The Educational Value of University Presidents' Opening Ceremony Speeches

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Abstract

This study responds to the national requirements for talent cultivation in higher education by examining the educational value of opening ceremony speeches delivered by presidents of Double First-Class universities. Taking the perspectives of individual-oriented, knowledge-oriented, and social-oriented values in higher education, the study aims to explore the mainstream values of Chinese higher education in the new era and provide references for cultivating high-level talents.

Keywords

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposes to comprehensively implement the Party's educational policy, implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating people, and nurture socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in morality, intelligence, physical health, aesthetics, and labor skills. It can be seen that while both individual-oriented and social-oriented values in higher education have their merits, they also have their shortcomings. The social-oriented value orientation in higher education overlooks individual worth, suppresses personal development, and is not conducive to the cultivation of talents in the new era. The individual-oriented value orientation in higher education neglects social values, focuses solely on personal interests, and is not conducive to nurturing builders and successors who contribute to the comprehensive development of socialist undertakings. Therefore, regarding the issue of values in higher education, it is necessary to establish values that not only meet the needs of social development and serve socialist modernization but also fully respect human dignity, develop individuality and creativity, and improve human quality. This harmonizes individual-oriented, social-oriented, and knowledge-oriented values, maximizing the satisfaction of both societal and individual developmental needs. It ensures that the values in higher education are scientific, comprehensive, and harmonious, fully harnessing their positive guiding and motivating functions.

2. Research Background

2.1. Policy Orientation: The Urgent Need for Clarifying the Value of Higher Education

In 2021, the gross enrollment rate of higher education reached 57.8%. Since 2019, when China's higher education entered the internationally recognized stage of popularization, the standards for output quality in the higher education system have been significantly updated, and the value of higher education has become increasingly prominent. In addition, the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly stated the importance of educating people for the Party and nurturing talents for the country, comprehensively

improving the quality of independently cultivated talents, focusing on cultivating top-notch innovative talents, and gathering talents from all over the world. It can be seen that higher education is an important pathway for talent cultivation. However, in recent years, there has been a rise in views such as the uselessness of reading, universities, and knowledge, questioning the rationality of the existence of universities. There is an urgent need for strong answers to questions such as the value of universities, why universities educate people, and what kind of people universities should educate.

The *Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curriculum* aims to integrate ideological and political education into the talent cultivation system and comprehensively promote the construction of ideological and political education in universities. Studying the values of higher education reflected in the opening ceremony speeches of university presidents will facilitate the deepening of theoretical research on ideological and political education, provide theoretical support for integrating ideological and political education into every course in universities, improve the quality of talent cultivation in universities, and optimize the construction of the discipline of ideological and political education.

2.2. Real-life Impact: Diversification of Social Values due to Era Changes

China is at a crucial stage of social transformation, with profound changes occurring in social thought, cultural life, and value concepts, directly and profoundly reflecting the enormous impact of era changes. This presents certain challenges to the healthy development of university students' values. The emergence of value pluralism in society is an important manifestation of contemporary Chinese social development and progress. How university presidents address the new changes of globalization in the values they convey during opening ceremony speeches, and how they urgently need to conduct targeted freshman education in response to these changes, require clear answers.

2.3. Student Needs: Guiding Students' Growth and Development with Higher Education Values

As the main force of future social development, university students' value concepts and orientations are greatly influenced by educational values. It is of great significance for higher education workers to actively guide students to establish correct educational values, cultivate a scientific outlook on life, and promote the healthy growth of university students' future. The values and orientations conveyed by university presidents in their opening ceremony speeches, as the first lesson of university education for freshmen, play an important role in guiding students' learning, life, and future development. Therefore, analyzing and exploring the educational values conveyed by university presidents to freshmen at the beginning of their university journey holds important practical significance for university students.

