieces of flannel where relevant. Tools are centrally stored and reused, which addresses the budgetary limits of rural schools. The short learning cycle is another advantage. A complete simple work, such as a snowflake or a round floral pattern, can be finished within a single lesson. This rapid success experience reduces students' fear of art learning, increases classroom participation, and lowers the practical resistance to implementing art courses in rural contexts.

Learner Conditions: Alignment With the Cognitive and Developmental Characteristics of Multi-Ethnic Junior High School Students

The course is aimed primarily at Grade 7 students who have just transitioned from primary school to junior high school. At this stage, students' manual abilities and aesthetic perception are developing rapidly, while concrete thinking remains prominent. Purely theoretical art appreciation is often less attractive to them than hands-on creation. Paper-cutting mobilizes fine motor movement through the

sequential actions of folding, drawing, cutting, and carving, which corresponds well to adolescents' interest in practical making.

Students in the local Dong, Tujia, and Miao communities are often familiar from childhood with ethnic embroidery, silver-ornament motifs, Nuo masks, and symmetrical or hollowed geometric patterns. Transforming these familiar visual symbols into paper-cutting materials lowers the threshold for understanding and creation. The curriculum also adopts differentiated tasks: basic units require simple round floral patterns, whereas advanced units invite students to design ethnic Nuo masks, campus landscapes, and creative name-based paper-cuts. This arrangement accommodates students with varied manual abilities and supports full participation. Since junior high school is also a key period for cultural identification and value formation, the auspicious meanings, revolutionary culture, and ethnic stories embedded in paper-cutting can function as moral education and ethnic-unity education through aesthetic experience.

Cultural Resources: A Local Multi-Ethnic Visual Repository

Daping Township's long-term coexistence of Dong, Tujia, and Miao communities has produced rich local folk-art resources. These include Tujia Nuo masks and totemic symbols, Miao butterfly patterns and floral embroidery, Dong geometric brocade motifs, local rural landscapes, campus ginkgo trees and roses, and the Confucius statue on campus. Together, these materials form a distinctive creative repository for the school-based paper-cutting curriculum.

Unlike general paper-cutting textbooks that rely mainly on standard auspicious motifs, the school's curriculum includes a separate unit on the "campus where ethnic cultures meet." This unit explores local Nuo culture in Tongren through digital Nuo museum resources and Nuo opera videos. Complex traditional Nuo mask patterns are simplified and cartoonized so that junior high school students can convert them into paper-cutting designs. The classroom thereby becomes a platform for ethnic cultural exchange: Dong students share brocade patterns, Tujia students explain Nuo cultural meanings, and Miao

students introduce embroidery motifs. Through collaborative creation, students deepen cross-ethnic understanding and contribute to fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community.

Curricular Sustainability: A Mature Framework Built on Four Years of Club-Based Practice

Four years of paper-cutting club practice have provided a solid foundation for regular course implementation. The teaching cases, operational procedures, and creative themes have all been tested and revised through repeated classroom practice. The school-developed textbook is divided into seven progressive units, each consisting of four class hours. The sequence proceeds from cognitive introduction to life connection, revolutionary-culture education, anniversary-themed creation, ethnic culture, self-expression, and farewell emotions. This spiral structure moves from foundational skills to cultural inquiry and creative thematic production. It also corresponds to the five dimensions of junior high school art core literacy: image reading, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding.

Layered Applications of Paper-Cutting in Art Teaching: The Daping Middle School-Based Curriculum

The school has built a two-level teaching system that combines basic classroom popularization with club-based advanced development. All Grade 7 students take a compulsory school-based paper-cutting course, while students with stronger interest and ability join the “Yijian Yunyi” Paper-Cutting Club for deeper creation. These two pathways form a complete teaching cycle for the use of paper-cutting techniques in art education.

Level One: Modular Classroom Teaching for All Grade 7 Students

The seven textbook units follow a progressive order. Each unit consists of four class hours and uses a standardized process of skill learning, cultural interpretation, thematic creation, and achievement display.

The units cover six teaching dimensions: basic paper-cutting, life aesthetics, revolutionary culture, ethnic culture, campus culture, and affective creativity.

Unit 1: Understanding Paper-Cutting—Standardized Instruction in Basic Techniques

The first unit introduces students with no prior training to paper-cutting. It lays the foundation for artistic expression through four lessons: the history of paper-cutting, the special language of paper-cutting, the use of basic tools, and beginner-level cutting, carving, or combined cutting and carving. In the appreciation component, students learn the historical development of paper-cutting from its early emergence through its development in the Sui and Tang dynasties, its flourishing in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and its modern innovation. They compare northern and southern styles and analyze the visual language of homophonic meanings, symbolic objects, auspicious motifs, and sacred imagery. In the operational component, the teacher explains the use of scissors, carving knives, mats, Xuan paper, flannel, and staplers; distinguishes cutting from fine carving; and teaches the five basic actions of folding, drawing, cutting, carving, and unfolding. Students practice two-fold, three-fold, and four-fold designs and complete standardized snowflake or floral works. Assessment focuses on line fluency, compositional integrity, and tool-use norms, helping students build confidence through visible progress.

Unit 2: Paper-Cutting and Me—Transforming Campus Scenery Into Paper-Cutting Designs

The second unit connects paper-cutting with realistic art creation and asks students to transform actual campus scenery into paper-cutting motifs. The core teaching points include negative and positive carving, extraction of natural and geometric patterns, and four compositional principles: extending the image to the edges, combining points, lines, and planes, enriching content, and maintaining continuity even when lines are visually interrupted. Students observe the campus environment and draw from seasonal scenes such as spring peach blossoms, summer roses, autumn ginkgo leaves, winter snow, and the campus Confucius statue. Bright daytime scenes are often expressed through positive carving, while moonlit or quiet scenes may use negative carving to create atmosphere. This process combines outdoor

observation, form simplification, and hollowed paper-cutting techniques, thereby compensating for the limited availability of outdoor art-sketching courses in rural schools.

Unit 3: Revolutionary-Themed Art—Integrating Paper-Cutting With Red-Culture Moral Education

The third unit creates an interdisciplinary paper-cutting classroom based on revolutionary-culture content from Chinese, history, and art textbooks. Its process involves three steps. First, Chinese classes explore revolutionary poetry, history classes examine local red stories, and art classes appreciate revolutionary-themed paper-cutting works. Second, students transform their understanding into visual sketches and use paper-cutting principles to simplify and optimize the image. Third, students complete revolutionary-themed paper-cutting works and explain their creative ideas and personal reflections. Through revolutionary figures, revolutionary scenes, and revolutionary slogans, the unit links hollowed paper-cutting art with patriotic spirit and broadens the practice of red aesthetic education in rural junior high schools.

Unit 4: Encountering the 50th Anniversary—Paper-Cutting for Campus-Themed Cultural and Creative Design

The fourth unit emphasizes the practical and design-oriented transformation of paper-cutting. With the school's 50th anniversary as an authentic project, students engage in paper-cutting sketch collection, pattern processing, stage display, and cultural and creative product design. The unit guides students beyond flat decorative paper-cutting toward applications such as scarves, bookmarks, clothing decoration, accessories, cards, and commemorative artworks. By integrating anniversary symbols, campus scenery, and ethnic motifs, students turn paper-cutting into a form of campus cultural design while developing design thinking and affection for their school.

Unit 5: A Campus Where Ethnic Cultures Meet—Integrating Local Multi-Ethnic Intangible Heritage

The fifth unit is the curriculum's most distinctive module. It explores local Tujia Nuo culture and combines it with Dong and Miao motifs. The instructional sequence includes tracing the history of Nuo

culture, appreciating local Nuo opera resources in Tongren, creatively designing cartoonized Nuo-mask paper-cuts, and producing integrated ethnic patterns. Using digital museum materials and Nuo opera videos, students deconstruct complex traditional mask motifs and simplify them into designs that match their cutting ability. They also integrate Miao butterfly patterns and Dong geometric brocade motifs. Through group cooperation, students from different ethnic backgrounds share visual symbols from their own communities and create integrated works, thereby learning cultural coexistence through artistic practice.

Unit 6: A Gift for Myself—Personalized Creative Expression Through Paper-Cutting

The sixth unit focuses on individual emotional expression through name-based creative paper-cutting. Students integrate natural, geometric, and continuous patterns while considering the strokes of their own names, their personality traits, and their aspirations. The textbook offers differentiated design advice: names with simple strokes, open or scattered structures, and enclosed structures may use different combinations of positive carving, negative carving, and border motifs. Evaluation combines self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher feedback across composition, pattern matching, craftsmanship, and emotional expression. This model respects student individuality and shifts the classroom away from mechanical imitation toward creative self-expression.

Unit 7: A Farewell Gift—Paper-Cutting as Affective Cultural-Creative Practice

The seventh unit anticipates students' three-year junior high school experience by using paper-cutting to prepare graduation-related cultural and creative products. Items include bookmarks, three-dimensional cards, and silhouette-based memory pieces. The unit reduces technical difficulty and emphasizes emotional narration. Students use simple motifs to record friendships and campus memories, transforming paper-cutting into a carrier of adolescent emotion and a medium for learning gratitude, memory, and healthy emotional expression.

Summary of the Seven-Unit Classroom Structure

Unit	Theme	Main Teaching Focus	Educational Function
1	Understanding paper-cutting	History, visual language, tools, folding, cutting, carving, and basic floral patterns	Foundational artistic expression
2	Paper-cutting and me	Campus observation, scenery transformation, positive/negative carving	Life-oriented aesthetic experience
3	Revolutionary-themed art	Revolutionary stories, revolutionary imagery, revolutionary-themed paper-cutting	Patriotism and moral education
4	50th anniversary	Campus symbols, bookmarks, cards, cultural and creative design	Project-based design practice and school identity
5	Ethnic cultures meet	Nuo masks, Miao motifs, Dong brocade patterns, group creation	Ethnic understanding and shared community awareness
6	A gift for myself	Name-based design and personal motifs	Self-expression and creativity
7	Farewell gift	Graduation bookmarks, cards,	Affective education and gratitude

Unit	Theme	Main Teaching Focus	Educational Function
		silhouettes, memory works	

Level Two: The "Yijian Yunyi" Paper-Cutting Club as an Advanced Pathway

While the basic classroom introduces all students to paper-cutting, the club provides differentiated advancement for students who show stronger interest and technical ability. Drawing on four years of practice, the club expands beyond flat paper-cutting into three advanced directions. First, students cooperate to create large multi-ethnic scrolls that integrate Tujia Nuo masks, Miao embroidery, Dong brocade, campus scenery, and revolutionary elements. This trains teamwork, overall composition, and large-format visual organization. Second, students transform paper-cutting patterns into cross-media cultural and creative products, including canvas bags, bookmarks, greeting cards, and clothing decorations. Third, students use digital museums and pattern repositories to develop preliminary design ideas before completing offline cutting and carving. Club outcomes are regularly displayed in the school exhibition area and selected works are submitted to district and county-level student art competitions, providing rural students with a broader platform for artistic visibility.

Interdisciplinary Integration of Paper-Cutting Teaching

The paper-cutting classroom is not confined to art instruction. Its cultural richness supports interdisciplinary learning. In Chinese language classes, students analyze poems, idioms, and folk stories associated with paper-cutting motifs and create paper-cutting illustrations for literary texts. In history classes, the history of paper-cutting is connected to ancient customs, ethnic cultures, and local revolutionary stories. In mathematics, folding and symmetrical round-flower designs help students understand axial symmetry, rotation, and translation. In morality and law courses, multi-ethnic paper-cutting works support ethnic-unity education, while revolutionary-themed works support patriotism and

civic values. In this way, paper-cutting functions as an integrated carrier of aesthetic education, moral education, and intellectual development within the limited curricular resources of a rural junior high school.

Multiple Pathways for Applying Paper-Cutting to Campus Culture Construction

Campus culture functions as an implicit aesthetic classroom. Daping Middle School transforms student and teacher paper-cutting works into visible cultural carriers across school spaces. The school has developed a three-dimensional paper-cutting campus culture system consisting of static environmental culture, dynamic activity culture, and long-term achievement culture. This system extends paper-cutting beyond the classroom and makes it a distinctive school cultural brand.

Static Visual Culture: Creating an Immersive Aesthetic Environment

First, the school designs corridor and hallway paper-cutting walls according to the seven course units. One floor displays paper-cutting history and basic auspicious patterns; another displays campus scenery and anniversary-themed works; another presents Tujia Nuo culture and multi-ethnic integrated designs; and another displays revolutionary-themed, name-based, and graduation-related works. These walls are updated regularly with student works from each unit, allowing students to encounter peer creations in daily movement through the school.

