

## Article

# Decoding the Cultural DNA of Chinese Characters: Ideological and Political Education Reform under New Liberal Arts

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of the New Liberal Arts disciplines and the systematic integration of ideological and political education into modern academic curricula, determining how to effectively incorporate the core elements of traditional Chinese culture into specialized coursework has emerged as a critical issue in contemporary higher education reform. Achieving a harmonious blend of foundational knowledge transmission and profound value guidance remains a significant pedagogical challenge. In response to this imperative, this paper proposes an innovative cultural gene decoding framework specifically designed for the Chinese Character Culture course. This comprehensive framework systematically organizes and analyzes four major gene maps embedded within the linguistic structure: civilizational heritage, ethical values, intellectual wisdom, and foundational social norms carried by historical characters. Furthermore, the study constructs a robust three-stage integrated education model comprising artificial intelligence-assisted decoding, the deep internalization of value exploration, and the tangible outputs of applied teaching practice. Extensive research demonstrates that utilizing the etymology and structure of characters as a pedagogical starting point can significantly help educators identify essential elements relevant to ideological and political education. Concurrently, this approach seamlessly incorporates AI-driven innovative teaching methodologies, thereby effectively enhancing students' overarching cultural identity and comprehensive literacy within the new liberal arts paradigm. Ultimately, this research provides a highly viable, scalable path for reforming the integration of ideological and political education into university curricula and offers practical, evidence-based guidance for ongoing pedagogical reforms in the broader field of international language education.

**Keywords:** new liberal arts; cultural identity; ideological education; language education; teaching reform; artificial intelligence

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## 1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes the importance of promoting cultural confidence and self-reliance to achieve new milestones in socialist culture. In higher education, the integration of ideological and political education into the curriculum serves as a vital mechanism for fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering virtue and nurturing talent. Simultaneously, the development of the New Liberal Arts advocates concepts such as value-driven leadership, cross-disciplinary integration, and responsiveness to contemporary needs. These ideas are driving significant transformation and innovation within the humanities. Against this dual backdrop, how can traditional cultural resources be revitalized and transformed into a dynamic source for nurturing students' values? These questions have become central to the reform of humanities curricula at universities [1].

Chinese characters are unique symbols of Chinese civilization, embodying the cultural heritage and national spirit accumulated over thousands of years [2]. Chinese Character Culture is a core course in the International Chinese Education program. It is rooted in the intrinsic connection between Chinese characters and culture, offering

distinct advantages for integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum. However, several challenges persist in the current teaching practices of this course. For instance, there is insufficient exploration of cultural connotations, the integration of ideological and political elements often appears forced, and teaching methods lack vitality. Consequently, systematic reform and exploration are urgently required.

Using the Chinese Character Culture course in the International Chinese Education program at Xi'an Peihua University as a case study, this study proposes a curriculum-based ideological and political education approach centered on the Chinese Character Cultural Genes framework. Additionally, it explores innovative teaching models that incorporate artificial intelligence technology, aiming to provide theoretical guidance and practical examples for ideological and political education reforms in similar courses.

## **2. Background and Related Work**

### *2.1. The Theoretical Implications and Developmental Trajectory of Ideological and Political Education in the Curriculum*

Integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum represents a major conceptual innovation in China's higher education reform in the new era. In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Kecheng Sizheng Construction in Higher Education Institutions. These guidelines systematically outline the development objectives, content framework, and implementation pathways for integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum. This marks the entry of this initiative into a phase of comprehensive implementation. Theoretically, the core of curriculum-based ideological and political education lies in achieving the organic integration of knowledge transmission and value cultivation. It aims to transform specialized courses into important channels for moral education, rather than mechanically superimposing ideological and political education onto specialized knowledge [3].

In recent years, the academic community has conducted extensive research on the theoretical frameworks and practical approaches to integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum [1]. Most researchers believe that effectively implementing this integration requires a thorough exploration of the cultural resources and value-oriented elements within the curricula of various disciplines. Only in this way can a genuine integration of professional education and ideological and political education be achieved. For humanities courses, China's outstanding traditional culture serves as the richest repository of resources for integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum. It possesses inherent educational advantages that help cultivate students' moral character.