3. Current Research Status and Review at Home and Abroad

3.1. Educational Value

Different scholars hold different views on the connotation of educational value. In the view of Marx, the essence of educational value lies in the relationship between education as the object and individuals as the subject, as well as between individuals and social groups—society, reflecting externally the impact and role of education on individuals, social groups, and society as a whole, that is, the degree to which education meets and satisfies the development needs of individuals, social groups, and even society. Wang Hanlan and others believe that educational value refers to the efficacy of education. Sang Xinmin believes that educational value refers to the satisfaction of educational needs of the educational object by education, which is a relationship of interest between the subject and object with education as the link. Wang

Kunqing believes that educational value refers to a specific relationship between the attributes of educational phenomena and human needs. Liu Qingchang believes that the value of education lies in its utility.

In summary, existing research classifies and discusses educational value from different perspectives, finding that educational value is not static but rather lies in the continuous exploration, discovery, excavation, utilization, formation, and guidance of human values. The educational value in this study refers to the overall perception and evaluation of the usefulness of educational activities in the process of mastering, utilizing, accepting, and enjoying education.

3.2. Value Orientation of Higher Education

3.2.1. Concept of Higher Education Value Orientation

Regarding the concept of higher education value orientation, scholars mainly define it from two perspectives: one is from the perspective of the subject of education, and the other is from the perspective of the effectiveness of higher education. The former, represented by *"the value orientation of higher education refers to the reflection of the value of higher education in people's minds"* [1], mainly emphasizes the subjective reflection of the subject of higher education. This definition is obviously too broad, so some scholars explore it from the latter perspective, combining the purpose and function of higher education with the value orientation of higher education. Scholar Xu Xiwen believes that *the value orientation of higher education refers to the extent to which the value of higher education determined by the functions and attributes of higher education satisfies the needs of educators and* learners, *and the interaction and feedback generated thereby on the social, economic, and cultural systems, emphasizing whether the value of the object meets the needs of the subject and to what extent it does so.* [2] Qiao Zhijie proposed that *"the value orientation of higher education should address the question of why universities should be established or why higher education should be conducted,"* [3] similar to Zhao Qingnian's view that *"the value orientation of higher education is the fundamental view on why higher education should be conducted, which is the systematic understanding and basic view of the value function of higher education"* [4].

Combining the above two perspectives, the value orientation of higher education is an activity of people's understanding of the value of higher education, including two aspects: the subject of understanding and the object of understanding. The subject of understanding is the subject of higher education, and the object of understanding is the value attribute of higher education. This study believes that the value orientation of higher education is the value recognition and judgment made by the subject of higher education under a specific perspective.

3.2.2. Classification of Higher Education Value Orientation

According to different criteria, the value orientation of higher education can be classified into different categories. Generally speaking, there are two classification methods for the value orientation of higher education:

The first classification method divides the value orientation of higher education into three categories: individual-oriented, society-oriented, and knowledge-oriented, mainly based on whether individuals, society, or knowledge are the focus of people's understanding and evaluation of the value of higher education. The essence of the individual-oriented value orientation of higher education is to advocate that the basic value of higher education lies in promoting the development of individual knowledge and reason, thereby achieving the perfection of personality, which is the earliest value orientation of higher education generated

[1] Zhang Zhonghua: *A New Topic on Higher Education* (Guangming Daily Publishing House, China2013)

[2] Xu Xiwen:*Looking back and reshaping the values of higher education*, Vol. 2008 (Issue 9), p. 187-189

[3] Qiao Zhijie: *Reflections on the Values and Quality of Higher Education*, Vol. Journal of Yan'an University (Social Science Edition), 2004 (06), p. 109-112

[4] Zhao Qingnian: *Philosophical Reflection on the Quality of Higher Education*,Vol.Jiangsu Higher Education,Vol.2013 (01), p.1-4

by human society. The essence of the society-oriented value orientation of higher education is to advocate that the main value of higher education lies in cultivating various specialized talents for society and promoting social development and progress. The essence of the knowledge-oriented value orientation of higher education is to advocate that the basic value of higher education lies in knowledge innovation, academic exploration, and scientific research.

