

The Cracking Study on the “Emptiness” and “Alienation” Phenomenon Based on Huang Yanpei's Vocational Education Thought

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Keywords: Huang Yanpei's vocational education thought; emptiness; alienation; the vocational education actuality; cracking path

Abstract: Development up to now, the vocational education had made remarkable achievements, but there also appeared the phenomena of "emptiness" and "alienation" in the vocational education, and exposed the problems in the speciality, value orientation, personnel training, education system and so on. In order to realize the great development, great leapfrog and great integration of the present vocational education. This paper insisted on Huang Yanpei's vocational education essence, expounded and analysed the phenomena of "emptiness" and "alienation" in the vocational education, diagnosed and clarified the root of the problem about the vocational education, explored the prescription and the path to solve the problem, add vitality and power for the development of the vocational education, gave full play to the practical significance and practical value of the vocational education.

China, as a major educational powerhouse, had a total of 11,500 vocational schools nationwide in 2020, boasting the world's largest educational system for vocational education. This extensive network has provided substantial support in terms of a vast pool of professional and technical talents, significantly propelling China's transition from being a "manufacturing giant" to a "manufacturing powerhouse" in various sectors [1,2]. However, with the rapid advancement of modern science and information technology, coupled with transformations in vocational education, phenomena such as an overreliance on simulation technology and the blurring of vocational education's distinctiveness have become increasingly prevalent. These tendencies have led to a "virtual" and "alienated" outlook in modern vocational education, causing the educational foundation to become somewhat unstable. This not only results in wastage of educational resources but also substantially affects the cultivation of skilled "craftsman" professionals and the healthy development of vocational education [3,4]. The practical ideals put forward by Huang Yanpei, a pioneer in vocational education in China, such as the emphasis on practical internships and experimental zones, remain highly relevant today. Concepts like "preparing individuals to serve society" and "preparing individuals to enhance productivity for the nation and the world" continue to hold strong contemporary significance [5]. In light of the new era of vocational education, marked by the implementation of initiatives such as the "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan," this paper, guided by the vocational education philosophy of Huang Yanpei, conducts an in-depth analysis of the "virtual" and "alienated" aspects

of modern vocational education. It seeks to address existing issues and make a valuable contribution to the reform of modern vocational education as it navigates the challenges of the "deep waters" [6-8].

1. The Essence of Huang Yanpei's Pragmatic Vocational Education Philosophy

1.1. Pioneering the Notion of "Integrating Theory with Practice" and Innovating Modern Vocational Education Methods

Addressing the prevailing situation in which politics remained distant from campuses and specialized knowledge seemed disconnected from practical skills, Huang Yanpei authored works such as "The Perilous Phenomenon in the Future of Education" and "A Pragmatic Critique of School Education." In these writings, he highlighted the isolation of school education from societal activities, the detachment of theoretical knowledge from real-world production, and the contradiction between students' lives and education.

Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy emphasized pragmatism and unequivocally stated that "the goal of vocational education lies in cultivating practical and effective productive capabilities, which require the integration of theory and practice." He argued that "relying solely on reading books to acquire practical knowledge and skills is entirely insufficient." Building upon these principles, Huang Yanpei innovatively formulated the methods of vocational education, emphasizing the fusion of "integrating theory with practice" and recognizing the development of individual student personalities [9,10].

1.2. Proposing the Principles of "Valuing Skills, Revering Abilities, and Hands-on Proficiency" for Modern Vocational Education

Vocational education embodies both the vocational nature of education and the practical skills of students. Huang Yanpei introduced concepts such as "Education that does not produce is an educational failure, and education that is not socialized is the failure of educators." He emphasized the significance of internships. These ideas underscored the essence of vocational education, which prioritizes practicality, production, individual hands-on abilities, and proficiency in professional technical skills.

Modern vocational education holds that educators, while shaping students' personalities and imparting cultural knowledge and ethical standards, should also view their role as serving society and the nation. They must fulfill the historical mission of "prosperity through practical work" to prevent the occurrence of "empty talk leading the nation astray," as encapsulated in the saying "high ideals, distant realities." Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy advocates for a correct view of labor, clarifies the relationship between student development and societal needs, and lays a theoretical foundation for talent cultivation in Chinese vocational colleges. It also defines the principles of modern vocational education [11].