### *2.2. The Concept of the New Liberal Arts and Reform of the International Chinese Education Program*

The development of the New Liberal Arts is a key strategic initiative launched by the Ministry of Education to drive a quality revolution in higher education. At its core, this concept aims to break down disciplinary barriers and promote the interdisciplinary integration of the humanities with the natural sciences, social sciences, and emerging technologies, thereby addressing the complex demands of social development in the new era. In the field of International Chinese Education, the New Liberal Arts philosophy requires curriculum development to not only remain grounded in the professional foundation of language instruction but also to broadly incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives from fields such as history, philosophy, and psychology. On this basis, well-rounded professionals with cross-cultural communication skills can be cultivated [2].

Currently, new possibilities for curriculum reform in the International Chinese Education program are offered by the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology. The widespread application of AI-assisted teaching tools can not only enrich the presentation of instructional content but also deepen students' understanding and experience of cultural connotations, thereby infusing modern vitality into the integration of ideological and political education into the curriculum [2].

### 2.3. Academic Achievements in the Study of Chinese Character Culture

The study of Chinese character culture is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on Chinese characters and explores the relationship between characters and culture. The academic achievements in this field have laid a solid foundation for the development of curriculum-based ideological and political education resources. Scholars have systematically developed a theoretical framework for the study of Chinese character culture. These studies reveal the deep connections between the structure of Chinese characters and the concepts of Chinese culture [4]. The Six Principles theory established in *Shuowen Jiezi* provides a classic framework for analyzing the cultural DNA of Chinese characters. However, existing research has largely focused on cultural interpretations at the academic level. How to transform these academic achievements into practical resources for ideological and political education remains a practical issue that requires further exploration.

## 3. The Theoretical Framework of the Cultural Genes of Chinese Characters

### 3.1. The Introduction of the Concept of Chinese Character Cultural Genes

Drawing on the metaphor of genes from biology, this study introduces the analytical concept of Chinese character cultural genes, which refers to units of cultural information deeply embedded in the form, sound, meaning, usage, and context of Chinese characters. These information units are capable of transmitting and expressing the core values, modes of thinking, and spiritual temperament of Chinese culture [1, 5]. Serving as the vehicle for Chinese characters, these cultural genes have undergone thousands of years of transmission and evolution, forming the deep-seated code of the Chinese nation's cultural identity.

Chinese character cultural genes possess three fundamental characteristics: stability, expressiveness, and transmissibility. Cultural genes maintain relatively stable core information throughout historical transmission and do not disappear with the passage of time. Additionally, cultural genes can be activated and expressed through specific cultural practices and educational activities [6]. They can also be transmitted through systematic teaching processes and internalized as the cultural identity of learners.

### 3.2. The Four-Dimensional Map of Chinese Character Cultural Genes

This study systematically integrates the ideological and political resources embodied in Chinese characters into four major cultural gene maps [7].

The basic dimension is the gene of civilizational continuity. Chinese characters constitute the world's only indigenous writing system that has been in continuous use for thousands of years. The continuity of Chinese characters itself serves as a living fossil of the unbroken Chinese civilization. From oracle bone script to bronze script, and from seal script to regular script, the evolutionary history of Chinese characters vividly illustrates the resilience and vitality of Chinese civilization. The wisdom of character creation revealed by the Six Principles of character creation reflects the exceptional observational skills and abstract thinking abilities of our ancestors, and also constitutes the cultural memory of the Chinese nation's innovative spirit. Furthermore, the imitation and creation of Chinese characters by ethnic minority scripts within the Sino-cultural sphere vividly show the inclusive nature of Chinese culture, characterized by its unity in diversity.

The second dimension is the gene of ethical value. The structure of Chinese characters' forms and meanings encompasses a wealth of ethical values. For example, the forms of characters such as *de*, *de*, and *xing* reveal the practical ethic that righteous conduct is virtue; the architectural layouts reflected in characters such as *jia*, *shi*, and *tang* mirror the spatial ethics of the Chinese cultural concept of the family and the nation being structurally interconnected; and the semantic evolution of characters like *ren*, *ren*, and *tian* reveals the historical development of the people-centered philosophy in Chinese culture.

The third dimension is the gene of wisdom and thinking. The unity of opposites inherent in the formation of Chinese characters embodies the cognitive characteristics of

the Chinese nation's holistic view and dialectical thinking. The unification of opposing elements in characters such as shou and shi reveals our ancestors' profound understanding of the interconversion of things. The ecological philosophy embodied in characters like yu, yang, xue, and chao highlights the ancient people's wisdom of respecting nature and adapting to local conditions. This wisdom resonates with contemporary concepts of ecological civilization.

