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From "Discipline" to "Empowerment": A Theoretical Reflection and Practical Approach to University Student Management Innovation under the Humanistic Perspective

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Abstract

Under the background of connotative development of higher education and the construction of a powerful country in education, university student management is facing a profound transformation from the traditional "discipline-oriented" model to a modern "empowerment-oriented" governance. From the theoretical perspective of humanism, this paper systematically explains the connotation of humanistic management and its applicable logic in university student management. It deeply analyzes the triple dilemmas in current practice: the gap between concept and practice, the imbalance between system and humanism, and the lagging and single management means. Furthermore, it proposes innovative paths from four dimensions: value reconstruction, mechanism optimization, space extension, and technology empowerment, aiming to provide references for the theory and practice of university student management in the new era.

Keywords

Humanistic Perspective; University Student Management; Management Model Innovation; Student-Centered Approach

1. Introduction

In January 2024, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the Outline of the Plan for Building a Powerful Country in Education (2024–2035), which clearly stated the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, adhered to the priority development of education, fully implemented the Party's educational policy, and accelerated the construction of a high-quality education system. Under this strategic background, university student management, as an important part of the higher education governance system and a fundamental support for talent cultivation, directly affects the effectiveness of

university education.

However, for a long time, Chinese university student management, guided by the inertial thinking of "knowledge-based" and "management-oriented" approaches, has formed a management paradigm characterized by rigid rules and regulations, administrative control as the main means, and order stability as the core goal. This paradigm had its rationality and necessity in a specific historical stage, but as higher education entered the popularization stage, student values became increasingly diverse, and individual development demands became more prominent, the inherent limitations of the traditional management model have become increasingly apparent. When the binary opposition between "manager" and "managed" is difficult to break, and when uniform system designs create tension with the real needs of students' personalized growth, "education" quietly retreats behind the veil of "management."

A theoretically explanatory shift might be understood as follows: the essence of student management is not "managing people" but "educating people"; not maintaining order through constraints but stimulating growth through support. Reconstructing university student management with a humanistic perspective is not only an inevitable requirement of higher education reform but also a proper response to the call of the times. The so-called "humanistic perspective" — with people's comprehensive development as the core value — differs from both the traditional model that treats students as passive management objects and the service-oriented approach that focuses only on momentary student satisfaction. It points to a management philosophy that integrates respect for individual subjectivity with the achievement of educational goals.

2. Theoretical Connotation and Value Implication of the Humanistic Perspective

2.1. Origin and Core Essence of Humanistic Management Thought

Humanistic management thought has a long history, with its theoretical roots traceable to the Western humanistic philosophy tradition and echoing the ancient Chinese Confucian thoughts of "benevolent love for the people" and "the people are the foundation of the state." As a systematic exposition of management theory, humanistic management emphasizes a people-centered approach, always placing human factors at the forefront of the management system, focusing on human development, thereby mobilizing people's initiative and creativity.

When this thought enters the educational field, especially embedded in the practice of university student management, it acquires a more educationally meaningful theoretical transformation. Under the humanistic perspective, the core of university student management is "student-centeredness" — taking students' development needs as the starting point and destination of management, aiming to exert students' subjective initiative and creativity, and promoting their healthy growth and

all-round development. The humanistic perspective innovates the thinking of university student management, transforming simple "discipline" into a management approach based on interaction that serves students' development needs.

2.2. Dialectical Unity of "Humanism" and "System"

It should be pointed out that the introduction of the humanistic perspective does not mean a simple negation of system management. On the contrary, true humanistic management requires the support and guarantee of a scientific system. Scientific management and humanistic management are not opposing but mutually reinforcing — appropriately integrating both in student management helps establish a scientific, healthy humanistic and institutional environment.

The rigidity of the system provides an order boundary and operational framework for the realization of humanistic values, while the flexibility of humanism injects educational warmth and humanistic care into system implementation. Achieving the organic unity of system management and emotional management, as well as the organic combination of external management and students' self-management, is precisely the ideal state that humanistic management should pursue in student management.