2. Manifestations of "Hollowing Out" and "Alienation" in Vocational Education

2.1. "Hollowing Out" in Vocational Education

2.1.1. Pursuit of Utility Leads to Hollowing of Program Offerings

Vocational colleges are expected to cultivate technical talents that seamlessly integrate with industries and sectors. However, driven by self-interest and utilitarian motives [12,13], some

institutions have excessively focused on short-term educational outcomes and enrollment for employment. Consequently, their program offerings have blindly catered to immediate industry demands without considering long-term development or the institution's unique strengths. In situations where industries undergo transformations and there is a shortage of qualified faculty, this approach has led to program contraction and a phenomenon of "hollowing out" of specialties. For instance, in one vocational college, the E-commerce program, which once had the capacity to enroll 800 students with high demand for graduates, now only admits three classes. This mismatch between program offerings and long-term industry needs has resulted in a disconnect between industry demands and talent cultivation, hindering the development of distinctive and branded specialties [14, 15].

2.1.2. Emphasis on Means over Teaching Content

Vocational education emphasizes knowledge transmission and practical skills. Influenced by the prevailing trends of technology-centric and information-focused education, some vocational colleges have excessively emphasized the application of information technology, such as simulation training and VR-based teaching, while neglecting innovation in teaching content [16]. For instance, in a certain vocational college's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary program, an overemphasis on simulation-based teaching has led to a lack of hands-on practical training. As a result, students have limited practical experience and inadequate proficiency. Similarly, an excessive focus on new poultry farming technologies and technology applications has left students ill-equipped to manage poultry farms when faced with equipment malfunctions. These examples highlight that information technology and technological equipment are merely means of teaching, with the core of vocational education lying in technical training and skill development.

2.1.3. Credential Emphasis, Diminished Vocational Proficiency

Vocational education demands the strengthening of faculty teams with specialized expertise. In the development of vocational colleges, significant attention has been given to building a competent faculty team through initiatives such as "internal cultivation" and teacher training programs encompassing "academic qualifications" and "dual-qualified" teachers. However, due to talent shortages in many vocational colleges, there has been an undue emphasis on the credentials of teachers. This has led to an educational phenomenon where "diploma-centric" and "thesis-centric" approaches have diminished the focus on vocational competence. This overalignment of faculty development in vocational colleges with that in traditional universities has exaggerated the importance of theoretical research over practical and applied research, thereby diluting the distinctive characteristics of vocational education. Consequently, vocational educators face confusion and blurred educational objectives [17].

2.2. Alienation" in Vocational Education

2.2.1. Treating Vocational Education as Conventional Education

The perception of vocational education as conventional education, with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge over vocational training, results in schools operating independently of industrial developments. Such misconceptions contribute to the "alienation" of vocational education, a phenomenon prevalent in Chinese vocational education. Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy stresses the need for vocational education to produce talents that society requires. He argued that "developing vocational education is fundamental to advancing industrial development" and stated that "if education is not aligned with vocations, it is no wonder that all industries stagnate."

Furthermore, Huang Yanpei advocated for the close linkage between vocational education, government, the education sector, and industry. He believed that vocational education should be a collaborative effort to establish a comprehensive "mega-vocational education" system. This vocational education philosophy aligns with the national policies of "industry-education integration" and "school-enterprise cooperation" and provides practical guidance [18].

2.2.2. Shifting Talent Development to Vocational Training

Many people mistakenly consider vocational education as primarily vocational training due to its strong vocational characteristics and job-related attributes. Consequently, they gauge the success of vocational colleges solely based on employment rates and their ability to enhance the reputation of specific programs. However, this viewpoint is erroneous. Vocational education, fundamentally, falls under the category of applied education. Vocational colleges should balance vocational and educational aspects. Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy, a core element of which is "vocational education aims to facilitate the personal development and enhancement of individual character," highlights that vocational education is not limited to technical skill mastery but also encompasses the comprehensive development of students. It emphasizes the integration of vocational and educational components and the genuine cultivation of national "artisan" talents who can contribute effectively to society [19-21].