The second classification method divides the value orientation of higher education into instrumentalist and humanistic perspectives based on whether higher education serves people or serves objects outside of people. The essence of the instrumentalist value orientation of higher education lies in promoting the development of culture and society outside of individuals or humanity and the higher education subject. The essence of the humanistic value orientation of higher education lies in helping individuals or humanity to break free from the enslavement of various external things, promoting the harmonious development of their body and mind and the integrity of their personality, and actively adapting to and promoting progress in various aspects such as human, social, and cultural development, that is, fully promoting human subjectivity; the protection and expression of subjectivity are necessary prerequisites for the development of the state, society, and culture, ultimately contributing to the realization of the ultimate goal of social development.

In summary, the classification of the value orientation of higher education in existing research is diverse. Higher education is specialized education for profound knowledge, and its fundamental purpose is to cultivate talents with moral integrity, with human beings as the center. At the same time, higher education must serve economic and social development, providing qualified human resources and continuous innovation in knowledge for society. This aligns with the three major functions of modern universities: inheriting knowledge, cultivating talents, and serving society. In line with this, higher education should also establish value orientations centered on knowledge and society.

4. Research Methods and Results

4.1. Research Methods

4.1.1. Text Analysis Method

Organizing the opening ceremony speeches of the presidents of 42 Chinese universities selected for the "World-Class University" construction project from 2019 to 2022, the texts were structured according to the format of "year-school-person-title of speech-text content". The text content, expression methods, and underlying meanings were analyzed to explore the textual characteristics, stage features, and future development expectations of presidential opening ceremony speeches in Chinese higher education since entering the stage of popularization.

4.1.2. Content Analysis Method

This study mainly adopts a computer-assisted text content processing method, using Nvivo 12.0 software to conduct word frequency statistics on the opening ceremony speeches of the presidents of 42 universities. Word frequency statistics refer to counting the number of occurrences and frequencies of each word in a text, which has developed into a scientific quantitative research method. *Word frequency statistics can reveal the essence through phenomena and have certain accuracy, objectivity, systematicity, and standardization, thus being widely used in research in multiple disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.*[5]

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[5] Zhai Yunqiu, Cheng Jinkuan: The Educational Value of University President's Opening Ceremony Speeches: A Word Frequency Analysis Based on Speeches by Presidents of 36 "World Class Universities" Construction Universities ,Vol. 2021

4.1.3. Social Network Analysis Method

"Social network" refers to the collection of social actors and their relationships, and social network analysis quantitatively studies the relationships between actors in social networks . [6]Based on word frequency statistics, conducting centrality analysis of high-frequency words and universities as network nodes can show the concentration trend and correlation of speech content, highlighting the important content and relationship approaches of the speeches. When the relationships between certain actors in the network are particularly close, forming a secondary group, a cohesive subgroup will be formed in the social network (Zhu Qinghua, 2008). The density of cohesive subgroups can measure the situation of speech content and group phenomena of each university.

4.2.   Statistical Process and Results

4.2.1. Data Source

This article collects the opening ceremony speeches of the presidents of 42 universities selected for the "World-Class University" construction project from their official websites, Baidu, WeChat public accounts, etc., since 2019 for four years. The speeches were organized into structured electronic documents in the format of "year-school-person-title of speech-text content". The word count and average word count of the text content were calculated, and the duration of each speech was calculated based on normal speech speed.

4.2.2. Data Processing Method

The content analysis of the text and social network analysis are mainly based on the processing of speech content. Firstly, the collected speeches were organized into operable electronic documents in the format of "year-school-person-title of speech-text content". The speeches were then categorized by year and university to compile three sets of documents: opening ceremony speeches of 42 universities in the same year, opening ceremony speeches of the same university over four years, and opening ceremony speeches of 42 universities over four years. Secondly, the three sets of documents were imported into Nvivo software for word frequency analysis, with a minimum length set to 2. After filtering out irrelevant or meaningless words, the data were exported to an Excel spreadsheet and word cloud images were generated. Next, UCINET was used for network analysis, and Netdraw was used to create visual network maps to present the relationships between speech content and university relationships. Finally, based on the data and graphical information obtained from the above processing, combined with actual situations and relevant literature, descriptions of the current situation and explanations of relationships were provided.