2.3. The Institutional Call of the New Era's Moral Education for Humanistic Management

The Outline of the Plan for Building a Powerful Country in Education (2024–2035) emphasizes that ideological and political education in universities should run through all disciplinary systems, teaching systems, textbook systems, and management systems, and be integrated into ideological, moral, cultural knowledge, and social practice education. This means that student management itself is not only a management behavior but also an educational behavior; not only order maintenance but also value transmission. Student management under the humanistic perspective fundamentally responds to the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education — only when management truly serves students' growth and development does management acquire the character of education and truly realize the function of "management educating people."

3. Reality Examination: Dilemmas of University Student Management under the Humanistic Perspective

Although "people-oriented" and "student-centered" have become high-frequency terms in the field of university student management, and their advanced nature and rationality have been widely recognized by managers, the transformation from concept to practice is far from smooth. Some studies have sharply pointed out that in the new era, universities take the "people-oriented" concept as the core of

management work, but actual implementation often deviates from the "people-oriented" educational philosophy. The following dilemmas are particularly prominent at several levels.

3.1. Disconnection between Concept and Practice: The Dilemma of "Slogan Humanism"

A relatively common phenomenon is that "student-centeredness" remains more at the level of document discourse and verbal expression, failing to truly embed itself in the daily logic of management. Some scholars have pointed out that due to insufficient understanding and lack of innovation in management methods, imbalances between humanism and system, and either overly strict or overly loose management of students, appear in the concrete application of humanistic management. In practice, some universities either weaken necessary management responsibilities in the name of humanism, falling into the trap of "laissez-faire," or quickly retreat to the traditional path centered on constraints and control when management pressure increases. This vacillation precisely exposes the fact that the humanistic perspective has not yet been internalized as the manager's way of thinking and action.

3.2. Opposition between System and Humanism: The Inertial Dilemma of "Managerialism"

Traditional university student management is deeply influenced by bureaucratic management logic, emphasizing top-down command transmission over bottom-up feedback responses, and focusing more on uniform regulation of student behavior than on differential attention to student needs. At present, there are still problems in university education management models such as the loss of students' autonomous choice and the tendency toward patterned management systems. Some studies have even revealed a more profound phenomenon of alienation: the current student evaluation system constructs a disciplinary system centered on symbolic governance and tournament allocation. Although it can stimulate students' motivation to "compete for excellence," it leads to double alienation in students' behavior and psychology.

The internal contradiction of this dilemma is: the original intention of system design is to regulate student behavior to maintain collective order, but when the system expands infinitely and evaluation standards become increasingly quantitative, students are reduced to data symbols and assessment indicators, and their richness and complexity as complete educational subjects disappear from the system's view. Thus, the system turns from a management tool into the purpose of management itself, and the space for realizing humanistic values is continuously squeezed by the layering of systems.

3.3. Lagging Management Means: New Challenges and Opportunities in the Information Age

The rapid development of information technology and new media environments has brought a double impact on university student management. On the one hand, informatization provides technical, platform, and channel support for innovation in university student management models, helping to improve the informatization level of student management; on the other hand, informatization somewhat reduces the quality of communication between teachers and students, creates certain information security problems, and becomes a difficulty and pain point in student management model innovation.

In the new media environment, students' ideological expression is more fragmented and emotional, their information exposure is more diverse and uncertain, and traditional management methods mainly in the form of classroom lectures, class meetings, and system notifications appear inadequate in this new communication ecology. Meanwhile, the education management team, facing the double challenges of accelerating technological iteration and widening generational cultural gaps, also faces severe tests of professional competence and adaptability.

The above three dilemmas are not isolated but interrelated and mutually reinforcing structural problems — the disconnection of concepts leads to deviations in system design, system deviations solidify lagging means, and lagging means in turn deepen the gap between concept and practice, forming a self-reinforcing cycle. To break this cycle, it is necessary to incorporate macro-value concepts, meso-system arrangements, and micro-practical operations into a unified reform framework for overall consideration.

4. Innovative Path: Systematic Reconstruction from "Discipline" to "Empowerment"

Facing the above dilemmas, the innovation of university student management cannot stop at partial repairs but requires systematic reshaping across value orientation, system design, spatial structure, and tool means. The deep logic can be summarized as "from discipline to empowerment" — meaning that the focus of management should shift from restricting what students "cannot do" to supporting what students "can become," and from an external control mindset to an educational paradigm that activates internal motivation.