Second, each class establishes a small paper-cutting corner that displays class-level works. The “Yijian Yunyi” Paper-Cutting Club room includes tiered display shelves showing floral designs, ethnic Nuo masks, cultural and creative products, tools, Xuan paper, and other materials. It functions as a miniature campus workshop for intangible heritage, allowing students to observe and practice during free time.

Third, selected paper-cutting works are framed and placed in the gatehouse, library, dining hall, meeting rooms, publicity boards, and other public spaces. Student-designed ginkgo, rose, and campus-

landscape patterns are also used in campus signage and visual decoration. These transformations reduce the monotony and homogeneity of rural campus environments and create a school visual culture with both ethnic features and adolescent vitality.

Dynamic Thematic Activity Culture

After each four-class-hour unit, classes hold small exhibitions in which students display their works and explain their creative thinking. At the end of each semester, the school organizes a campus paper-cutting art festival with exhibition areas for basic floral patterns, red themes, ethnic Nuo culture, anniversary cultural and creative products, and graduation souvenirs. Student docents from different ethnic backgrounds introduce the works and their cultural stories, making the exhibition an all-student campus art event.

The school also uses paper-cutting in anniversary and festival activities. During the 50th anniversary, students created paper-cutting bookmarks and decorative works as commemorative gifts. During Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, National Day, and revolutionary-culture commemorations, students create corresponding works to decorate the campus. During ethnic festivals, students create designs integrating Dong, Tujia, and Miao motifs and participate in cultural sharing activities. The seventh unit also supports a graduation-season gift culture in which graduating students make bookmarks and cards for peers and teachers, while younger students create works to welcome or bless graduates.

Long-Term Achievement Culture and Transmission Mechanisms

The school-developed textbook reserves blank pages at the end of each unit for student works, so that each cohort's outcomes can be preserved in bound form as a campus paper-cutting archive. Outstanding cases can be used to compile a second volume of the school-developed textbook, supporting long-term curricular iteration. The school also preserves bookmarks, flannel works, anniversary designs, Nuo-mask cultural products, and other physical objects as campus cultural collections for parent open days and external exchanges. Finally, the school has begun to build a transmission ladder in which senior club

members assist younger students during after-school service and club activities. This creates an internal mechanism through which paper-cutting skills and ethnic cultural knowledge are passed from cohort to cohort.

Paper-Cutting and Campus Ethnic-Unity Culture

For a rural school with a multi-ethnic student body, paper-cutting has become a key cultural carrier for fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community. Exhibitions and activities encourage students to combine Dong brocade geometry, Tujia Nuo totems, and Miao butterfly patterns within the same work. A dedicated "multi-ethnic family" display area presents collaborative works, and cultural activities include ethnic-pattern sharing sessions. Through these practices, students explain their own communities' customs to peers and recognize the beauty of cultural coexistence. Paper-cutting thereby becomes a practical medium for reducing cultural distance and cultivating mutual appreciation.

Educational Value of Applying Paper-Cutting in Art Teaching and Campus Culture

Based on four years of curriculum practice at Daping Middle School, paper-cutting has produced value in five interrelated domains: aesthetic education, moral education, cultural transmission, labor education and psychological development, and school brand construction. These values support the broader goal of integrated education in rural junior high schools.

Aesthetic-Education Value

First, continuous practice in folding, drawing, cutting, and carving strengthens students' fine-motor modeling ability and helps them master the folk-art visual language of symmetry, hollowing, positive and negative carving, and point-line-plane composition. Second, systematic appreciation of historical and contemporary paper-cutting, regional styles, and multi-ethnic motifs improves students' aesthetic perception and judgment. Third, the progression from imitation to independent design of campus scenery, ethnic Nuo masks, and creative names encourages autonomous thinking and creative practice. Fourth,

paper-cutting broadens rural students' knowledge of folk art and connects them to local Dong, Tujia, and Miao intangible cultural heritage.

Moral-Education Value

Revolutionary-themed paper-cutting makes revolutionary history and patriotic spirit visible and tactile. The cutting and carving process requires patience, concentration, care, and responsibility, while tool organization and workspace cleaning cultivate work habits. Anniversary and graduation paper-cutting foster affection for the school, gratitude to teachers, and care for peers. Multi-ethnic integrated works guide students to respect cultural differences, understand the pluralistic unity of Chinese culture, and strengthen a shared sense of national community.

Cultural-Transmission Value

The curriculum introduces all Grade 7 students to the history, skills, and cultural meanings of Chinese paper-cutting, responding to the problem of aging folk-art inheritors and weakened youth transmission. It also transforms local Tujia Nuo culture, Miao motifs, and Dong visual patterns into classroom-suitable design materials, bringing local ethnic heritage back into young people's field of vision. Through making, appreciating, and displaying works, students experience the value of their hometown culture and develop cultural confidence.

Campus-Culture Value

Many rural junior high schools lack distinctive and sustainable cultural carriers. The Daping model uses four years of club practice and a seven-unit school-developed textbook to build a stable campus paper-cutting culture system across instruction, environmental design, thematic events, and archival preservation. Because paper-cutting is inexpensive and sustainable, it is especially suitable for rural schools with limited funding and can help form a distinctive "paper-cutting plus multi-ethnic culture" campus brand.

Comprehensive Practice and Psychological-Health Value

After-school service in rural junior high schools is often limited in content. Paper-cutting classes and club activities offer students a high-quality practical option. The immersive and therapeutic nature of paper-cutting allows students to relieve academic pressure through concentration and to gain a strong sense of achievement when a work is completed. Collaborative creation also provides communication opportunities for introverted students and can reduce social timidity, thereby supporting adolescent psychological development.

Practical Problems in Implementing Paper-Cutting Teaching and Campus Culture

Weak Professional Teaching Capacity

The school currently relies mainly on one art teacher to develop the school-developed curriculum, teach classes, guide the club, and organize campus cultural displays. There is limited collaboration with paper-cutting inheritors or specialists in ethnic folk art. Although the teacher has accumulated four years of practice, systematic training in folk paper-cutting, Tujia Nuo culture, and Miao-Dong embroidery motifs remains insufficient. This limits deeper cultural interpretation and advanced guidance for ethnic-integrated creation. The absence of a dedicated paper-cutting teacher also disperses instructional energy and constrains individualized guidance.

Low Digitalization of Curriculum Resources

Current materials rely mainly on printed textbooks, teacher-taken campus photographs, and offline Nuo opera videos. The school lacks a standardized digital repository of ethnic motifs, complete digital teaching materials from online Nuo-culture museums, and digital tools for assisting paper-cutting design. Multimedia equipment in rural schools is often outdated, which limits immersive digital heritage appreciation. Student works also lack systematic digital archiving and online display, restricting their circulation beyond the campus.

Limited Transformation Into Campus Cultural-Creative Products

At present, campus paper-cutting culture is still dominated by flat paper displays. Cultural-creative transformation remains limited to simple bookmarks and greeting cards. Deeper integration with school uniforms, campus signage, wall design, stage backgrounds, or other cultural products has not yet formed a standardized series. Because professional design guidance is limited, students' cultural and creative products may be repetitive, and public dissemination is mostly limited to internal school exhibitions rather than township or district-level cultural spaces.

Insufficient Home-School-Community Transmission

Most teaching and cultural activities occur within the school. Parents in rural communities may not fully recognize the educational value of paper-cutting or intangible heritage aesthetic education. The school has not yet built regular parent open days, family paper-cutting tasks, or parent-child activities. Consequently, the transmission chain of school teaching, family practice, and village-community dissemination remains incomplete, limiting the broader revitalization of local multi-ethnic intangible cultural heritage.

Strategies for Optimizing Paper-Cutting Art Teaching and Campus Culture Development

Build a Dual-Teacher Team of School Teachers and External Heritage Inheritors

First, local rural art teachers should receive regular specialized training in paper-cutting, Tujia Nuo mask patterns, and Miao-Dong embroidery motifs. Cooperation with district and county cultural centers and intangible heritage offices can provide hands-on workshops. Second, local Nuo opera and folk paper-cutting inheritors should be invited to school for long-term instruction, such as one thematic practical lesson per month. They can explain the cultural meanings of ethnic motifs and guide advanced multi-ethnic paper-cutting creation. Third, surrounding rural multi-ethnic schools can form a paper-cutting art

instruction-research community to share lesson plans, cases, and school-developed textbook resources, thereby reducing the burden on a single school.

Use Digital Tools and Build a Local Ethnic Motif Resource Repository

The school should establish a digital resource repository of local multi-ethnic paper-cutting materials, including high-resolution drafts of Tujia Nuo masks, Miao butterfly motifs, Dong brocade geometry, campus scenery, and revolutionary-culture elements. These resources can be stored on campus multimedia devices for classroom appreciation and design reference. Online digital museums, intangible heritage exhibitions, and short documentaries can be used to compensate for the lack of nearby art institutions. Outstanding student works should also be scanned and archived in an online exhibition platform open to parents and the township community. Simple digital drawing tools may support preliminary design before students complete traditional manual cutting.

Expand Campus Applications and Develop a Cultural-Creative Brand

The school can apply student paper-cutting motifs to uniforms, campus tote bags, notebooks, publicity boards, wall paintings, and art-festival stage backgrounds to form a unified visual brand. Cultural-creative products can be developed at different levels: basic bookmarks and cards for all students, flannel ornaments and decorative products for club members, and higher-level souvenirs in cooperation with local cultural and creative workshops. The school can also send outstanding multi-ethnic works to township cultural stations or district art museums and participate in ethnic festival exhibitions, allowing campus paper-cutting culture to radiate into the local community.

Establish Home-School-Community Collaborative Transmission

The school should design parent-child paper-cutting homework for traditional festivals and ethnic festivals, encouraging students and parents to create auspicious or ethnic motifs together and then exhibit them at school. Regular parent open days can invite parents to observe paper-cutting lessons and learn

about the value of intangible heritage and local ethnic culture. The paper-cutting club can also enter village communities to make festival window decorations or ethnic patterns for residents. Through these activities, a three-part transmission mechanism involving school, family, and community can be formed.

Iterate the School-Based Curriculum and Improve Differentiated Progression

On the basis of the current first volume and its seven units, the school should continue collecting classroom cases, refine the Nuo culture and multi-ethnic integration units, and add modules on digital paper-cutting creativity and cultural and creative design. Teaching goals should be further differentiated for beginners and advanced club members. More challenging tasks, such as ethnic motif integration, large thematic scrolls, and digital paper-cutting design, can help build a more complete curriculum that better fits the learning conditions of rural multi-ethnic students.

Conclusion and Outlook

Conclusion

This paper has examined four years of paper-cutting curriculum practice at Daping Middle School in Daping Dong, Tujia, and Miao Township in Wanshan District. The case shows that paper-cutting is low-cost, easy to implement, and highly compatible with the conditions of rural multi-ethnic junior high schools. Local Dong, Tujia, and Miao heritage motifs provide irreplaceable teaching materials, and a two-level system of basic classroom teaching and club-based advancement is highly feasible. The seven-unit modular school-developed curriculum follows a spiral logic of cognition, technique, life, moral education, ethnicity, creativity, and emotion. It integrates paper-cutting with revolutionary culture, local Nuo culture, campus anniversary themes, and graduation emotions, and it offers a standardized teaching model for Grade 7 students in Southwest China’s rural multi-ethnic schools.

The case further demonstrates that paper-cutting can empower campus culture through static visual environments, dynamic activities, long-term archives, and ethnic-unity culture. It produces educational

value in aesthetic education, moral education, intangible heritage transmission, labor education, psychological development, and school brand construction. However, the model still faces constraints in teacher capacity, digital resources, cultural and creative transformation, and home-school-community collaboration. These challenges can be addressed through dual-teacher teams, digital resource repositories, campus cultural and creative branding, and collaborative transmission mechanisms.

Outlook

In the broader context of promoting rural aesthetic education, bringing intangible cultural heritage into schools, and fostering a strong sense of the Chinese national community, paper-cutting art instruction in rural multi-ethnic junior high schools has considerable potential. Daping Middle School can continue to refine its school-developed curriculum, deepen the creative integration of Tujia Nuo culture and Miao-Dong motifs, promote digital paper-cutting teaching, expand campus cultural and creative branding, and build collaborative transmission among school, family, and community. Its four-year practice can also be summarized and shared with neighboring rural multi-ethnic schools as a replicable, low-cost model for intangible-heritage-based aesthetic education and distinctive campus culture development.

