Cultivation of Labour Values in Schools and Universities in the AI Era: Logic, Problem, and Strategy

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Abstract: The artificial intelligence (AI) era has posed a great challenge to the cultivation of labour values in schools and universities, while labour values, whose theoretical logic originates from the dialectical unity relationship between the subject and object of labour, are the core in labour education. Labour values are embodied by labour subjectivity and developed by labour practicality. The research takes the bidirectional relationship between AI and labour education as the theoretical perspective to locate three major problems confronted by labour education: (1) educational administration in schools and universities; (2) separation between technique and morality; (3) binary opposition between mental and manual labour. In this case, labour education in schools and universities should adhere to the proper value orientation of labour education, promote the inter-coordination between labour skills and labour values, and pursue a system that integrates the five education dimensions—morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labour.

1. Artificial intelligence Influence on Labour Values Education

Artificial intelligence (AI), as a remarkable emerging technology, has posed a profound impact on labour education in schools and universities. The transformation of the traditional form of labour values education that could come up with a strategy of labour values education adapting to the AI era becomes a significant issue for labour education. The community, at present, focuses rarely on the theoretical logic of labour values under the AI context, as well as the major problems confronted (basically, what problems can be solved in what possible ways in values education) and their practical solutions. It is of great significance for labour education in the new era to disentangle these problems by scientific principles and establish a strategy system.

2. Theoretical Logic of Labour Values Education in the AI Era

Originating from the dialectical unity relationship between the subject and object of labour, labour values are embodied by labour subjectivity and developed by labour practicality. A proper understanding of the theoretical logic of labour values is an important prerequisite for schools and universities to carry out labour values education.

2.1. Dialectical Unity Between the Subject and Object of Labour

Marxist theory of labour value advocates the dialectical unity relationship between the subject and object of labour. It helps to deepen our insight into the value of labour education by analysing the origin of labour values from the subject-object relationship. According to Marx, “Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature.” Thus, humans, through labour (the subject) maintain a material relationship with nature (the object), and such a relationship is started, regulated, and controlled by humans. The theory emphasizes that labour is embodied. In other words, labour practice has an effect on external things and shapes humans internally by virtue of the interactions between humans and external things. In this case, labour is not only an externalized, targeted, and objective activity but also an internalized, spontaneous, and subjective activity of humans. Along with this subject-object interaction, labour develops labour knowledge and skills and cultivates correct labour values, which further proposes a requirement for labour education to lay stress on both the livelihood function of labour and the unique value of humans. Labour knowledge and skills, after all, are the necessary conditions to cultivate labour values and, ultimately, inspire humans’ ideology and concept of value.

2.2. Labour Subjectivity

Labour is the self-verification of humans for subjectivity. Labour is the action and activity implemented by a human subject for certain purposes; it reflects the subject’s cognition, will, and emotion. Marx considered labour as the self-verification of human nature – “my labour is the living expression of freedom and, thus, is the joy of living.”
being a man.” [3] 30, in which “the fundamental need” living but also the fundamental need, for which a man is being a man.” [3] 30, in which “the fundamental need” indicates the need for free and comprehensive development and human subjectivity, laying a theoretical basis for labour values education.

AI can empower and pose a significant impact on the subjects of labour education (schools and universities) as the mediator. AI improves the comprehensive quality of labour education subjects. By enabling intelligent educational contents, methods, and evaluation, it liberates the subjects from normal affairs that consume most of their time and energy, allowing them to devote themselves to developing students’ labour values and thoughts [4]. In this case, it raises additional requirements for the subjects’ quality, emphasizing both good quality labour education and scientific AI knowledge. Furthermore, AI guides labour education subjects to transform their educational ideas and modes. With the hardware and software technologies that change and iteratively optimize the labour pattern, it urges the subjects to adapt to new educational ideas and abandon the conventional single-direction cramming education to enhance students’ acceptance of the initiative and leadership of labour values.