4.1. Value Reconstruction: Establishing "Student-Centeredness" as the Starting Point of Management

The implementation of the humanistic perspective first requires a transformation of managers' role perception from "manager" to "service provider," "guide," and "companion." To implement humanistic management ideas in the work of university counselors, it is necessary to achieve the unity of system management, scientific

management, and humanistic management in student work. This means that the manager's criterion should not be "whether it facilitates management" but "whether it is conducive to student development." Universities should establish a "people-oriented" education management concept, form a consensus on education management across the university, ensure the student's subject status, and improve rules and regulations. When managers truly regard students as growing subjects rather than passive objects of management, the starting point and evaluation criterion of management fundamentally shift.

4.2. Mechanism Optimization: Constructing a Management System Integrating System and Humanism

The key to resolving the opposition between "system" and "humanism" lies in building a management system that combines rigidity and flexibility, and complements external and internal management. On the one hand, necessary rules and regulations are indispensable; they provide a basic operational framework and behavioral boundaries for management. On the other hand, the implementation of systems should always retain an educational perspective and humanistic warmth. In student management work, adhering to the organic combination of rule-of-law management and humanistic management, system management and student self-management, explicit education and implicit education, is an effective path to deep integration.

Specifically, a normalization mechanism for student participation in management can be explored. Realizing students' self-education, self-management, and participatory management not only embodies the humanistic perspective but also reduces management costs and improves management efficiency. The "interactive all-staff standardized management" paradigm — centered on students, with joint participation of teachers and students, combining heteronomy and self-discipline — proposed by some studies provides a useful practical reference for this idea. When students shift from being the "disciplined" to the "co-governors" of management, the legitimacy of management is reshaped, and the educational function of management is maximized.

4.3. Space Extension: Expanding the Educational Field of "One-Stop" Student Communities

Student management should not be confined to classrooms and administrative offices but should extend to various fields of students' daily lives. In recent years, the construction of "one-stop" student communities has been regarded as an important practical approach for universities to practice the "student-centered" educational concept. This model sinks management service resources to students' living spaces, achieving localization, immediacy, and personalization of management and services. Introducing refined management models into living spaces such as student

dormitories, integrating student service resources, and building smart platform support are not only inevitable choices for the future development of education but also necessary requirements for embodying the people-oriented education management concept. It is worth further considering: when the reach of management extends to students' daily life fields, how to define the boundary between management and guidance, how to balance privacy protection and emotional care, and how to coordinate self-service support and in-depth education — the answers to these questions will directly determine whether the "one-stop" community model can achieve a substantial leap from "spatial integration" to "educational empowerment."

4.4. Technology Empowerment: Improving the Precision of Humanistic Management through Digital and Intelligent Means

Technology should not become a barrier to teacher-student communication but should be a booster for humanistic management. In the context of informatization, innovative paths for university student management models include integrating resources, improving system management, building network platforms to promote teacher-student communication, focusing on mental health education, and using new media for whole-process supervision. Using big data analysis to accurately identify students' academic difficulties, psychological warnings, and growth needs can shift management from experience-based judgment to data-driven precision implementation; building online and offline integrated communication platforms can break the time and space barriers of teacher-student communication, providing more convenient and diverse channels for humanistic care. Of course, the use of technology must always be measured by "human," avoiding falling into the "data supremacy" technological trap — the role of technology in management is always a means, not an end; it is a tool to serve human development, not the ultimate pursuit of management itself.

5. Conclusion

The deep dilemma of university student management reflects a fundamental proposition in the process of educational modernization: between institutional efficiency and individual development, between management order and educational authenticity, how should we choose and balance? The proposal of "from discipline to empowerment" in this paper may provide a directionally responsive solution worth serious consideration. The innovation of university student management under the humanistic perspective is not a simple negation of system management, but a dialectical reconstruction of the relationship between system and humanism; not a complete abandonment of traditional paradigms, but an educational return of management value.

Truly mature management does not use the reinforced concrete of systems to build

cold order, but uses humanistic warmth and educational wisdom to nurture the blooming of every life. When managers begin to look at students with the gaze of "this person" rather than "this type of person," when system design takes whether it helps human growth as the ultimate yardstick, then we may say that educational management has finally found its most authentic connection with education itself.

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