With a pair of scissors and a sheet of red paper, Chinese paper-cutting can take root in rural multi-ethnic campuses. Through the craft of the fingertips, students inherit Chinese cultural memory, encounter the beauty of their hometown, and recognize the coexistence of multiple ethnic cultures. In this process, Dong, Tujia, Miao, and Han adolescents can grow into young inheritors of outstanding traditional Chinese culture and local multi-ethnic heritage, realizing the educational ideal of nurturing people through beauty and culture.

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Appendix: Visual Materials From the School-Based Paper-Cutting Practice

The following figures preserve the visual evidence embedded in the original manuscript. Captions are descriptive because the source file did not provide formal figure numbers for all images.

Figure A1. Paper-cutting workshop and classroom materials used in the school-based practice.

Figure A2. Students participating in paper-cutting practice in an ordinary classroom.

Figure A3. Classroom-based paper-cutting activity with students working at their desks.

Figure A4. Student sketch transforming campus scenery into a paper-cutting design.

Figure A5. Completed student paper-cutting work based on campus scenery.

Figure A6. Framed paper-cutting works displayed as part of campus culture development.

Figure A7. Student work integrating multi-ethnic visual symbols and thematic imagery.

Figure A8. Framed circular paper-cutting works using campus and auspicious motifs.


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Figure A9. Paper-cutting works showing character imagery and ethnic-style visual design.

Figure A10. Ethnic-style paper-cutting design based on costume and mask imagery.

Figure A11. Simple repeated motif used for foundational paper-cutting training.

Figure A12. Paper-cutting works displayed on a campus exhibition wall.


山河在，不愁草木不生；壮志在，不愁事业不成
——大虾中学

Figure A13. Student works reflecting labor, auspicious, and festive themes.

Figure A14. Revolutionary-themed paper-cutting work used for moral and patriotic education.

Figure A15. Student practice combining sketching, motif planning, and cutting.

Figure A16. Circular floral paper-cutting work showing symmetrical design.

Figure A17. Student engaged in detailed paper-cutting practice.

Figure A18. Paper-cutting representation of a traditional architectural form.

Figure A19. Framed paper-cutting work used in the school's display area.

Figure A20. Paper-cutting bookmarks and small cultural and creative products.


1972

Figure A21. School 50th-anniversary paper-cutting cultural and creative design.

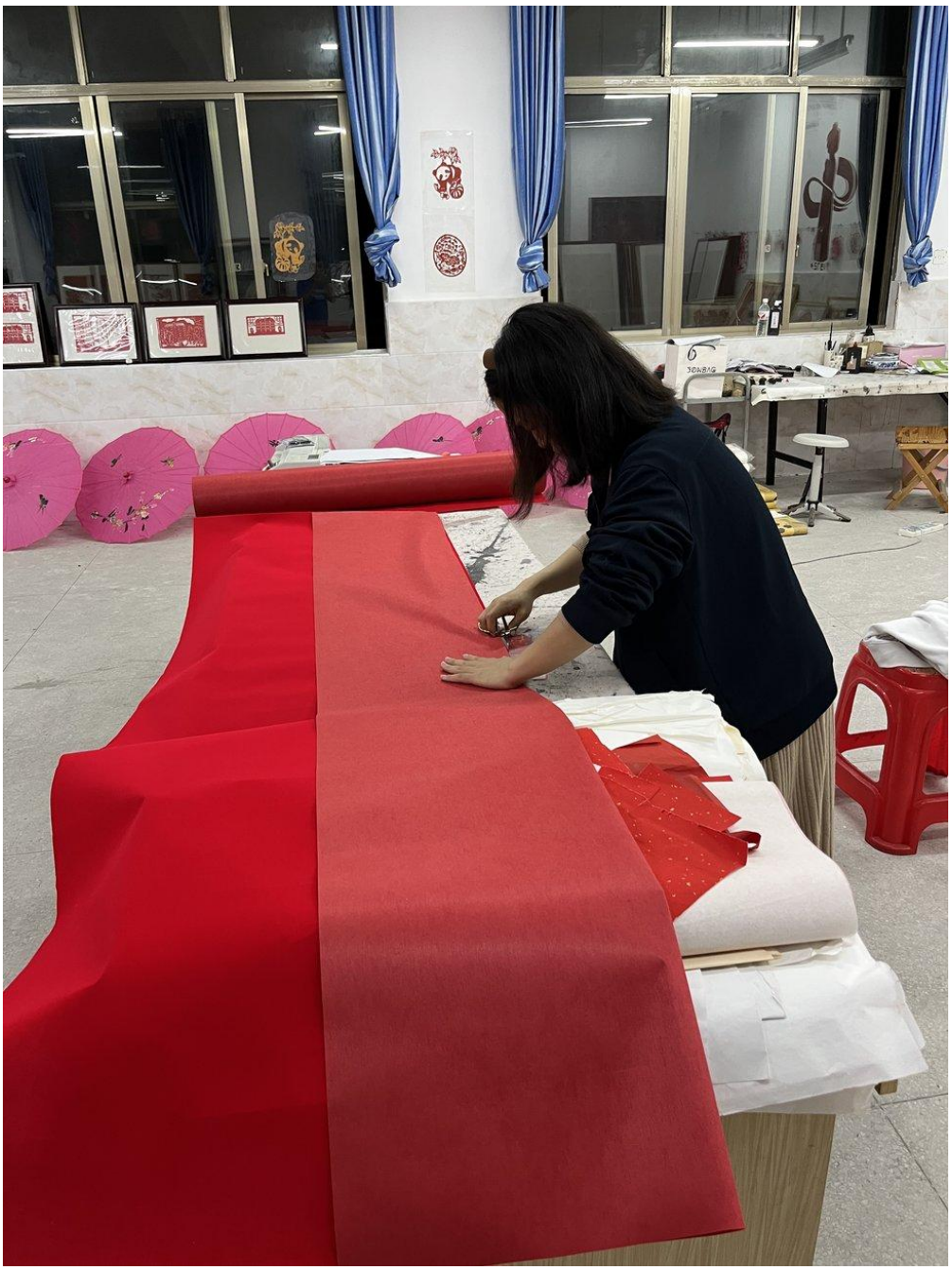

Figure A22. Anniversary-themed student paper-cutting work.

Figure A23. Additional anniversary paper-cutting design for campus culture.

Figure A24. Campus display of a paper-cutting club and achievement wall.

Figure A25. Paper-cutting materials and visual displays used for school exhibitions.

Figure A26. Campus cultural display area for paper-cutting works.

Figure A27. Digital image or poster related to paper-cutting cultural display.

Figure A28. Student or teacher paper-cutting demonstration scene.

Figure A29. Classroom or exhibition scene associated with the paper-cutting curriculum.

Figure A30. Supplementary visual material from the original manuscript.

Figure A31. Supplementary visual material from the original manuscript.

Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

The "Eternal Recurrence" of the Overman On the Teaching Proclaimed by Zarathustra

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI:https://doi.org/10.66581/c7cew780

Received 11 June 2026 • Accepted: 18 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Lang, X. (2026). The "Eternal Recurrence" of the Overman On the Teaching Proclaimed by Zarathustra. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 21.

Published by Nova Science Press, HK

Abstract

Thus Spoke Zarathustra occupies a pivotal position in Nietzsche's oeuvre. The work brings together two of Nietzsche's most decisive ideas: the overman (Übermensch) and eternal recurrence. The overman is not merely an ideal opposed to the "last man"; it is also the figure through which the hatred of time is overcome. This is the point at which the concept of the overman becomes internally connected with eternal recurrence. The overman affirms the past, wills entry into the ring of eternal recurrence, enters each coming moment as a creator, and thereby confers meaning upon existence. Zarathustra is both the teacher of the overman and the teacher of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's two key ideas can therefore be fully understood only within the narrative of Zarathustra's preaching and descent among human beings.

Keywords: Zarathustra; overman; last man; eternal recurrence

Introduction

The obscurity of Nietzsche's thought is well known. One of the major difficulties in studying Nietzsche lies in his distinctive mode of expression: aphorism, poetic diction, allegorical narration, and prophetic speech run through his writings. Thus Spoke Zarathustra begins with the line: "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home."[1] In composing this work, Nietzsche deliberately adopts a biblical form, modeling Zarathustra's activity on the experience of prophetic preaching and, more specifically, on the narrative pattern of Jesus' ministry. Yet Nietzsche chooses as his spokesman not Jesus but Zarathustra, the ancient Persian prophet. This choice is not accidental. Nietzsche's opposition to Christianity is well known; in order to establish a new principle of value, he must first exceed the

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2010), 5.

old principle of value. By writing in a biblical mode while displacing its theological center, Nietzsche seeks to criticize and overcome Christianity through its own rhetorical form. The new principle of value is concentrated in the concept of the overman.

Why, then, does Nietzsche assign the role of philosophical herald to Zarathustra? In his autobiography, Nietzsche explains that the singular historical significance of this Persian lies precisely in the fact that he first interpreted the struggle between good and evil as the true mechanism of things.[2] Nietzsche therefore reverses Zarathustra's historical function: the first moralist becomes the one who must overcome morality. As Sun Zhouxing notes, Nietzsche's primary reason for adopting the image of Zarathustra is to make him the herald of the doctrine of eternal recurrence; the name "Zarathustra" is inseparable from that doctrine.[3] In Nietzsche's philosophical drama, Zarathustra becomes the teacher of eternal recurrence and the bearer of a value opposed to Christianity.

Eternal recurrence is one of the most important concepts in Nietzsche's philosophy. Philosophers have long disagreed over its significance. Karl Jaspers and others regarded it with considerable suspicion, whereas Heidegger attributed to it a decisive place in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche himself describes the idea as standing "6,000 feet beyond man and time," and calls the fundamental conception of Thus Spoke Zarathustra—namely, the thought of eternal recurrence—the highest formula of affirmation available to us.[4] He also claims that eternal

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, Nietzsche's Autobiography: The Revaluation of All Values, trans. Zhanxiong Mai (Harbin: Heilongjiang Education Press, 2011), 114.

[3] Sun Zhouxing, "Several Issues Concerning Nietzsche's Image of Zarathustra," Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition), no. 5 (2009): 23–24.

[4] Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2015), 272.

recurrence is "the most scientific of all possible hypotheses."[5] Although Nietzsche's philosophy is often identified primarily with the will to power, eternal recurrence is no less central. As Heidegger's interpretation suggests, the will to power thinks the basic character of beings as beings, whereas eternal recurrence thinks the meaning of Being as such.[6] This article therefore takes Zarathustra's preaching as its guiding thread and examines the relation between Nietzsche's two key concepts: the overman and eternal recurrence.

1. Several Images of Zarathustra

Who is Zarathustra? When Nietzsche first presents him, we encounter above all a solitary figure. Zarathustra does not dwell among human beings; he lives with his animals, the eagle and the serpent. Nietzsche writes: "Behold! An eagle soared through the air in wide circles, and on it hung a serpent, not like prey but like a friend; for the serpent was coiled around its neck."[7] That Zarathustra lives with these animals, rather than others, is significant. Nietzsche uses them to communicate a concealed philosophical meaning. The eagle flies in circles, while the serpent coils upon its head; together they form a powerful image of the ring of eternal recurrence. The eagle is the proudest of animals. It surveys the earth from above, does not move with the herd, and moves in solitude from height to earth and back again. This image corresponds to Zarathustra's own solitary character. The serpent, by contrast, is a symbol of wisdom. In the biblical story it is the serpent who tempts Eve, telling her that the fruit of the tree of knowledge

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 35–36.

[6] Zhang Ke, "Is the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence Nietzsche's Core Thought? On Heidegger's Interpretation of Nietzsche's Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence," German Philosophy Yearbook (2008): 309.

[7] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 249.

will make her like God. The serpent is therefore both cunning and knowing. It possesses the power of mediation and transformation, and it controls the play between Being and appearance.