2.3. Labour Practicality

The essence of labour is practical, and humans and their belief in the “labour values” world are improved in the process of labour practice. As Marx noted, “Future education, to the children over a certain age, will be a combination of productive labour and intellectual and physical education. It is a solution to improve social production and the only solution for the integrated development of humans.” Such a definition discloses the close relationship between productive labour and intellectual and physical education, demonstrates the significance of labour practicality on intellectual and physical education, and provides a theoretical basis for the theory that promotes all-round development yet averts the lopsided development of humans [3]. In essence, labour can be understood as labour practice or practical labour. It changes, develops, and realizes humans themselves fundamentally. Humans, in turn, learn and create individual values and achieve social values so as to cultivate their labour values. As “What people to be trained?” has long been a substantial question in education, it is important to realize that labour and education are unified intrinsically. Practice integrates labour and education to improve labour knowledge and skills, the spirit of labour, and the ability to work cooperatively and independently, creating favourable conditions to highlight human subjectivity and human essence (i.e., labour).

3. Major Problems in Labour Values Education in the AI Era

In the age of intelligence, labour values education is a game between labour subject, labour object, and labour practice that, the other way around, restrict its effect, for which labour values education in schools and universities is neglected and marginalized [6]. Especially, the prominent “form over substance” problem, abstract contents, and utilitarianism in labour values education are rooted in the misunderstanding of labour values.

3.1. Administration of Labour Education

3.1.1. Absence of Rigid Regulations in Education Administration

Most typically, labour education is substituted by course practice or professional training and is of little importance in the school personnel training system, and the curriculum and teaching systems of labour education, to some extent, perform practically no function. In the cases where labour education is substituted by professional education, students are the object of professional education that hardly keeps to their cognition of labour and the law of growth and development. The linear and single-direction education pattern deviates from the purpose of “fostering virtue through education” and the target of “cultivating well-rounded and high-quality talents”, reducing students’ acceptance of manual labour. According to the statistics, a majority of students tend to despise manual labour because of both the impact of conventional wisdom and the absence of guidance on traditional labour values from schools and universities (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Perspectives of Student Respondents on Traditional Labour Values (N=2641)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>The “Arduous struggle” spirit is outdated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Those who do mental labour rule and those who do manual labour are ruled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a scholar is to be the top of society</td>
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3.1.2. Educational Formalities

Some universities make negative and passive responses to the national labour education strategy. They focus on the short-term effect of education and carry out casual labour education only when there is a request from higher authorities. Due to the imperfect administration mechanism of labour education, the education synergy is not yet systematized, and the “collaborative education”
initiative is inefficient. Therefore, the fragmented, mutually independent educational contents that are poorly designed fail to form a synergy and promote the integration of the five educational dimensions (i.e., morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labour), resulting in pointless formalities of labour education that could hardly exert positive educational significance of labour [7]. The research takes the average hours of housework per day during the summer holiday as a factor to explore students’ labour habits. In the questionnaire, there are “None”, “Within 15 mins”, “15-30 mins”, and “30-60 mins” options. With “15-30 mins” selected by most student respondents, it reveals the influence of the university’s labour values education on the housework habit of its students (Figure 1).

![The Average Hours of Housework Per Day During The Summer Holiday](image1)

**Figure 1.** Statistics of Average Hours of Housework Per Day During the Summer Holiday among Student Respondents (N=2641)

### 3.2. Separation Between Technique and Morality

Labour education has been simplified to be one of the courses of technical education. While it is reasonable that the training and learning of knowledge and skills should conform to socio-economic development, the practice that defines narrowly labour education as technical education or vocational education dilutes the moral cultivation effect of labour and limits the development of labour values. It is a severe deviation from the core people-oriented principle of labour education. In the survey, some students noted that labour could retard, impede, and intervene in learning. This is because they fail to recognize correctly the relationship between labour and intellectual education and oppose labour against learning, considering labour as a meaningless practice that consumes their time and energy for learning (Figure 2).

![Labour Would Intervene in Learning](image2)

**Figure 2.** Statistics of Student Respondents on “Labour Would Intervene in Learning” (N=2641)

### 3.3. Opposition Between Mental and Manual Labour

The age of intelligence is the age of information, which poses a higher requirement on students’ intelligence and pays more attention to the cultivation and development of intelligence. Labour education in schools and universities tends to focus on basic knowledge and skills to develop students’ mental ability, making mental education principal and physical labour education subordinate. In this case, it narrows students’ cognition of mental values and simplifies their cognition of labour values. The lopsided intelligent education separates the unity relationship between mentality and physiology. It makes light of the value of practical labour experience on mental
cognition. However, it has been proven that abstract mental knowledge can only be transformed into individual cultural literacy if it is rooted in perceptual manual labour. Mental cognition, as a rational perception, can only be corroborated by manual labour.