Table 1 High-frequency Word Statistics of Presidents' Speeches at University Opening Ceremonies from 2019 to 2022

Number	2019		2020		2021		2022	
	high-frequency words	count	high-frequency words	count	high-frequency words	count	high-frequency words	count
1	Learning	360	Learning	311	Learning	360	Development	350
2	Achievement	287	Development	296	Era	273	Learning	282
3	China	284	Country	287	Country	256	Era	251
4	Development	271	Achievement	263	Achievement	252	Country	248
5	Era	268	China	228	China	246	Achievement	234
6	Country	254	Era	200	Development	246	Hope	233

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[6] Ma Chaoyang: *Research on Network Core and Community Structure Mining Based on SNA* (Dalian Jiaotong University. 2010)

7	Hope	248	Hope	199	Hope	233	Cultivate	195
8	Practice	204	World	195	Need	189	China	192
9	Innovation	201	Innovation	182	Cultivate	174	Development	184
10	Creation	183	Cultivate	181	Innovation	168	Problem	161
11	World	176	Spirit	178	Spirit	168	Need	150
12	Cultivate	175	Creation	175	Discipline	154	Innovation	144
13	Life	174	Growth	174	Future	149	School	143
14	Spirit	173	Need	172	Life	142	Nation	138
15	Nation	158	Practice	151	Creation	142	Youth	138
16	Need	156	Life	148	Nation	140	Practice	137
17	School	150	Pandemic	142	Become	140	World	134
18	Become	150	Become	136	Effort	133	Creation	134
19	Struggle	146	Future	135	Knowledge	128	Spirit	133
20	Growth	145	Ability	129	Practice	127	Life	123

4.3. Statistical Findings

4.3.1. Student Personal Development as the Core Goal of Education

From the perspective of word frequency analysis, it can be observed that terms related to students' personal development such as "learning," "practice," and "becoming" are all high-frequency words. The speeches consistently emphasize the cultivation of students' multifaceted abilities, reflecting universities' regard for student personal development as an important aspect of talent cultivation. Based on this, the author will delve deeper into the analysis of speeches from the perspectives of comprehensive development, individual cultivation, and future planning. An overview of speeches from major universities reveals repeated references to the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills development, emphasizing not only "reading extensively" but also "travelling extensively." Additionally, the cultivation of good character and teamwork skills is emphasized, conveying the idea that university education entails not only academic success but also encompasses aspects such as moral character and teamwork, emphasizing holistic student development. Regarding future planning, specific career plans are rarely mentioned in the speeches; instead, the focus is on setting aspirations and goals. For example, in Chongqing University's 2019 address, it was stated that "the correct way to approach university life is still to set personal goals for oneself," while in Northwestern Polytechnical University's 2022 address, it was expressed, "I hope everyone will aim high and consciously integrate personal ideals into the 'greater self' of the development of the party and the country," conveying a grand sense of direction in the context of the speeches. However, in practice, these statements serve to motivate students to solidify their theoretical foundations and strive to learn skills. Unfortunately, there is very little content related to individual cultivation, with the speeches focusing more on the importance of moral cultivation and teamwork, while the concept of individualism is lightly touched upon, with little emphasis on embracing the diverse personalities of students.

4.3.2. Nurturing Talent for the Nation and the Era is a Crucial Function of Universities

From the perspective of word frequency analysis, the words "development," "learning," "era," and "nation" have consistently appeared as primary high-frequency words from 2019 to 2022. This reflects the universities' important advocacy for nurturing talent for the nation and the era, guiding social progress by fostering learning-oriented and innovative talents. Terms like

"development" and "learning" represent universities' continuous requirements and expectations for student progress and growth. The concept of "learning" extends beyond the classroom to encompass practice, research, and social service, enabling students to truly develop their potential. At the same time, universities provide students with a systematic and professional learning environment, cultivating their professional competence and comprehensive abilities through diverse teaching methods, highlighting their core function in talent cultivation. The co-occurrence of terms such as "nation" and "era" indicates universities' close attention to the changing times and national strategies, continuously adjusting their own development directions and educational philosophies. By cultivating high-quality talents and producing high-level research results, universities contribute to the economic and social development of the country. In summary, universities, based on their own school motto characteristics, academic pursuits, and cultural traditions, universally require students to engage in diverse innovative learning, seek truth from facts, and persevere diligently, thus becoming the learning-oriented and innovative talents required by the times and the nation.