From the first part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra onward, the eagle and the serpent appear repeatedly. They are not only symbols of eternal recurrence; they also articulate an understanding of it. In Part Three, Zarathustra's animals say: "Everything goes, everything returns; eternally rolls the wheel of Being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of Being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of Being builds itself. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; eternally the ring of Being remains faithful to itself. In every moment Being begins; around every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity."[8] What the animals express, however, is only the phenomenal surface of eternal recurrence. They perceive the circular structure of becoming, but they do not enter the gate of eternal recurrence. At this stage, eternal recurrence remains suspended above the earth like an otherworldly faith. Only when a being is placed within it does the ring of eternal recurrence begin to operate. In this sense, many interpretations of Nietzsche's doctrine remain at the level of the animals: they treat eternal recurrence as a cosmological belief without existential significance. After the dwarf, the eagle, and the serpent, Nietzsche introduces the young shepherd. This shepherd, who represents Zarathustra, goes beyond the dwarf and the animals. By biting off the head of the black serpent that has lodged in his throat, he defeats the serpent of nihilism and grasps the actuality of eternal recurrence in the moment.

[8] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 249.

What, then, is Zarathustra's image? Nietzsche himself asks: "Who is Zarathustra? Is he a promiser? Or a fulfiller? A conqueror? Or an inheritor? An autumn? Or a ploughshare? A physician? Or one who has recovered? Is he a poet? Or a truthful one? A liberator? Or a subduer? A good man? Or an evil one?"[9] Zarathustra is indeed complex. From the perspective of ordinary human beings, he appears fragmentary, just as Zarathustra himself sees humanity as "fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents." To define Zarathustra, we must ask what he undergoes. In defining any person, we look to the actions and experiences through which that person's character is formed. As Aristotle's practical orientation suggests, action reveals essence. Napoleon is called a great commander because he underwent and performed the actions through which the essence of a commander was gathered in him. Likewise, Nietzsche describes Zarathustra as "the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle."[10] The decisive question is therefore how Zarathustra becomes such an advocate. This question leads us to his preaching experience and explains why Nietzsche treats the whole of Thus Spoke Zarathustra as the poetic articulation of eternal recurrence.

2. Zarathustra's Preaching Experience

2.1 The Preacher of the Doctrine of the Overman

When Zarathustra leaves his homeland and his lake and withdraws into the mountains, he is thirty years old. Jesus likewise began his public ministry at about thirty. Nietzsche once suggested that, had Jesus lived longer, he might not have persisted in the doctrine he believed to be true. Where Jesus' end becomes the origin of Christianity, Zarathustra's solitude becomes the

[9] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 221.

[10] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 349.

origin of a counter-teaching. After ten years in the mountains, Zarathustra's spirit overflows. He recognizes that he must give his love to human beings and says: "Behold! This cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again."[11] Thus begins his first descent. What does Zarathustra give to humanity? First, he announces the reality that "God is dead." He then proclaims the doctrine of the overman: "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome."[12]

There have been many definitions of the human being. Some have defined the human as the rational animal; others have defined the human as the tool-using animal. For Nietzsche, however, the human being is an undetermined being, a transitional form. Heidegger praises Nietzsche's insight into the unfinished character of humanity. In What Is Called Thinking?, Heidegger makes the difficult claim that "the most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking."[13] The undetermined human and the "not-yet-thought" are closely related. The human being remains open because its essence has not yet been gathered into a final form. The overman names this openness as a task of self-overcoming.

The concept of the overman is often misunderstood, especially when it is imagined as a being endowed with superhuman powers or as a figure beyond the ordinary human dimension. Walter Kaufmann objected to rendering Übermensch as "superman," because that translation easily suggests a comic-book or heroic fantasy figure.[14] Übermensch is a compound word, and its decisive element is über, meaning "over," "above," or "beyond." The overman, in this sense,

[11] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 6.

[12] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 9.

[13] Martin Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, trans. Zhouxing Sun (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2017), 9.

[14] Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 308.

remains a human type, yet one who exceeds the present form of humanity. The overman is not an otherworldly divinity. He is the meaning of the earth, and this meaning requires fidelity to the earth. This opens a perspective opposed to all doctrines that slander this world.[15] If "God is dead," then the overman is not a new God replacing the old one. As Sun Zhouxing argues, Nietzsche never presents the overman as another God; rather, he presents him as a higher, well-formed human type, opposed to the modern human, the "good person," the Christian, and other forms of nihilism.[16] The overman is therefore not omniscient or omnipotent. He is defined by the self-overcoming of inherited morality.

Nietzsche repeatedly describes the human being as a bridge. Heidegger interprets the overman as a figure of passage and transition. To clarify the essence of the overman, Nietzsche introduces the last man, the figure that immediately precedes the possible appearance of the overman.[17] The overman and the last man differ in kind. The last man represents the exhausted form of previous humanity. He does not belong to the "not-yet-thought." His way of representing the world is captured by Nietzsche's phrase: "We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink.[18] This blinking means a mode of appearance governed by concealment, comfort, and false truth. The last man no longer inquires into what appears; he demands conformity, conventionality, and safety. Whoever refuses this blinking truth is treated as a heretic.

[15] Leo Strauss, Nietzsche's Heavy Thought, trans. Yong Ma (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2020), 49.

[16] Sun Zhouxing, "The Last Man, the Overman, and the Human of the Future," Philosophical Research, no. 2 (2019): 110.

[17] Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, 84.

[18] Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, 97.

The last men are the preachers of virtue, the believers in a beyond, the despisers of the body, and the teachers of death. They make Zarathustra feel nausea and suffocation. The overman is the overcoming of this mode of representation. The morality of the overman lies in a will that creates beyond itself and, for that reason, is willing to perish.[19] The will that continually exceeds itself and overcomes itself is directed toward a gathering that has not yet been spoken. Thought is capable of thought precisely because there remains something not yet thought. The overman is not the embodiment of fixed happiness or a dead doctrine. He is a figure who wills destruction and simultaneously wills self-transcendence. Heidegger's interpretation may be summarized in three claims: first, the overman transports the essence of previous humanity into its truth and assumes it; second, this essence is not a product of unconstrained imagination projected into emptiness; and third, the figure of the overman belongs to Nietzsche's metaphysical thought because Nietzsche's thinking is rooted in the prior destiny of Western thought.[20] This is the first teaching Zarathustra brings to humanity. He teaches the overman: the giver, the self-overcomer, and the dancer of life. He proclaims not a will merely to survive, but a will to power: reconstruction upon destruction, repeated within an eternal fate. This future human is the embodiment of the will to power and is directed toward the eternal recurrence of the same.

2.2 Liberation from the Spirit of Revenge

After returning to the mountains, Zarathustra again experiences the pain of overflowing wisdom. In a dream he sees a child holding a mirror. In the mirror he does not see himself but rather a devil's face and mocking laughter. He recognizes a danger: "Truly, all too well do I understand the dream's sign and warning: my doctrine is in danger; weeds want to be called

[19] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 97.

[20] Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, 69.

wheat!"[21] In this anxiety, Zarathustra decides to descend again in order to clarify and defend his teaching. The second part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, corresponding to Zarathustra's second preaching experience, exposes once more the nature of the last man and seeks the bridge that leads toward the overman. It articulates the path by which one separates from the last man.

Zarathustra states: "You have placed reward and punishment in the foundation of things—and now even in the foundation of your souls."[22] Reward and punishment are the morality of the last man. Zarathustra then identifies the last man's most fundamental trait: "the spirit of revenge: my friends, that has so far been the best reflection of humanity; and wherever there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment."[23] Why does the spirit of revenge arise? How does the last man fall into the vortex of reward and punishment? At this point, Zarathustra identifies the decisive problem: time. "This, indeed this alone, is revenge itself: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.'"[24]

The will is obstructed by time. All that "was" lies beyond the power of willing. Schelling writes that, in the highest and final sense, there is no being other than willing; willing is primal being.[25] The spirit of revenge is the most typical symptom of the last man. It is no longer merely a moral or psychological phenomenon; it is the representational structure of Platonism and Christianity as a whole. In this sense, Nietzsche's account of revenge exposes the path of previous thought and at the same time thinks the Being of beings as a whole. If time is the key to

[21] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 126.

[22] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 145.

[23] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 223.

[24] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 223.

[25] F. W. J. Schelling, Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom, trans. Hua Xue (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 1999), 271.

revenge, what concept of time does Zarathustra presuppose? He extends Aristotle's thought in the Physics, where time appears primarily as a destructive factor.[26] Zarathustra similarly understands time through passing-away: if time exists, it passes, and this passing is unbearable.[27] The essence of time is disappearance. Time never remains; what it truly leaves behind is the past. This is the source of tragedy. The will is imprisoned, deprived of hope and even of freedom. The disgust produced by the obstructed will is revenge. The last man is the pessimist trapped within this tragedy. Beyond revenge, he possesses nothing.

For Zarathustra, the last man must be overcome. But how is this overcoming possible? When Zarathustra confronts the poisonous tarantulas, he says: "For that man be delivered from revenge—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms."[28] Liberation from revenge is the bridge Zarathustra teaches. It is the path to the overman and to the Being of beings. Such liberation must return to the will's hatred of time and its "it was." Time and "it was" here name the same structure, because the essence of time is passing. The decisive question is how the will can cease hating time. This question leads us into the region of what has not yet been thought.

Zarathustra's answer is redemption: "To redeem what is past and to transform every 'It was' into 'Thus I willed it!'—that alone should I call redemption."[29] True redemption is the overcoming of revenge. It transforms "it was" into "thus I willed it." In Heidegger's words, such

[26] Aristotle, Physics, trans. Zhuming Zhang (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1982), 121.

[27] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 215.

[28] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 155.

[29] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 222.

transformation releases the will from what is counter to it.[30] The liberation of the will from what resists it takes place as a victory over the passing of time. Only such a will is the will to power. But how is the will to power awakened? How does the self-overcomer overcome itself? How does willing move from reaction to activity? This is possible only if the will is free. The freedom of the will means that, amid all departure, willing is still free. If the will does not flee what has passed but brings it back, then it can release itself from opposition. If the will continually wills and demands the departure and return of all things, then it is freed from hatred of time and from hatred of the merely past.[31] What makes the will free points necessarily toward the eternal recurrence of the same. Only if the will wills and demands that every "it was" return eternally can it overcome hatred and thereby overcome the spirit of revenge.

The first two descents of Zarathustra show that eternal recurrence has long dwelt within his thought, even when it has not yet been named. The process of uncovering this thought is difficult, because Zarathustra remains a master of metaphor. Like his serpent, he governs the play between Being and appearance. In the first two parts of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, we do not find a direct exposition of eternal recurrence. Yet Nietzsche later insists that the work primarily expresses this thought. It is therefore only by entering the logic behind the obscure sayings that we can approach Nietzsche's inner structure of thought.

2.3 The Teacher of Eternal Recurrence

Through the first two stages of preaching, Zarathustra discovers a path toward eternal recurrence. Yet this discovery fills him with terror. Although the spirit of revenge can be

[30] Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, 118.

[31] Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, 119.

overcome, such overcoming leads him into an even more desolate place: “all houses of Being remain to be built.” Between the most extreme nihilism and the highest value there lies only a narrow fissure. Zarathustra therefore bears the heaviest burden; the thought itself is the “greatest weight.” His soul says: “O Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruits.”[32] He returns again to solitude. The stillest hour arrives, signaling that he is prepared to be shattered. When he returns to human beings once more, he has become mature.

At the beginning of his third descent, Zarathustra can no longer withhold the demonic thought: “This slow spider that crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must we not all have been here before?”[33] Zarathustra now teaches that all things will recur in the same way. Only through the eternal recurrence of the same can the will truly overcome hatred of the past. Nothing is simply past; everything returns. Every moment will return innumerable times. The will no longer has the right to hate. Its only path is to say: thus I willed it; I willed what was, because it is what will come again. This does not mean that the will passively accepts the poison of time. On the contrary, because of eternal recurrence, the will resolves to integrate every moment into its own essence. In this way, the will grants time the highest value.

At this point, the last man has been overcome, and the spirit of revenge has disappeared. Every coming moment becomes eternal. The moment no longer merely vanishes. The bridge to the overman has been built, and Zarathustra’s secret garden is opened. The mission of Zarathustra as teacher of eternal recurrence is accomplished in the third preaching experience. Everything recurs, and Zarathustra is no exception: “I return eternally to this same and selfsame

[32] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 235.

[33] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 235.

life, in what is greatest and in what is smallest, to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak again the word of the great noon of earth and human beings, to proclaim the overman again to humanity."[34] In eternal return, Zarathustra recognizes his own essence: he exists eternally as the teacher of eternal recurrence.