Moreover, in the era of intelligent labour, students’ rational ability relies mainly on their minds rather than their physical perception, resulting in the weakened ability of practical labour and the suppressed development of physical senses and functions. Once students fail to understand correctly the relationship between mental and manual labour, a concept of labour value that is unreasonable could be formed to manipulate them to measure the meaning of labour by their specific levels of mental maturity instead of a comprehensive set of labour values [8]. According to students’ acceptance of traditional labour values, a questionnaire survey is designed for analysis. The results show that “think that each grain is hard-won” has the highest degree of acceptance (75.81%), followed by “labour creates happiness” (57.84%). Figure 3

Figure 3. Statistics of Acceptance of Traditional Labour Values (N=2641)

In general, students tend to have a positive attitude toward our excellent traditional labour values, but there are a few students who do not have a correct understanding of the different divisions of labour; for example, 23% of them disagree with one of the old sayings—“a book holds a house of gold”.

4. Cultivation Strategy of Labour Values in the AI Era

The age of intelligence has posed many challenges and problems for labour values education and also implied an available cultivation strategy that requires schools and universities to steer the proper value orientation of labour education, promote the inter-coordination between labour skills and labour values, and pursue a system that integrates the five education dimensions.

4.1. Orientation: The Value of Labour Education

Labour education in the age of intelligence aims at the all-around guidance on students’ labour values and aims to educate them on the meaning of labour to individual and social values. AI, to some extent, triggers a deviation of labour values among students and provides them with an obscure value orientation, resulting in their misunderstanding of the relationship between mental and physical labour. In this regard, schools and universities should emphasize labour itself and its value subjectivity in guidance on values, emotional attitude, goal orientation, and code of conduct. In response to students’ negative emotions about labour, schools and universities should manage to highlight the mental and physical involvement in labour to enhance students’ experience of labour. At the same time, worldview, values, and outlook on life should be integrated into labour education. It takes the development and practice of values as the orientation to change the fact that students despise labour and misunderstand labour values, thereby deepening their acceptance of core socialist values. With only multi-channel guidance, students’ ideology and concept of value on labour and labourer can be corrected and labour education can make students accept and practice correct values.

4.2. Content: Inter-coordination Between Labour Skills and Labour Values

4.2.1. To Tamp the Base of Labour Values with Embodied Skills

Physical labour is the connotation and foundation of
labour education in the age of intelligence. It can shape correct labour values by only maintaining and highlighting the practical significance of labour skills in labour. AI enriches educational contents and techniques through the Internet of Things, educational robots, and other AI-enabled technologies and extends students’ embodied senses with virtual technology to form all-around, profound, and systematical labour values.

4.2.2. Development of the Spirit of Labour with Intelligent Technology as the Breakthrough

Technolatry and techno-utopianism are prone to rely on labour education on intelligent technology. To cultivate the spirit of labour among students is to confront and cast off the laziness and stereotypy incurred by technological intervention in labour education. Based on this concept, it should encourage students to apply AI technology in innovative labour education for new converted knowledge. While schools and universities are committed to creating a benign atmosphere by providing a place and teachers for AI education and training, real labour environments can be introduced to, under teachers’ guidance, arouse students’ creative ability and create and shape their spirit of labour in the process of practice, exploration, and perception.

4.3. System: Integration of the Five Educational Dimensions

The values that the five educational dimensions (i.e., morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labour) advocate and stick to are important resources to realize the fundamental mission of “fostering virtue through education”. Labour has a different educational logic, orientation, and strategy but a common goal with the other four dimensions. For the improvement of labour education, moral education provides ideological guidance on worldview, values, and outlook on life; intellectual education trains professional skills; physical education creates a healthy body; aesthetic education nourishes students’ appreciation of labour. They are closely connected with different focuses, providing significant support for developing all-around socialism constructors and successors.

The cultivation of labour values may not rely on labour education itself only but need to be embedded in an all-around inclusive education system in schools and universities. An integrated framework should be established for labour, moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education. The joint points towards values education should be located. In addition, it should focus on textbook construction and curriculum design to build an educational mechanism that combines the five educational dimensions. It should set up a practical teaching platform that provides comprehensive and effective educational content as a systematic structure of collaborative education based on the five educational dimensions. At the same time, it should assemble various forces, including schools and universities, families, and social organizations, in the top-level design of labour education, promoting the development of labour values using a favourable mechanism to carry through the “educate all-around talents with all forces in the whole course” initiative.

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References