4.3.3. Students and Universities Must Jointly Shoulder Social Responsibilities

From the perspective of word frequency analysis, terms such as "era," "cultivation," "society," "nation," and "ethnicity" have become high-frequency words in presidential speeches, reflecting the necessity for students and universities to jointly shoulder social responsibilities and contribute to the overall development of society. Based on this, the author will delve deeper into the analysis of speeches from the perspectives of exploring the unknown, innovative cultivation, serving society, and national rejuvenation. An overview of speeches from major universities emphasizes making good use of the opportunities and resources provided by universities to enhance one's own abilities and prepare to contribute to the country and society's development. There is a strong emphasis on the combination of theory and practice, with repeated mentions of the importance of laying a solid knowledge foundation and possessing the ability to solve practical problems. For instance, President Ding Kuiling of Shanghai Jiao Tong University emphasized that "students should have the courage to explore unknown fields and make important contributions to the country's technological progress and social development." President Wang Shuguo of Xi'an Jiaotong University emphasized that "students should lay a solid knowledge foundation and cultivate innovative capabilities during their university years, utilize the opportunities and resources provided by universities to enhance their innovation capabilities, and prepare to contribute to the country's major needs." President Jin Li of Fudan University emphasized that "students should become individuals with broad vision and solid foundations, not only focusing on the forefront of disciplines but also closely integrating with the country's strategic needs, shouldering the responsibility of strengthening the country." President Wang Shuxin of Chongqing University emphasized that "students should take on the responsibility of building a strong country and national rejuvenation, actively participate in major national strategies and regional development, and contribute to social progress." Through these presidential speeches, we can see the importance that universities place on cultivating students with a sense of social responsibility and innovation, as well as the earnest expectations of presidents for students to play a role in society and shoulder social responsibilities in the future.

4.3.4. Education and the development of the era of great change interact and progress together

In the opening ceremony speeches of university presidents, high-frequency words such as era, pandemic, innovation, practice, nation, and spirit appeared. This reflects the need for education in the era of great change and the challenges and opportunities that education faces in this era. Today's world is in an era of great change, facing unprecedented changes. The association of "era" and "pandemic" reflects the impact of the global pandemic in recent years. Universities

closely monitor international changes, understand the global situation, and cultivate corresponding talents to actively respond to sudden challenges such as pandemics. The association of "innovation" and "practice" reflects the emphasis on cultivating innovative and practical talents in the era of technological change. Innovation requires talents to have open-mindedness and creativity; practice requires talents to have strong execution, team spirit, and continuous learning abilities. Universities attach great importance to the cultivation of these abilities, enabling talents to achieve self-breakthroughs and career development in a constantly changing environment. The association of "nation" and "spirit" reflects the characteristic development of Chinese education. While Chinese universities educate talents for global development, they also emphasize ideological education. Universities need to cultivate talents with thinking rather than being machines, requiring students to have correct values and contribute to the development of China and even the world.

5. Analysis of the Educational Value in the President's Speech at the Opening Ceremony

5.1. Universities Should Adhere to a People-Oriented Educational Approach

In our country, the concept of "people-oriented" has a long history, where "people" refer to the fundamental aspects of things. *The Classic of Poetry* contains the idea of "people are the foundation of a state, and the foundation is what makes a state secure," while the book *Guanzi* proposes that "the beginning of a hegemony is based on people." These discussions focus on the fundamental aspects of the state from a political perspective. Although the circumstances differ, the principle remains the same: the foundation of a nation is its people, and the foundation of a university is its students.

Implementing the requirement of "people-oriented" into the task of cultivating talents in universities and reflecting it in the educational work of higher education institutions requires adhering to a "student-centered" approach. This involves providing high-quality services for students' growth and development. It entails allocating educational resources in accordance with the laws of student talent growth and the needs for success, optimizing teaching elements and campus activities, creating a more favorable teaching environment and effective educational platforms to promote students' comprehensive and healthy development, stimulate their independence in self-development, and expand their autonomy in decision-making.