3. The Problem of Meaning in Eternal Recurrence

The eternal recurrence of the same has always contained a serious problem. Heidegger formulates its most terrible form as follows: existence as it is, without meaning and without aim, yet inevitably recurring without end, all the way to nothingness—this is eternal recurrence. It is the extreme form of nihilism: nothingness, or meaninglessness, is eternal.[35] Between the highest value and the deepest void there lies only the narrowest fissure. If what one now experiences and will experience has already occurred countless times, where is the motive for existence? Where is freedom of the will? All the values one believes in seem to be swallowed by the ring of recurrence. Eternal recurrence not only shatters the dream of a beyond; it also breaks the meaning of this-worldly existence, casting beings as a whole into boundless solitude, like Sisyphus eternally pushing his stone up the mountain.

Nietzsche himself was aware of this problem. When he formulates the thought, he is terrified: "O abyssal thought, you are my thought! When shall I find the strength to hear you digging and no longer tremble? When I hear you digging, my heart leaps into my throat. Your silence itself would strangle me, you silent abyss!"[36] For this reason, he calls the thought the

[34] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 350.

[35] Heidegger, Nietzsche, 458.

[36] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 255.

greatest weight. Nietzsche attempts in several ways to demonstrate the actuality of eternal recurrence, but these attempts often lead readers astray. The title under which he presents the thought—"On the Vision and the Riddle"—already reveals his anxiety. Great thinkers are often difficult because truth itself is difficult. Nietzsche states through the mouth of the Wanderer and his Shadow: "The desert grows: woe to him who harbors deserts!"[37] The thought of eternal recurrence had already begun to torment Nietzsche. Yet the question of human meaning must still be confronted.

The most influential interpretation of eternal recurrence remains Heidegger's interpretation of the eternal recurrence of the same. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, however, offers a different reading. For Deleuze, eternal return is not the return of permanent sameness, a state of equilibrium, or a dwelling of identity. It is not the return of "the same" or "the one," but the return that belongs to multiplicity and difference.[38] Keith Ansell Pearson summarizes this Deleuzian interpretation by emphasizing that eternal return is not the intensification of "this one" but of "another"; it is not identical reproduction but the repetition of difference.[39] Nietzsche's attempts to demonstrate eternal recurrence begin from the idea that the universe has no final equilibrium: finite configurations of force and infinite time yield endless becoming. On this point, Deleuze and Heidegger are not entirely opposed. Their crucial difference concerns the mode of return.

[37] Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 488.

[38] Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Ying Zhou and Yuyu Liu (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2016), 101.

[39] Keith Ansell Pearson, "Living the Eternal Return as the Event: Nietzsche with Deleuze," Journal of Nietzsche Studies, no. 14 (1997): 67.

Deleuze argues that Nietzsche's affirmation of multiplicity is concentrated in the tragic spirit. Dionysus affirms all existence, including death, rebirth, and the deepest suffering; this, for Deleuze, is the essence of tragedy—the affirmation of plurality and multiplicity.[40] Because Nietzsche's tragic thought is a thought of affirmation, Deleuze holds that Nietzsche cannot be affirming a rigid repetition of identity. Moreover, Deleuze argues that the will itself is plural and complex. Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer precisely by refusing the unity of the will: once we assume that the will has unity or identity, we are already destined to negate the will itself.[41] A will defined by identity ultimately imprisons itself in pity, morality, and asceticism. Such a will cannot overcome the spirit of revenge. For Deleuze, then, Nietzsche cannot have intended a dead cycle of identical repetition.

To demonstrate the eternal return of multiplicity, Deleuze turns to Nietzsche's image of the dice throw. The throw of the dice has two moments: the moment of casting and the moment of falling. These two moments belong to the same world. "The relation of multiplicity and unity, of becoming and Being, constitutes a game. To affirm becoming and to affirm the Being of becoming are the two moments of the game."[42] To throw the dice is to face chance and affirm contingency. The return of the dice is the affirmation of necessity. Nietzsche identifies chance with multiplicity. The affirmation of the moment therefore lies in affirming its contingency and plurality. The second moment of the dice throw, the return, is not only the affirmation of necessity but also the return of the first moment itself; it is the repetition of the throw, the

[40] Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 36.

[41] Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 15.

[42] Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 53.

regeneration and reaffirmation of chance.[43] Chance affirms necessity, and necessity affirms chance. The two are internally linked.

Through Deleuze's account of the return of multiplicity, the meaning of the moment becomes clearer. The eternal recurrence of the same and the eternal return of multiplicity are not simply mutually exclusive. Rather, they are two aspects of eternal recurrence. As the return of actual facts, eternal recurrence is the reappearance of the same. As the return of the moment, however, it is the collision of past and future; the moment itself is always open to multiplicity and contingency. Every moment is filled with the essence of the will to power, and this will must be plural if it is to desire continual self-overcoming. Eternal recurrence places beings into the open field of time, dispels the gloomy atmosphere of mere circular repetition, and grants life its highest value.

The meaning of the future human—the overman—therefore lies in striving to overcome oneself in every moment. To realize the best possible moment is to assume the greatest responsibility for life. We are always confronted by the question: do you will this again and again, innumerable times? This question becomes the source of the future human's motivation and the disclosure of the meaning of the earth. Kathleen O'Dwyer observes that the mystery of hope within despair, the resilience of beginning again after failure, and the affirmation that life is worth striving for are combined in the poetic claim that life has meaning and that the search for meaning itself is worth the effort.[44] Even if we are repeating the moments of a previous ring, we still choose to overcome ourselves. Even if all things finally perish and return to nothingness, life

[43] Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 56.

[44] Kathleen O'Dwyer, "Nietzsche's Challenge: Eternal Recurrence," Journal of Humanistic Psychology 51, no. 2 (2011): 253.

remains worthy of affirmation. This is the expression of the will to power and the essence of the tragic spirit. In countless identical mornings, Sisyphus still pushes his stone up the mountain with full energy; this is his highest contempt for Zeus. As Strauss puts it, the earth itself has no purpose; only when human beings will the earth to have meaning does the earth possess meaning.[45]

4. Conclusion

The concepts of the overman and eternal recurrence are internally connected. The overman becomes the overman because willing enters the ring of eternal recurrence and creates beyond itself in the recurring moment. The doctrine of eternal recurrence removes the mysterious veil of Platonism and Christianity. It teaches that the otherworldly beyond contains only nothingness: there is no original sin, no redemptive debt, and no salvation outside the earth. The earth is the foundation and aim of the Being of beings. Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead" therefore demands a return to beings themselves and to the overman as the this-worldly aim of humanity.

The overman and the last man are opposed images of human possibility. They embody different human essences. The overman signifies the enhancement of humanity, whereas the last man signifies decline and decadence. Their deepest difference lies in their relation to time. The last man's relation to time generates the spirit of revenge; the overman overcomes hatred of time. In Nietzsche's thought, eternal recurrence is the essence of Being. No being can pass beyond the limit of eternal recurrence, and the overman neither does nor can transcend that limit. Therefore, the realization of the overman must occur within the ring of eternal recurrence. The future human

[45] Strauss, Nietzsche's Heavy Thought, 49.

is not a final destination; indeed, there may be no final destination, because time for Nietzsche is a ring.

The overman first affirms fate and the meaning of the earth. In every moment of the ring, he takes himself seriously and attempts to overcome himself. Nietzsche writes in The Gay Science: "Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all, someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer."[46] As Aaron Ridley explains, to love fate is to say yes to the counter-concepts of the created God: temporality, embodiment, contingency, and every necessity of a life without transcendence.[47] This is Nietzsche's tragic wisdom. It is the morality of the overman: no original sin, no hatred of time, no spirit of revenge, but affirmation of all that has been and the effort to confer meaning upon every coming moment through one's own will.

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[46] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 223.

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Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

Practical Pathways for Coordinating Burden Reduction and Quality Improvement in Primary and Secondary Schools Under the Double Reduction Policy

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI:https://doi.org/10.66581/mtjk6269

Received 15 June 2026 • Accepted: 26 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Tang, L., Duan, X., & Shen, Z. (2026). Practical pathways for coordinating burden reduction and quality improvement in primary and secondary schools under the Double Reduction policy. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 12.

Abstract

Objective: This paper constructs a practice-oriented pathway for coordinating burden reduction and quality improvement in primary and secondary schools under China's Double Reduction policy. Methods: Drawing on policy analysis, school-based practice reflection, and the logic of instructional improvement, the study develops an implementation framework covering school governance, homework redesign, classroom transformation, after-school services, home-school collaboration, and evaluation reform. Results: The analysis identifies a coordinated pathway that clarifies school-level governance responsibilities, reconstructs homework as diagnostic evidence of learning, improves classroom efficiency through meaningful learning tasks, builds differentiated after-school services, strengthens home-school communication, and replaces score-centered accountability with process-oriented quality monitoring. Conclusion: The central purpose of Double Reduction is not a simple reduction in learning time, but a structural shift from externally imposed pressure to internally generated educational quality. Sustainable burden reduction becomes possible only when curriculum, teaching, homework, services, and evaluation are redesigned as an integrated system.

Keywords: Double Reduction; burden reduction; quality improvement; homework governance; after-school service; basic education

Introduction

China's Double Reduction policy, issued in 2021 for compulsory education, aims to reduce excessive homework and off-campus tutoring burdens. Its policy intention is not merely the administrative compression of homework or tutoring time, but a deeper reconstruction of the

ecology of basic education (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2021). When external tutoring is restricted and written homework is regulated, schools become the central sites in which educational quality, learning equity, and student well-being must be secured.

In practice, however, burden reduction and quality improvement can easily become disconnected. Some schools interpret reduction primarily as numerical control over homework quantity, while the quality of classroom learning remains unchanged. Some teachers reduce assignments but compensate by accelerating classroom pace, thereby shifting pressure rather than reducing it. Some parents, concerned about examination competition, transfer the burden to hidden tutoring, repeated practice, or intensive home supervision. These tensions indicate that Double Reduction cannot be implemented through isolated administrative measures. It requires a coordinated system in which curriculum design, classroom teaching, homework, after-school services, family education, and evaluation reform support one another.

This paper addresses the practical question of how primary and secondary schools can reduce students' excessive academic burden while improving the quality of learning. Rather than treating burden reduction as a policy slogan, the study regards it as both a school-based governance problem and an instructional-improvement problem. The central argument is that sustainable implementation depends on a shift from time-based management to quality-based learning design. The paper therefore constructs a practical pathway that connects governance, pedagogy, service provision, home-school collaboration, and evaluation.

Theoretical Basis and Policy Logic

The policy logic of Double Reduction is grounded in three related concerns. First, excessive homework and shadow education increase students' academic pressure and weaken the developmental functions of schooling. Second, dependence on off-campus tutoring can enlarge educational inequality, because families with greater economic and cultural resources can purchase additional learning opportunities. Third, an examination-oriented learning culture often narrows the curriculum and reduces students' time for sleep, exercise, reading, social participation, and personal interests.

From the perspective of school improvement, reducing burden does not mean lowering academic standards. Learning quality is not determined simply by the number of exercises completed, but by the alignment among learning objectives, meaningful tasks, timely feedback, and opportunities for transfer. Research on formative assessment suggests that feedback, diagnostic evidence, and student involvement in learning goals can improve learning more effectively than repetitive low-level practice (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Similarly, studies of effective teaching emphasize clarity, feedback, and visible learning processes rather than the mechanical accumulation of learning time (Hattie, 2009).

Double Reduction also has an equity dimension. Studies of shadow education show that private tutoring can operate as a hidden market that reshapes educational opportunities outside formal schooling (Bray, 2009). If mainstream schools cannot provide high-quality teaching and appropriate after-school support, restrictions on tutoring may produce anxiety or substitution effects. The core responsibility of schools is therefore to make high-quality learning available

within the public school system, so that students do not need to rely excessively on external supplementation.

Research Design

This paper adopts a practice-oriented analytical design. The research object is not a single school case, but an implementation mechanism that can guide school-based reform under Double Reduction. The analysis follows a chain of policy requirement, school problem, practice pathway, and quality evidence. On this basis, the study synthesizes common implementation tasks in primary and secondary schools and organizes them into a coordinated framework.

The analytical framework includes five dimensions: school governance, homework design, classroom teaching, after-school service, and evaluation. These dimensions correspond to the main sites where student burden is generated or reduced. Governance determines whether responsibility is clear; homework reflects the relationship between teaching and learning evidence; classroom teaching determines the quality of core learning time; after-school services influence equity and differentiated support; and evaluation shapes the behavior of teachers, students, and parents.