3. The Origins of "Hollowing Out" and "Alienation" in Vocational Education

3.1. Influence of Traditional Beliefs on Vocational Education

Influenced by traditional ideologies such as "All professions are lowly except scholarship" and the belief that "studying leads to official positions," vocational education in China has been subject to significant prejudice. It is often viewed as a means to an end, with the primary goal being a glamorous transformation and successful career through academic pursuits. Vocational education is perceived as inferior, a secondary choice made out of necessity rather than a preferred path [22,23]. Additionally, the students enrolled in vocational education are sometimes considered to have lower academic abilities and less self-discipline compared to those in traditional undergraduate programs. They are labeled as "underachievers" and "problematic students." There is a perception that vocational education fails to instill good character and ethical values in students and that it does not cultivate a desire for personal growth. These biases contribute to teachers losing interest and passion in their teaching.

3.2. Influence of Value Orientation on Vocational Education

With the rapid development of modern society and ongoing social transformations and industrial transitions, the educational philosophy of vocational education has gradually evolved. On one hand, vocational colleges have been significantly influenced by educational policies. These policies place a strong emphasis on managing the employment of graduates, reducing student enrollment quotas for institutions with low employment rates, and even suspending enrollment. This has led to vocational colleges perceiving enrollment and employment as their "life or death" issues, resulting in a utilitarian approach to educational evaluation [24]. Furthermore, some vocational colleges exhibit self-doubt, believing that their educational resources and the quality of their faculty and students are inferior to those of traditional universities. Consequently, they may become resigned and focus only on ensuring students' personal safety, drifting away from the intrinsic requirements of vocational education.

4. Strategies to Overcome "Hollowing Out" and "Alienation" in Vocational Education

4.1. Transforming Traditional Beliefs and Promoting Dedication

To develop vocational education and eliminate biases, it is essential to address both the quantity and quality of students in vocational education. We should follow the guidance of Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy and undergo self-refinement and elevation of our thinking. The essence of "dedication and teamwork" should be integrated throughout the entire vocational education process. We must genuinely harness vocational education's unique role in nurturing high-quality technical and skilled talents, artisans, and national "artisans of industry." "Academic degrees," "diplomas," and the like represent the past and should not be the sole criteria for education. Through dedicated efforts, a focus on real skills, and showcasing more "skills changing lives" success stories, we can gradually eliminate prejudice and disdain toward vocational education.

4.2. Upholding Education for the Public Good and Rejecting Utilitarianism

Vocational education is an integral part of the national education system, and the Vocational Education Law explicitly states that vocational education is of "equal importance" to general education [24]. In the current era of profound change, to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we require not only a substantial number of innovative talents to break through technological bottlenecks but also a significant number of skilled workers to support "Made in China." Therefore, vocational education should remain committed to serving society, fulfilling its function, and breaking free from the negative aspects of "self-centeredness" and "utilitarianism." We should wholeheartedly adhere to the value demands of educational development, reshape academic and "artisan" spirits, and position vocational education as a key contributor to industrial transformation, technological innovation, and leadership in outcomes [25].

4.3. Optimizing Program Offerings and Adhering to Educational Principles

The development of vocational education should align with societal needs and the mission of serving industries. Emphasizing the diversification of vocational colleges, vocational education should focus on producing talents that meet industrial demands. By addressing issues such as disjointed program offerings, non-representative specialties, and a lack of penetration, vocational education can vigorously promote the development of "branded" and "distinctive" specialties. This should involve integrating talent development into the teaching process, program offerings, and curriculum structure. Consequently, vocational education can achieve high-quality, integrated development of "specialty clusters," enhancing the quality of talent cultivation and industry recognition. Simultaneously, we should adhere to the principles of "socialization," "egalitarianism," and "scientific orientation" from Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy. This will ensure that vocational education serves as a driving force for societal development, thereby breaking free from the existing challenges in vocational education development and creating a promising space for its growth [26,27].

5. Conclusion

The phenomena of "hollowing out" and "alienation" in vocational education have had a significant impact on various aspects, including program offerings, value orientation, talent development, and educational systems. Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy demonstrates a forward-thinking approach that can identify the shortcomings in vocational education development, unravel the dilemmas faced by vocational colleges, and redefine the essence of vocational education. In the current era of unprecedented change, national rejuvenation, and rising prominence, vocational

education must continue to promote Huang Yanpei's vocational education philosophy. It should also uphold core socialist values, prioritize the educational essence and responsibilities inherent to vocational education, and emphasize the "new pragmatism." This will fully reflect the practical significance and real-world value of vocational education.

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