The final dimension is the gene of social norms. Chinese characters record and reflect the historical evolution of social norms. Take the character dao as an example: its meaning has expanded from a concrete road to encompass principles and morality [8]. This evolutionary process reveals the psychological foundation of Chinese culture, which regards the rules governing society as universal principles. By conducting a historical analysis of Chinese characters related to ancient ritual systems and critically comparing them with modern values, we can guide students toward a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural origins of the spirit of the rule of law. This will finally foster a sense of citizenship grounded in historical rationality.

#### **4. An AI-Driven Three-Phase Integrated Pedagogical Model**

##### *4.1. Overall Structure of the Model*

Based on the theoretical analysis outlined above, this study proposes a three-stage educational model [3]. The model comprises AI-assisted decoding, internalization of values through exploration, and application in teaching practice and is guided by the interdisciplinary and integrative philosophy of the New Liberal Arts. It positions artificial intelligence as a tool for enhancing the teaching experience, deepening cultural understanding, and facilitating the transmission of values, rather than the educational objective. These three stages are interconnected and together form a comprehensive educational chain.

##### *4.2. Phase One: AI-Assisted Decoding of the Cultural Genes of Chinese Characters*

The core objective of this phase is to build a digital repository of ideological and political education resources based on Chinese character culture. Using AI-assisted digital tools, we will systematically organize and integrate the ideological and political elements embedded in the form, pronunciation, meaning, usage, and context of Chinese characters [9]. Building on this foundation, we will develop a structured Knowledge Graph for Ideological and Political Education in Chinese Character Culture. This graph will provide clear guidance for accessing resources in future teaching.

When it comes to creating educational resources, we can actively leverage existing AI-powered text-to-image and text-to-video tools. These tools can transform abstract cultural concepts, such as the unity of knowledge and action and the integration of family and nation, into dynamic visualizations and short situational videos. The resulting content can be used in classroom instruction. This approach effectively enhances the visual appeal and impact of teaching. At the same time, cloud-based collaboration platforms can also be used to advance the development of interdisciplinary case studies. These case studies integrate multidimensional teaching materials, such as historical documents, archaeological findings, and current events, which provide rich learning scaffolds for classroom activities.

##### *4.3. Phase Two: Internalization of Value Exploration*

This phase primarily employs a blended learning approach, emphasizing students' independent learning and active engagement. Prior to class, AI-generated preparatory materials, such as animations illustrating theories on the evolution of Chinese characters, are distributed via the course platform [10]. This approach guides students in identifying questions independently and stimulates their interest in exploration.

During classroom instruction, AI dialogue models are used to simulate specific historical perspectives or academic viewpoints. To deepen their understanding of cultural concepts, students engage in dialogic inquiry on themes such as responsibility toward

family and nation, as well as awareness of rules. Simultaneously, real-time online feedback tools are utilized to conduct instant surveys and facilitate the exchange of viewpoints during discussions on key topics, enhancing classroom engagement and critical thinking. For post-class activities, digital creation tasks are designed to guide students in using AI-assisted tools to create infographics or write micro-lesson scripts about the cultural DNA of Chinese characters, thereby fostering the transfer of knowledge into practical application and creativity.

#### *4.4. Phase Three: Practice Output and Assessment*

This phase focuses on innovation in the evaluation system [11]. The study developed a multidimensional assessment framework that combines formative and summative assessments, with quantitative data and qualitative evaluations complementing one another. The weighting of classroom discussions, group projects, and digital portfolios in the overall course evaluation has been significantly increased. Additionally, the framework places a strong emphasis on students' learning trajectories.

In terms of digital learning analytics, the platform's data analysis capabilities are utilized to gain insights into students' learning behaviors. Content analysis is conducted on written assignments to track changes in the quality of students' thinking and expression. The assessment system further incorporates evaluations of students' digital literacy and ethical use of AI tools. These measures help students develop habits of using digital tools in a reasonable, effective, and compliant manner.

### **5. Design of the Pathway for Ideological and Political Education in Courses**

#### *5.1. Restructuring the Course Content System*

The content of the Chinese Character Culture course has been systematically restructured using the four-dimensional diagram of Chinese character cultural genes as a framework [12]. While maintaining the integrity of the original knowledge system, elements of ideological and political education have been seamlessly integrated into each teaching module. For instance, in the module on Chinese characters and dwelling, the structural rationale behind characters such as *jia*, *shi*, and *tang* is explained, naturally introducing the unique wisdom of Chinese culture. This approach achieves a high degree of integration between physical space, human relationships, and social responsibility. Additionally, by linking this to the cultivation of family values in the new era and grassroots governance practices, students are guided to develop a sense of family responsibility and community consciousness. This design philosophy, which uses characters to explore culture and culture to educate people, ensures that ideological and political education complements professional knowledge effectively.