Because this paper is a practice-pathway study rather than a statistical evaluation, it does not claim causal effects based on experimental data. Its value lies in clarifying operational principles, implementation steps, and quality indicators that schools can adapt to their own contexts. Future empirical studies may test the framework through longitudinal school data, student workload surveys, classroom observation, teacher interviews, and comparative evaluation.

Practical Pathways for Coordinated Implementation

First, schools should establish a governance mechanism that links burden reduction with quality improvement. A school-level Double Reduction working group should not only check homework time, but also review assignment quality, classroom progress, after-school service participation, student well-being, and parent feedback. The principal's office, teaching-research groups, grade groups, moral education departments, and parent committees should share information through a regular review cycle. This converts Double Reduction from a compliance task into a continuous improvement process.

Second, homework should be redesigned from quantity control to learning diagnosis. In many schools, homework becomes burdensome because it repeats classroom exercises without differentiation. A quality-oriented homework system should include basic consolidation tasks, optional extension tasks, interdisciplinary inquiry tasks, and reflection tasks. Teachers should estimate completion time before assigning homework, collect evidence of common errors, and use homework results to adjust subsequent instruction. The key question is not only whether homework is reduced, but whether each task has a clear learning function.

Third, classroom teaching should become the main field of quality improvement. If classroom efficiency remains low, reducing homework will be perceived as a risk to achievement. Teachers need to strengthen lesson preparation around core concepts, learning difficulties, and transfer tasks. Classroom time should be used for explanation, inquiry, practice, feedback, and correction rather than one-way coverage of content. Cooperative learning, problem-based tasks, and formative assessment should be adopted selectively when they serve learning objectives. A

high-quality classroom allows students to understand, practice, and receive feedback before they leave school.

Fourth, after-school services should shift from supervision to developmental support. After-school time is often used only for homework completion or childcare. Under Double Reduction, it should become a structured service system that includes academic support, reading, arts, sports, science and technology, labor education, and mental-health activities. Schools should design differentiated service menus for students with different needs. For students with learning difficulties, after-school services can provide targeted guidance; for students with strong interests, they can provide enrichment activities; and for all students, they can offer time and space for holistic development.

Fifth, home-school collaboration should guide parents from anxiety-driven supervision to developmental support. Parents are important participants in Double Reduction because family expectations can either consolidate or undermine school reform. Schools should explain the purpose of burden reduction, provide clear homework standards, share evidence of student development, and offer guidance on sleep, reading, exercise, and digital-device use. Parent education should not rely on moral persuasion alone; it should provide practical tools that help families build reasonable routines and trust school-based learning.

Sixth, evaluation should be reconstructed to support quality rather than pressure. If schools continue to evaluate teachers mainly by test rankings and students mainly by scores, Double Reduction will remain superficial. Schools should develop a multi-source quality-monitoring system that includes academic progress, classroom participation, homework quality, physical health, reading habits, interest development, and psychological well-being. Examination results

remain important, but they should be interpreted as one form of evidence rather than the sole purpose of schooling.

Implementation Framework

The practical pathway can be organized as a closed-loop framework of diagnosis, design, action, evidence, and adjustment. Diagnosis identifies where burden is produced; design translates policy goals into school routines; action implements changes in classrooms, homework, services, and family communication; evidence records workload, learning quality, and student development; and adjustment uses evidence to refine practice. This closed loop prevents Double Reduction from becoming a one-time campaign.

Dimension	Main Problem	Practice Path	Quality Evidence
Governance	Policy tasks are fragmented across departments.	Build a school-level review cycle linking homework, classroom teaching, services, and student well-being.	Monthly workload records; teaching-research meeting minutes; parent and student feedback.
Homework	Assignments emphasize repetition and uniform quantity.	Design layered, diagnostic, and feedback-oriented homework with time estimation.	Completion time, error patterns, revision quality, and teacher feedback records.
Classroom	Low-efficiency teaching transfers pressure to after-class practice.	Use goal-focused teaching, core tasks, formative checks, and in-class correction.	Classroom observation, student work samples, and learning-progress evidence.
After-school Service	Services remain limited to care or homework supervision.	Provide academic support, reading, sports, arts, inquiry, and interest-based programs.	Participation rate, program diversity, student satisfaction, and development portfolios.
Evaluation	Score ranking drives hidden burden and parental anxiety.	Combine academic progress with well-being, habits, participation, and growth evidence.	Student growth files, health records, multi-source evaluation reports.

Table 1. A Coordinated Implementation Framework for Burden Reduction and Quality Improvement

Key Difficulties and Countermeasures

The first difficulty is the tension between reduced workload and examination pressure. In many contexts, entrance examinations remain a strong external constraint. Schools should therefore improve the precision of teaching rather than simply reducing practice. Grade groups

can develop shared lesson plans, common error banks, and targeted remedial resources so that students receive effective support within school time.

The second difficulty is the uneven professional capacity of teachers. High-quality homework design, formative assessment, and differentiated after-school services require professional knowledge and collaboration. Schools should build teaching-research communities that focus on real student work rather than only on lesson-display activities. Teachers can jointly analyze assignments, compare student responses, and refine task design. Such professional collaboration reduces individual workload while improving instructional quality.

The third difficulty is parental anxiety. When parents do not understand school reform, they may seek hidden tutoring or add extra assignments at home. Schools should make learning processes visible. Weekly learning notes, sample feedback, reading records, and student growth portfolios can show parents what students have learned and where support is needed. Transparent communication helps families replace excessive control with informed cooperation.

The fourth difficulty is resource inequality among schools. High-quality after-school services require teachers, facilities, community resources, and funding. Education authorities should support schools through district-level resource platforms, teacher rotation, shared online courses, community partnerships, and targeted funding. Without external support, schools with weaker resources may face heavier implementation pressure and lower service quality.

Discussion

The analysis shows that burden reduction and quality improvement are not inherently contradictory. They become contradictory only when schools equate quality with additional time

and repetitive practice. If learning design is improved, less homework can still support better learning because assignments become more diagnostic, classrooms become more efficient, and after-school services become more differentiated. The essential reform is a change in the production mode of learning quality.

This paper also suggests that Double Reduction should be understood as ecological reform. Student burden is produced by the interaction of policy expectations, school routines, teacher practices, family anxiety, assessment systems, and social competition. Therefore, a single measure cannot solve the problem. The coordinated pathway proposed here emphasizes alignment: homework reform must be connected with classroom teaching; after-school services must be connected with equity; home-school collaboration must be connected with evaluation reform; and evaluation reform must be connected with student development.

At the same time, implementation should avoid formalism. Reducing the number of written assignments without improving task quality may lead to superficial compliance. Providing after-school services without curriculum design may increase teachers' workload without improving students' development. Replacing public rankings with hidden rankings may maintain pressure in another form. Schools need evidence-based monitoring to identify these risks and adjust practice continuously.

Limitations and Future Perspectives

This study is primarily a conceptual and practice-oriented analysis. It constructs an implementation framework but does not provide statistical evidence from a large-scale empirical sample. The proposed pathways should therefore be interpreted as operational guidance rather

than verified causal conclusions. Different regions, school stages, and student groups may require different emphases.

Future research can examine the framework through mixed methods. Quantitative studies may measure changes in homework time, sleep duration, academic progress, participation in after-school services, and parent anxiety before and after implementation. Qualitative studies may use classroom observation, teacher interviews, student learning diaries, and parent focus groups to identify how the mechanisms operate in real schools. Comparative case studies across urban, rural, and county schools can further clarify the conditions for sustainable implementation.

Conclusion

Under the Double Reduction policy, the practical task of primary and secondary schools is to reduce excessive academic burden while improving the quality of school-based learning. This paper argues that the two goals can be coordinated through an integrated pathway consisting of governance reconstruction, diagnostic homework design, classroom quality improvement, differentiated after-school services, home-school collaboration, and developmental evaluation.

The core of Double Reduction is not a mechanical subtraction of homework and tutoring, but a structural improvement of the educational system. When schools provide efficient classrooms, meaningful assignments, rich services, reasonable evaluation, and trustworthy communication with families, students' learning burden can be reduced without weakening educational quality. Such reform requires sustained professional work, evidence-based adjustment, and shared responsibility among schools, families, and education authorities.

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Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

Authenticity Crisis, Personality Replication Risks, and Labeling Governance in Generative-AI Deep Synthesis: Toward a Traceable and Rights-Sensitive Framework

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.66581/tbyn7997

Received 6 June 2026 • Accepted: 16 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Song, Z. (2026). Authenticity Crisis, Personality Replication Risks, and Labeling Governance in Generative-AI Deep Synthesis: Toward a Traceable and Rights-Sensitive Framework. Journal of Psychology & Education, 1(5), 32.

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence has transformed deep synthesis from a specialized technique of media manipulation into an ordinary infrastructure for producing text, images, audio, video, virtual scenes, digital humans, and increasingly personalized AI agents. The ethical problem is therefore no longer limited to whether a specific image or video is fake. A deeper challenge concerns the technological blurring of three boundaries: the boundary between authentic and synthetic content, the boundary between a real person and a digital replica, and the boundary between human agency and automated proxy action. This article argues that the governance of AI-generated synthetic content should not be reduced to content labeling alone. Labeling is necessary because it helps users identify the artificial origin of media, but it is insufficient when synthetic content imitates a particular person's voice, likeness, expressive style, behavioral patterns, or decision-making tendencies. In such cases, the ethical issue is not merely deception but the unauthorized occupation of a person's communicative position. The article develops a three-level analysis of ethical risk: epistemic risks to public truth and social trust, personality-rights risks arising from digital replication, and responsibility risks generated by persona-based AI agents. Drawing on current governance instruments in China, the European Union, the United States, and international AI ethics frameworks, the article proposes a five-dimensional governance model: identifiability, provenance traceability, identity authorization, revocability, and accountability. The central claim is that deep synthesis governance must move from a narrow model of "AI-content disclosure" toward a broader

framework of "synthetic personhood governance," in which content origin, identity authorization, agentic behavior, and responsibility allocation are treated as interconnected problems.

Keywords: generative AI; deep synthesis; deepfakes; digital replicas; personality rights; AI agents; content labeling; authenticity; accountability; AI governance

1. Introduction

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has made synthetic content increasingly realistic, inexpensive, and accessible. Text can be generated in a human-like style; faces can be synthesized without a real subject; voices can be cloned from short recordings; videos can be manipulated to represent events that never occurred; and conversational agents can be personalized to imitate the linguistic habits, preferences, or decision-making patterns of specific individuals. The ethical concern raised by these technologies is not simply that some people may use artificial intelligence to lie. Deception, forgery, and impersonation existed long before generative AI. What is new is the scale, fidelity, automation, and social embeddedness of synthetic production. Deep synthesis technologies shift the problem from occasional falsification to a persistent uncertainty about whether a given piece of content, identity performance, or communicative act originates from a real human being.

This article focuses on three related problems: the authenticity crisis of AI-generated synthetic content, the personality replication risks of digital replicas, and the limits of labeling-based governance. The argument is that the most serious ethical challenge of deep synthesis is not exhausted by the question "Is this content AI-generated?" A more fundamental question is: "Whose presence, intention, and responsibility does this synthetic content claim to represent?" A synthetic video of an unknown person, a parody image of a fictional figure, a realistic clone of a public official's voice, and a personalized agent trained on a real person's private messages do not raise the same ethical issues. They differ in relation to identity, consent, public harm, and responsibility.

Recent regulatory developments show that governments have begun to recognize the need for specific rules on synthetic content. China's 2025 Measures for the Labeling of AI-Generated Synthetic Content require both explicit and implicit labeling of AI-generated synthetic content under defined conditions, while earlier Chinese rules on deep synthesis and generative AI services already imposed obligations concerning provider responsibility, user management, and content safety. The European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act introduces transparency obligations for certain AI systems, including requirements related to marking AI-generated content and disclosing deepfakes, with Article 50 transparency obligations applying from August 2026. The U.S. Copyright Office has also addressed the legal and policy problems of "digital replicas," emphasizing that AI-generated imitations of a person's voice or likeness create risks not fully captured by traditional copyright doctrine.