Therefore, when formulating regulations and systems in various aspects, the guiding principle should be to promote students' comprehensive development. In terms of campus life, it is essential to always address the most immediate and practical concerns of students and prioritize their interests. Governance should have consistency, and the welfare of the people should be paramount. Even the seemingly minor matters that affect students' immediate interests should be highly valued by the school. There should be increased emphasis on communication with students, allowing them to feel more fulfilled, secure, and supported, thus fostering a harmonious, stable, and positive campus atmosphere.

5.2. Universities Should Establish the Correct "Knowledge-Oriented" Perspective

In this era of rapid technological advancement, acquiring knowledge has become easier than ever. However, issues such as the disconnect between acquired knowledge and its application in society, and the prevalence of mere theoretical discussions without practical application, have gradually surfaced. The notion of "knowledge being useless" has gained momentum for a time. In the era of quality education, concepts like "cultivating character," "acquiring skills," and "developing critical thinking" have gained increasing recognition. However, this does not mean

abandoning the emphasis on "knowledge" itself. While acknowledging that knowledge is indeed valuable, it's essential to ponder which knowledge is valuable and how it should be applied.

Universities serve as a bridge for students to transition from academia to society and are pivotal in the inheritance and innovation of knowledge. Against the backdrop of complex external changes, universities should orient themselves towards application, strengthen the social service function of knowledge, and cultivate individuals capable of shouldering the responsibility of national rejuvenation. Universities should adapt to the development of the times by continually reforming their curriculum systems, enhancing practical teaching, eliminating rigid and mechanical components from the curriculum, integrating cutting-edge knowledge and technological innovations into teaching, and stimulating students' innovation capabilities through diverse course offerings and abundant academic resources. This ensures that students can adapt to the diversity and dynamics of knowledge development.

Furthermore, by encouraging and guiding students to participate in practical projects, social practices, internships, and training, universities can help them understand the operating mechanisms of society and industry standards, thereby cultivating their ability to transform knowledge. Simultaneously, courses and activities aimed at nurturing students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness should not be overlooked. With a focus on the application of knowledge, the true implementation of the service function of knowledge, university students can better integrate into and serve society, becoming valuable assets for national development.

5.3. Universities Should Strengthen Their Educational Role in Social Services

In May 2018, the Ministry of Education issued a notice on the pilot work of *the comprehensive reform of "three comprehensive education"*, proposing to carry out the pilot work of the comprehensive reform of "three comprehensive education" in a classified manner, implement the fundamental task of moral education and the mission of the times. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and eight other departments issued *the Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of the Ideological and Political Work System in Universities*, once again emphasizing the importance of practical education. Social services are not only a requirement for national strategic development, but also a key carrier for universities to integrate into the construction of the digital economy. Building a multi person interactive and collaborative mechanism for "three comprehensive education" in universities is an urgent need to implement the policy of moral education, an effective path to exert joint efforts, a choice for systematically optimizing educational resources, and *an important mission entrusted by the collaborative education mechanism of the whole society.*[7]Therefore, the new era has put forward new requirements for the service education work in universities, emphasizing the process and effect of service education. In this context, colleges and universities should deeply understand the connotation of the new era, grasp the main body of service education, improve the education mechanism, pay attention to the process of service education, and ensure the level of service education work, so as to strengthen the effectiveness of university service education, comprehensively improve the social service ability of students, encourage students to become the source of vitality for social development, actively integrate into the national regional development strategy, use action to feed the region, use science to lead the society, serve the people, serve the CPC in governing the country, serve the consolidation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, serve the reform and opening up and socialist modernization, actively respond to the national strategic needs, and contribute youth strength to social and economic development.

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[7] Zhai Yunqiu, Cheng Jinkuan:*The Educational Value of University President's Opening Ceremony Speeches: A Word Frequency Analysis Based on Speeches by Presidents of 36 "World Class Universities" Construction Universities* ,Vol. 2021

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