#### *5.2. Intelligent Upgrades to Teaching Methods*

In terms of teaching methods, we have advanced a One Core, Three Dimensions framework for collaborative curriculum development. This framework centers on the restructuring of the curriculum content system [13]. It promotes the coordinated development of three dimensions: the intelligent upgrading of teaching methods, the digital creation of teaching resources, and the process-oriented reform of assessment methods.

Specifically, AI technology is applied in a variety of teaching scenarios [6]. For example, visual representations of the evolution of Chinese characters, contextualized interpretations of ancient texts, and dynamic presentations of cross-cultural comparisons. These technological approaches offer unique advantages in stimulating learning interest and deepening cultural understanding. At the same time, we adhere to the principle that curriculum content is the foundation, and technological tools are the means. We ensure that every technological application directly serves specific teaching objectives and educational priorities.

#### *5.3. Process-Oriented Innovation in Assessment Methods*

Traditional course assessment places excessive emphasis on summative exams, which limits the ability to fully capture the depth of students' cultural understanding and shifts in their value systems. This study advocates for the development of a diversified assessment system that prioritizes formative assessment. Such a system incorporates qualitative tools, including classroom observations, learning portfolios, analysis of digital works, and reflection journals. These methods collectively document and evaluate students' learning trajectories in a comprehensive manner.

To establish evaluation criteria, detailed rubrics have been developed to provide a solid foundation for qualitative assessment. These rubrics aim to enhance the objectivity and focus of evaluations. Specifically, in assessing digital learning tasks, the framework includes a thorough evaluation of students' digital literacy and humanistic values. This approach encourages students to maintain a sense of humanistic awareness while applying technology.

## **6. Expected Outcomes and Educational Value**

### *6.1. Expected Outcomes in Student Development*

Through the systematic study of this course, students are expected to develop in three key areas. First, they will establish cultural identity and value confidence. By utilizing digital tools, students will deeply interpret the ethical concepts, ways of thinking, and normative awareness embodied in Chinese characters, thereby fostering a solid sense of cultural confidence and a conscious sense of value identity. Second, they will enhance their comprehensive literacy in the new liberal arts [14]. In addressing the complex challenge of decoding Chinese character culture, students will cultivate interdisciplinary thinking, critical thinking, and digital humanities research capabilities. Third, they will strengthen their ability to innovate in teaching and communication. By gaining practical experience in digitally transforming and interactively disseminating traditional cultural knowledge, they will enhance their future professional competitiveness.

### *6.2. Exemplary Significance at the Course Development Level*

The Chinese Character Cultural Genes decoding framework and the AI-driven three-stage education model developed in this study demonstrate strong transferability and significant exemplary value [5]. Their core concepts and foundational approaches provide a valuable reference for ideological and political education within other traditional culture courses. Furthermore, the AI-assisted teaching model explored in this study serves as a representative example of technological application in teaching reform for the humanities under the New Liberal Arts framework, contributing to the advancement and modernization of humanities education in higher education institutions.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper advocates for a shift in the approach to integrating ideological and political education into the Chinese Character Culture course. Such integration should not be treated as supplementary content but should be organically incorporated into the core of the curriculum. The Chinese character cultural genes framework proposed in this paper offers a principled methodology. This methodology is used to identify and interpret the value dimensions inherent in the morphological and semantic evolution of Chinese characters. Building on this foundation, we have developed a three-stage teaching model, which offers a structured yet flexible pathway for developing these value dimensions in the classroom. Additionally, artificial intelligence tools can significantly enrich the teaching process, but their application requires careful management to ensure effectiveness and alignment with educational goals.

At the same time, it is acknowledged that curriculum reform proposals are often more idealistic during the design phase than they are in actual implementation. Although the model proposed in this paper has been systematically designed, it has not yet undergone rigorous evaluation and comprehensive testing across multiple cohorts of students, so certain aspects may not function as expected. Furthermore, students'

reactions to specific instructional content may be unpredictable, and the assessment framework may require significant revisions. Nevertheless, if Chinese characters are viewed as cultural carriers rather than merely writing tools, they can help students gain a deeper understanding of Chinese civilization and encourage them to recognize their identities as future educators and cultural ambassadors.

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