These developments confirm the relevance of labeling and disclosure. Yet labeling alone cannot resolve the ethical complexity of deep synthesis. A watermark or metadata label may show that a video, voice, or text was generated by AI, but it does not necessarily tell users whether the depicted person consented, whether the training data were lawfully obtained, whether the content is satirical or deceptive, whether a platform verified the identity claim, or who is responsible if an AI agent acts on behalf of a human. The governance of deep synthesis must therefore combine content transparency with identity authorization, provenance tracking, auditability, and responsibility allocation.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 clarifies the concepts of generative AI, deep synthesis, digital replicas, and persona-based agents. Section 3 analyzes the authenticity crisis as an epistemic and social-trust problem. Section 4 examines personality replication as a rights and dignity problem. Section 5 discusses AI agents and responsibility attribution. Section 6 reviews existing governance approaches, including Chinese regulation, the EU AI Act, U.S. digital-replica policy, NIST risk management, and international AI ethics frameworks. Section 7 argues that labeling governance is necessary but insufficient. Section 8 proposes a traceable and rights-sensitive governance framework. The conclusion argues that the future of deep synthesis governance lies in moving from content labeling to synthetic-personhood governance.

2. Conceptual Clarification: From Synthetic Media to Synthetic Personhood

A serious analysis of deep synthesis must distinguish several concepts that are often conflated. Generative AI refers to systems capable of producing new content in response to prompts, examples, goals, or environmental inputs. This includes language models, image-generation systems, audio synthesis models, video-generation tools, and multimodal systems. Deep synthesis refers more specifically to the use of AI to generate, modify, or combine text, image, audio, video, virtual scenes, or other digital content in a way that may simulate reality or human expression. Deepfakes are a narrower subset of synthetic media, usually involving realistic AI-generated or AI-manipulated image, audio, or video content that resembles real people, events, or environments and may mislead viewers.

Digital replicas represent a further development. A digital replica is not merely synthetic content; it is synthetic content that imitates an identifiable person. It may replicate a person's face, voice, gestures, style of speech, artistic manner, emotional tone, or other recognizable attributes. The U.S. Copyright Office's 2024 report on digital replicas uses the concept to address AI-generated representations that realistically portray a person's voice or appearance, especially when such portrayals raise concerns about unauthorized imitation and exploitation. In ethical terms, the decisive feature of a digital replica is not technical similarity alone but recognizability and representational substitution. The replica is ethically significant because it can lead audiences to believe that a real person has spoken, acted, endorsed, consented, or appeared.

Persona-based AI agents extend the problem from representation to action. An ordinary generative model produces outputs. An agentic system can pursue goals, call tools, retrieve information, interact with external systems, and perform multi-step tasks. Recent work on agentic AI emphasizes that such systems are no longer merely reactive text generators but can execute workflows and produce consequences in social, economic, and organizational contexts (Kasirzadeh & Gabriel, 2025; Mukherjee & Chang, 2025). When such systems are personalized with a user's data, memory, voice, writing style, or preference profile, they may operate as digital proxies. The ethical question then shifts from "What content was generated?" to "Who is being represented by this agent, and who is responsible for its acts?"

This conceptual shift is crucial. A deepfake video may deceive viewers about an event. A digital replica may misappropriate a person's identity. A persona-based agent may occupy a person's communicative role. These are related but not identical harms. The first concerns truth, the second concerns personality, and the third concerns agency and responsibility.

The term "synthetic personhood" is used here not to imply that AI systems possess moral personhood, consciousness, or legal personality. Rather, it refers to the social appearance of personhood created when synthetic systems simulate the presence, voice, style, intention, or agency of identifiable persons. The danger is not that a machine becomes a person in the metaphysical sense. The danger is that a

machine may be treated by others as if it were a person, or as if it legitimately represented a person, without adequate authorization, disclosure, or accountability.

3. The Authenticity Crisis: Epistemic Risk and Social Trust

The first ethical risk of generative-AI deep synthesis is an authenticity crisis. This does not mean that every AI-generated output is false or harmful. Synthetic media can support education, accessibility, entertainment, translation, cultural preservation, and creative production. The problem is that generative AI weakens many of the ordinary cues through which people evaluate the origin and reliability of information. In the past, a photograph, audio recording, or video had a special evidentiary status in everyday reasoning. It did not guarantee truth, but it often functioned as an epistemic anchor. Deep synthesis reduces the reliability of that anchor.

Rini (2020) describes this as a threat to the "epistemic backstop" provided by recordings. Social testimony is partly regulated by the possibility that an event could be recorded and checked. If recordings themselves become easy to fabricate, then the trustworthiness of testimony may also be weakened. The problem is not only that fake recordings may be believed. It is also that real recordings may be dismissed as fake. This second effect is sometimes described as the "liar's dividend": the availability of deepfake technology gives wrongdoers a plausible way to deny genuine evidence by claiming that it was generated or manipulated (Chesney & Citron, 2019).

The authenticity crisis therefore has two directions. In one direction, synthetic content may be falsely accepted as real. In the other direction, real content may be falsely rejected as synthetic. Both undermine public trust. Political communication, journalism, judicial evidence, academic integrity, and interpersonal relationships all depend on some shared methods for distinguishing fact from fabrication. When deep synthesis becomes ordinary, the burden of verification shifts from expert institutions to ordinary users, many of whom lack the technical capacity or time to evaluate provenance.

Empirical research supports this concern, while also warning against exaggerated panic. Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) found that synthetic political video can affect deception, uncertainty, and trust in news, but the impact is not simply that all viewers are fooled. The more complex effect is uncertainty. Users may become less confident in their ability to determine what is real. Similarly, research on AI disclosure has emphasized that AI-generated media can become nearly indistinguishable from human-created content, making disclosure design a central human-computer interaction issue (El Ali et al., 2024). The ethical problem is therefore not merely individual gullibility. It is the transformation of the information environment.

This distinction matters because a strong article should avoid technological alarmism. It is imprecise to claim that generative AI simply "reduces the public's ability to distinguish truth from falsehood." A more defensible claim is that deep synthesis increases the cognitive and institutional burden of authenticity judgment. It

raises the cost of verification. It creates incentives for malicious actors to exploit uncertainty. It also pressures institutions to develop provenance systems, labeling norms, and trusted verification channels.

A further risk is that labeling may itself reshape trust in unintended ways. If users are trained to treat labeled content as artificial and unlabeled content as authentic, then the absence of a label may generate false confidence. Yet labels can be removed, metadata can be stripped, screenshots can detach content from its original provenance, and cross-platform circulation can weaken disclosure. Research on synthetic-content warning labels suggests that labels can influence beliefs about whether content is AI-generated, but their effects vary by design and do not necessarily change engagement behavior (Gamage et al., 2025). This means that labeling should be treated as one part of a broader trust infrastructure, not as a complete solution.

4. Personality Replication: Identity, Dignity, and the Unauthorized Occupation of Communicative Position

The second major ethical risk concerns personality replication. Deep synthesis becomes more ethically serious when it imitates an identifiable person. A synthetic image of a non-existent face raises issues of disclosure and possible deception. A synthetic video of a real person saying something they never said raises additional questions of consent, dignity, reputation, and autonomy. A cloned voice used to issue

instructions, endorse a product, solicit money, or express intimate feelings can create harms that are not reducible to misinformation.

Personality replication involves more than the misuse of private data. It concerns the relation between a person and their socially recognizable identity. Human beings appear in the world through bodies, voices, names, gestures, styles of speech, habits of expression, and patterns of interaction. Deep synthesis can detach these attributes from the person and recombine them into synthetic performances. The harm lies not only in economic exploitation but also in the loss of control over how one is represented to others.

This is why traditional intellectual-property concepts are insufficient. Copyright protects works, not persons as such. Privacy law protects certain personal information, but a voice, face, or style may be publicly observable while still being deeply connected to identity. Defamation law addresses false statements that damage reputation, but not every unauthorized digital replica is defamatory. Right-of-publicity law protects commercial value in a person's likeness, but it often developed around celebrities and commercial endorsement. Digital replicas challenge all these categories because they can harm dignity, autonomy, reputation, trust, and emotional security even when no copyrighted work is copied and no explicit false factual claim is made.

The U.S. Copyright Office's digital-replica report is important because it recognizes that existing legal regimes may not adequately address unauthorized

AI-generated voice and likeness imitation. The proposed NO FAKES Act in the United States similarly reflects a policy movement toward giving individuals clearer rights over unauthorized digital replicas of their voice and visual likeness, though the details of such legislation must be balanced against free expression, satire, news reporting, and artistic use.

From an ethical perspective, the key concept is identity self-determination. Individuals have a legitimate interest in controlling whether and how their recognizable personal attributes are used to create synthetic representations. This interest is not absolute. Public interest, parody, historical representation, artistic expression, and political commentary may justify some uses. But the burden should increase when synthetic content is realistic, personalized, commercially exploited, intimate, defamatory, fraudulent, or likely to mislead audiences into believing that the person authorized or participated in the communication.

A crucial point is that an AI system trained on someone's data does not literally reproduce that person's mind. It is misleading to say that a persona agent has "the same thoughts" as the real person. Even if the agent imitates a person's writing style or decision tendencies, it remains a statistical and computational system. The ethical harm does not depend on proving psychological identity between the model and the human. The harm arises when others reasonably interpret the synthetic output as representing the person's intention, endorsement, emotion, or presence. The wrong is the unauthorized occupation of a communicative position.

This distinction helps avoid metaphysical confusion. The issue is not whether the digital replica has consciousness. The issue is whether the replica appropriates a human identity in social interaction. If a synthetic voice of a professor gives academic advice to students, if a replica of a deceased relative sends emotional messages to family members, or if a digital version of a public figure endorses a policy, the ethical question is whether the relevant audiences understand the artificial nature of the interaction and whether the represented person or legitimate rights-holder authorized that use.

Personality replication also raises posthumous and relational questions. A dead person cannot consent in the ordinary sense, but their digital resurrection may affect surviving relatives, cultural memory, and public dignity. A child's digital replica raises additional concerns because children cannot meaningfully consent to long-term uses of their likeness or behavioral data. A public figure's replica may involve stronger free-speech interests but also greater risk of public deception. A private individual's replica may involve stronger privacy and dignity interests. Governance must therefore be context-sensitive rather than based on a simple rule that all synthetic imitation is either prohibited or allowed.

5. Persona-Based AI Agents and Responsibility Attribution

The third risk emerges when generative AI moves from producing synthetic content to performing proxy action. An AI agent may answer emails, negotiate appointments, recommend purchases, manage social media, interact with clients,

provide customer support, conduct educational tutoring, or make preliminary decisions. When personalized, it may do these things in the name, style, or apparent identity of a specific human being.

This development creates a responsibility problem. If a person creates an AI agent based on their own data and authorizes it to communicate with others, who is responsible for what it says or does? If a third party creates an AI agent based on another person's data without authorization, what rights are violated? If an organization deploys a persona-like agent to represent a professional, brand, or public figure, how should responsibility be allocated among the developer, deployer, platform, user, and recipient?

A useful starting point is to reject the idea that responsibility can be assigned to the AI system itself. Current AI agents are not moral agents in the full sense. They do not possess autonomous moral understanding, legal accountability, or the capacity to bear blame and punishment. The relevant problem is not machine responsibility but distributed human and organizational responsibility. Matthias (2004) described the "responsibility gap" created by learning machines whose behavior cannot be fully predicted or controlled by designers. With persona-based agents, the gap becomes more socially visible because the agent may appear to speak or act as a person.

However, the responsibility gap should not become an excuse for responsibility evasion. A governance framework should allocate responsibility according to control, benefit, foreseeability, and role. The user who knowingly deploys an agent to speak

on their behalf should bear responsibility for authorized uses within the declared scope. The platform should bear responsibility for system design, safeguards, identity verification, abuse prevention, logging, and complaint handling. The developer should bear responsibility for foreseeable technical defects, inadequate safety design, or misleading product claims. A malicious third party who creates an unauthorized replica should bear direct responsibility for impersonation, fraud, or personality-rights violations. Organizations that deploy agents in professional or commercial settings should not be allowed to shift responsibility to the system.

The responsibility question becomes more difficult when agent behavior exceeds the user's expectation. Suppose a user authorizes an agent to reply to routine messages, but the agent makes a harmful promise, discloses sensitive information, or expresses a defamatory statement. In such cases, the governance system must examine the authorization boundary, the design of user controls, the clarity of warnings, the availability of human review, the foreseeability of the harm, and the adequacy of logging. Responsibility should be graded rather than all-or-nothing.

The development of AI agents also strengthens the case for interaction disclosure. A person interacting with an agent should generally know that they are interacting with AI, especially when the agent represents a real person, professional role, or institution. The EU AI Act's transparency obligations include requirements that people be informed when interacting with AI systems, unless this is obvious from the circumstances. This principle becomes especially important for persona-based agents

because the harm is not only informational deception but relational misrepresentation. People have a legitimate interest in knowing whether they are speaking with a human being, a generic chatbot, or a personalized proxy.

6. Existing Governance Approaches: Achievements and Limits

Current governance approaches can be grouped into five categories: ethical principles, risk management frameworks, content-labeling rules, digital-replica protections, and agentic accountability mechanisms.

International AI ethics principles provide broad normative foundations. The OECD AI Principles emphasize human-centered values, fairness, transparency, robustness, security, and accountability. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence similarly stresses human rights, dignity, transparency, fairness, privacy, and human oversight. These frameworks are useful because they articulate general values, but they are too abstract to resolve concrete questions about digital replicas and persona-based agents. They tell us that AI should be transparent and accountable, but they do not specify how a platform should verify consent for voice cloning, how long agent logs should be stored, or when a synthetic representation of a real person should be prohibited.

Risk management frameworks offer more operational guidance. NIST's AI Risk Management Framework and the 2024 Generative AI Profile encourage organizations to govern, map, measure, and manage AI risks across the system lifecycle. The

Generative AI Profile specifically helps organizations identify risks distinctive to generative AI and align mitigation actions with organizational goals. This lifecycle approach is valuable because deep synthesis risks arise not only at the output stage but also during data collection, model training, deployment, user interaction, content distribution, and post-harm remediation.

China's approach is notable for its direct regulation of deep synthesis and labeling. The Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services, the Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services, and the 2025 labeling measures establish a regulatory path that emphasizes provider obligations, service management, safety, and content identification. The 2025 labeling rules are especially relevant because they distinguish explicit labels visible to users from implicit labels embedded in metadata or technical formats. This dual model recognizes that human-readable disclosure and machine-readable traceability serve different functions.

The European Union's AI Act adopts a broader risk-based regulatory structure. Its transparency rules require certain AI systems to inform users when they are interacting with AI and require synthetic content to be marked in machine-readable form under specified conditions. The European Commission's Code of Practice on Transparency of AI-Generated Content is intended to support compliance with AI Act obligations concerning marking and labeling of AI-generated content, including deepfakes and certain AI-generated publications. The EU model is significant because

it connects labeling to information-ecosystem integrity, deception prevention, and risk governance.

The United States currently has a more fragmented approach. Instead of a single comprehensive AI law, governance is distributed across copyright policy, right-of-publicity law, privacy law, consumer protection, state legislation, and proposed federal bills. The U.S. Copyright Office's digital-replica report and the NO FAKES Act proposal show growing recognition that voice and likeness replication require specific legal protection. The advantage of this approach is sensitivity to expression and constitutional concerns. Its disadvantage is uneven protection and uncertain enforcement.

Despite these developments, three governance gaps remain. First, content-labeling rules often focus on whether media are AI-generated, not whether a real person's identity was authorized. Second, digital-replica rules often focus on voice and likeness, but may not fully address behavioral style, writing style, personal memory, and agentic imitation. Third, AI-agent governance remains underdeveloped, especially for systems that act across platforms, access personal data, or represent specific persons in social interaction.

7. Why Labeling Is Necessary but Insufficient

Labeling is ethically necessary because users have a legitimate interest in knowing whether content was generated or substantially modified by AI. Without

disclosure, audiences may misinterpret synthetic media as direct evidence of real events or real human expression. Labeling also supports accountability by creating technical and institutional mechanisms for provenance tracking.

However, labeling has at least six limitations.

First, labels are technically fragile. Visible watermarks can be cropped, blurred, overwritten, or removed. Metadata can be stripped when files are uploaded, compressed, screenshotted, or shared across platforms. Machine-readable labels require interoperability standards and platform cooperation. If different systems use incompatible marking methods, the social value of labeling declines.

Second, labels are context-dependent. A small label may be sufficient for low-risk entertainment content, but inadequate for political communication, financial advice, medical information, legal evidence, or synthetic content depicting a real person. The more serious the potential harm, the more robust the disclosure should be.

Third, labels do not prove authorization. A video labeled “AI-generated” may still be an unauthorized imitation of a real person. Conversely, authorized synthetic content may still require disclosure because users deserve to know that they are interacting with a synthetic representation rather than a live person. Therefore, the label “AI-generated” answers only one question: the mode of production. It does not answer the questions of consent, identity, responsibility, or truth.

Fourth, labels may generate false assumptions. Users may infer that unlabeled content is authentic, even though labels may be absent because of noncompliance, technical loss, foreign origin, malicious removal, or platform failure. In this sense, labeling systems can produce a dangerous binary: labeled equals artificial, unlabeled equals real. Governance must therefore combine labeling with media literacy and trusted provenance channels.

Fifth, labels do not resolve responsibility. If an AI agent makes a harmful statement, a label saying "AI-generated" does not explain whether the user authorized the statement, whether the platform failed to implement safeguards, whether the developer misrepresented system capabilities, or whether a third party abused the system.

Sixth, labels may not protect personality rights. A person harmed by an unauthorized replica may not be satisfied by disclosure alone. A synthetic pornographic image, fraudulent voice clone, fake endorsement, or emotional manipulation using a deceased relative's likeness can remain harmful even if labeled. Some uses require prohibition, removal, compensation, or other remedies, not merely disclosure.

For these reasons, labeling should be understood as a threshold governance mechanism. It creates minimum transparency, but it cannot carry the full ethical burden of deep synthesis governance.

8. Toward a Traceable and Rights-Sensitive Governance Framework

This article proposes a five-dimensional framework for governing generative-AI deep synthesis: identifiability, provenance traceability, identity authorization, revocability, and accountability.

8.1 Identifiability

Identifiability means that users should be able to recognize when they are viewing, hearing, reading, or interacting with AI-generated or AI-mediated content. This includes visible labels, audio disclosures, interface notices, and contextual warnings. The level of disclosure should be proportionate to risk. Low-risk creative content may need ordinary labeling. High-risk content involving political speech, public safety, professional advice, or identifiable persons may require prominent and persistent disclosure.

Identifiability also includes interaction disclosure. When a user communicates with an AI system, especially one representing a person or organization, the system should disclose its artificial nature. This is not merely a consumer-protection measure. It protects relational autonomy. People make different judgments when they believe they are interacting with a human being rather than a machine.

8.2 Provenance Traceability

Traceability means that synthetic content should be linked, where feasible, to reliable provenance information: generation time, generating system, account or organization responsible for generation, modification history, and distribution path. This does not require public disclosure of all technical details, which may raise privacy and security concerns. It does require auditable records accessible to appropriate institutions under lawful procedures.

Traceability is especially important because synthetic media often circulate beyond the platform on which they were created. A visible label may disappear; a provenance record may remain available if supported by interoperable standards. Governance should therefore encourage machine-readable provenance infrastructure, platform-to-platform metadata preservation, and audit mechanisms for high-risk synthetic content.

8.3 Identity Authorization

Identity authorization is the missing element in many labeling regimes. When synthetic content imitates an identifiable person, governance should require evidence that the relevant identity attributes were lawfully used. This includes consent for voice cloning, likeness generation, digital human creation, and persona-based agent deployment.

Authorization should be specific, informed, revocable, and purpose-limited. A person who consents to voice cloning for an audiobook has not necessarily consented

to political endorsement, commercial advertising, intimate conversation, or posthumous use. A person who permits a platform to process their data has not necessarily permitted a third party to create a personalized agent that imitates them. Consent should not be hidden in broad terms of service.

Identity authorization should also distinguish between private persons, public figures, professionals, children, and deceased persons. Public-interest exceptions may exist, but the burden of justification should increase when the synthetic representation is realistic, misleading, commercially exploitative, intimate, or likely to affect reputation and trust.

8.4 Revocability and Redress

Revocability means that individuals should have practical mechanisms to withdraw authorization, request removal, challenge unauthorized replicas, and seek correction or compensation. Without revocability, consent becomes a one-way transfer of identity control. This is especially dangerous because synthetic replicas can persist, be copied, modified, and redistributed.

Redress mechanisms should be fast and accessible. Victims of unauthorized replicas often face immediate reputational, emotional, financial, or relational harm. A slow litigation process is insufficient. Platforms should provide complaint channels, identity verification procedures, emergency removal for high-risk harms, appeal

mechanisms to protect legitimate expression, and cooperation with regulators or courts when necessary.

8.5 Accountability

Accountability requires clear responsibility allocation. The governance framework should reject both technological determinism and user-only responsibility. Developers, deployers, platforms, professional users, and end users each have duties corresponding to their control and benefit.

Developers should design systems with safeguards against impersonation, non-consensual sexual content, fraud, and high-risk misuse. Platforms should verify identity authorization for high-risk replication tools, preserve logs, respond to complaints, and prevent repeat abuse. Deploying organizations should conduct risk assessments before using agents in education, health, finance, employment, law, or public administration. Users should be responsible for intentional misuse and for authorized agent actions within reasonably foreseeable scope.

For persona-based agents, accountability requires action logs. If an agent sends a message, makes a recommendation, approves a transaction, or interacts with third parties, the system should record the human instruction, autonomy level, tools used, data accessed, output generated, and review status. Without logs, responsibility cannot be reconstructed.

9. Practical Governance Design: Classification, Standards, and Institutional Coordination

A workable governance system should classify deep synthesis applications by risk rather than treating all AI-generated content alike. Four levels are useful.

Low-risk synthetic content includes clearly fictional, artistic, educational, or entertainment uses that do not imitate identifiable persons or affect significant interests. These uses should generally require light labeling but not heavy licensing.

Medium-risk synthetic content includes realistic media that may be mistaken for real events but does not imitate a specific person in a harmful context. Such content requires visible labeling and provenance preservation.

High-risk synthetic content includes digital replicas of identifiable persons, synthetic political communication, professional advice, commercial endorsement, educational assessment, medical or psychological guidance, financial communication, and AI agents acting on behalf of users. These uses require stronger disclosure, identity authorization, logging, and auditability.

Prohibited or presumptively unlawful uses include non-consensual sexual deepfakes, fraud, extortion, impersonation for financial or legal gain, synthetic evidence fabrication, unauthorized replicas designed to deceive, and agentic systems that make significant decisions without appropriate human oversight in high-stakes settings.

Technical standards are also necessary. Labeling should include both human-readable and machine-readable forms. Provenance systems should be interoperable. Detection tools should be used cautiously because deepfake detection is an adversarial field; detection models can be bypassed, and false positives can harm legitimate speakers (Mirsky & Lee, 2021; Neekhara et al., 2020). The governance aim should not be perfect detection but layered trust: disclosure, provenance, authentication, audit, and institutional verification.

Institutional coordination is equally important. Governments can set baseline rules. Platforms can implement labeling and takedown systems. AI developers can build safeguards and provenance mechanisms. Civil society can monitor abuse. Academic researchers can evaluate label effectiveness and social impact. Courts and regulators can clarify responsibility. No single actor can govern deep synthesis alone.

Education should not be ignored. Users need AI literacy, but literacy cannot replace institutional responsibility. It is unfair to place the entire burden of verification on ordinary citizens. A mature governance model should combine public education with enforceable duties for those who design, deploy, profit from, and distribute deep synthesis systems.

10. Conclusion

Generative-AI deep synthesis has transformed the ethics of digital media. The central issue is no longer merely whether a photo, video, voice, or text is fake. The

deeper issue is whether synthetic systems are beginning to simulate, appropriate, and act through the recognizable identities of human beings. This creates three connected crises: an authenticity crisis in which the boundary between real and synthetic content becomes unstable; a personality replication risk in which a person's voice, likeness, style, or behavioral patterns can be used without authorization; and a responsibility crisis in which persona-based agents act in ways that blur the line between human intention and automated execution.

Labeling is an essential response, but it is not sufficient. It can identify AI-generated content, but it cannot by itself establish consent, prevent identity misuse, preserve social trust, or allocate responsibility. The governance of deep synthesis must therefore move beyond simple disclosure toward a framework that integrates identifiability, provenance traceability, identity authorization, revocability, and accountability.

The normative goal is not to suppress generative AI. Synthetic media and AI agents can produce genuine social value. The goal is to prevent technological simulation from eroding the conditions of truthful communication, personal dignity, and responsible agency. In the age of generative AI, society must not only ask whether content is artificial. It must also ask whose identity is being represented, whether that representation is authorized, what social relationship it creates, and who must answer for its consequences.

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