

Practice Exploration and Optimization Path of the Residential College System Reform under the Philosophy of Chinese General Education

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Abstract: *Residential college system reform under the philosophy of general education is an important way to improve the quality of higher education and cultivate comprehensive talents. General education aims to cultivate “complete people” with critical thinking and social responsibility, and promote the improvement of students’ all-round quality through interdisciplinary integration and community learning. Residential college system plays a key role in this process. It provides students with an interdisciplinary learning platform by breaking disciplinary boundaries, strengthening teacher-student interaction, and promoting extensive knowledge. Residential college system and general education’s ideas are highly consistent, especially in terms of educational goals, knowledge breadth, interdisciplinary integration, community-based learning and flexible learning mode. Currently, the residential college system reform faces challenges such as conflicts in management structures, insufficient fulfillment of educational functions, and concerns regarding its legitimacy. Through the practice exploration of Three Chinese University, this paper puts forward some strategies to optimize the reform of residential college system, including clarifying the value of residential college, innovating the curriculum system, reforming the management mechanism, promoting technical support and rooting in traditional culture. The reform of residential college system can not only break through the limitations of traditional education mode, but also provide a strong guarantee for cultivating high-quality talents with global vision and innovative ability.*

Keywords: General education, Residential college system, Higher education.

1. Introduction

In today’s society, with the rapid development of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, the information-based and globalized society has put forward higher requirements for higher education. Cultivating high-quality, comprehensive and innovative talents is an important goal of higher education in various countries. Under this background, the traditional professional education mode is facing challenges, and general education has become a key path to improve the higher education and cultivate comprehensive talents. The goal of general education is to provide the learners with knowledge and values that are common among different groups of people in a modern and diverse society, which is very consistent with the traditional educational concept of residential college system. Residential college system breaks through the limitations of traditional professional education, breaks the boundaries of universities and majors, and cultivates students’ all-round abilities by implementing interdisciplinary integration management. The reform of university residential college system under the philosophy of general education is of great value to cultivate high-quality talents with independent thinking ability, interdisciplinary vision and sense of social responsibility. In 2017, the State Council’s Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Education System and Mechanism proposed to explore the establishment of “residential college system” [1]. In 2019, the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Undergraduate Education and Teaching and Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Talent Cultivation issued by the Ministry of Education proposed to actively promote the establishment of the student management mode of residential college system in universities, and develop the pilot “one-stop” student community comprehensive management mode [2].

Residential college system has become a new carrier for cultivating top-notch innovative talents, a new form of education and management mode, and a new direction for the reform of higher education mode and even the construction of modern university system with Chinese characteristics.

General education is the core concept of residential college system and one of the key paths to break the dilemma of “emphasizing specialty over literacy” in traditional higher education. As a new mode of higher education, residential college production not only breaks through the limitations of traditional disciplines and majors, but also breaks the boundaries of the original universities and majors, and realizes interdisciplinary integration management. This innovative educational mode focuses on cultivating students’ all-round ability, emphasizing the comprehensiveness of knowledge and the improvement of application ability, aiming at providing students with a wide range of disciplinary knowledge and values through general education, and promoting their all-round development of thinking mode, social responsibility and practical ability. At present, there is a widespread problem of “emphasizing specialty over literacy” in higher education. Especially in some traditional discipline-oriented education systems, the acquisition of professional knowledge often becomes the core of education, while the cultivation of students’ comprehensive ability and ideological and moral development are relatively weak. The proposal and implementation of the residential college system happens to be an effective response to this problem. By breaking down disciplinary barriers, the residential college system provides students with a broader learning platform, exposing them to knowledge across diverse fields. This fosters critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding, truly embodying a student-centered “holistic education” that

lays a solid foundation for students' comprehensive development in the future.

By sorting out the relevant literature of residential college system by CNKI, we can see that since 2013, research on residential college system has shown a fluctuating upward trend. Especially in recent years, with the widespread promotion of residential college system in Chinese universities, the academic community has paid increasing

attention to residential college system year by year, the number of related studies has increased significantly, and the scope of research has gradually expanded. At present, the existing research mainly focuses on several aspects: residential college system's education model [3][4], management model [5][6], comparison of Chinese and foreign residential college system [7][8], and residential college system optimization path [9], etc.

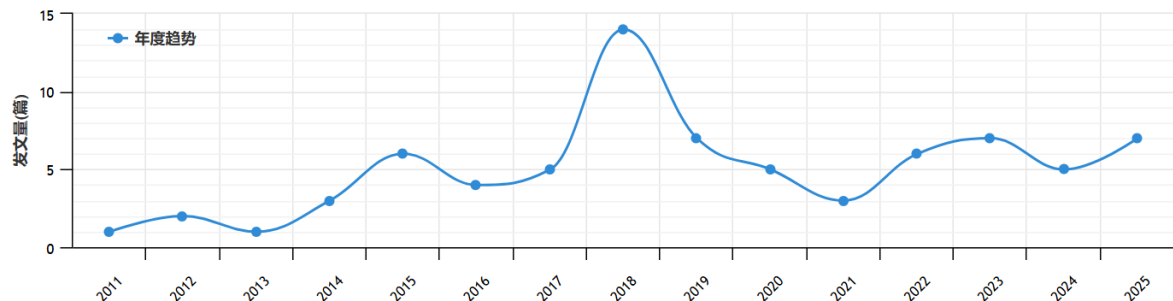


Figure 1: Trend Chart of Publications on Residential College System in China (2011-2025)

However, although the existing research has provided important academic and practical references for the reform of residential college system, there are still some problems, especially the lack of close combination of theory and practice. At the practical level, although many universities have made many explorations when implementing the residential college system, they are faced with some problems in specific operation, such as uneven distribution of resources, insufficient coordination of management mode and unclear roles of teachers and students, which to some extent restrict the real implementation of residential college system's educational concept [10]. On the other hand, although theoretical research has put forward many feasible reform paths, there is still insufficient combination with specific practice of universities and a lack of individualized schemes and practical cases for different universities [11].

Based on the practice of contemporary university residential college system and the foundation of previous studies, combined with the actual needs of current higher education, this study uses literature analysis and case method to deeply explore the collaborative path between residential college system and general education, so as to better achieve the goal of holistic education. Through literature analysis, this paper systematically sorts out and summarizes the previous research results in the field of residential college system and general education, comprehensively understands the development and practice status of relevant theories, clarifies the internal relationship between residential college system and general education, and reveals the challenges and development trends in current educational practice. This paper also uses case method, selecting representative universities at home and abroad to analyze the integration path of residential college system and general education in practical application and discuss how to effectively improve students' comprehensive quality and innovative ability. Following the logical framework from theory to practice and from problems to countermeasures, this paper puts forward the practical path and optimization countermeasures of the integration of residential college system and general education the specific situation of universities, and finally provides theoretical

support and practical guidance for the reform of higher education and the realization of the goal of holistic education.

2. The Coupling Logic of General Education and Residential College System

2.1 The Philosophy of General Education and Its Development in China

As the core component of modern higher education, the core idea of general education is to cultivate "complete persons" rather than experts in a single field. General education follows the tradition of liberal education in the western humanity. Both are essentially a kind of "free education" with the purpose of cultivating "free people". During the Renaissance, free education was endowed with the connotation of humanistic education. Since then, science has developed vigorously, which has had a great impact on the traditional free education. Huxley, an educator, pointed out that university education can no longer stick to the humanistic tradition, and must incorporate science education into free education or liberal arts education. In the book *The Ideal of a University*, Newman tried his best to defend the tradition of liberal education, with an idea that professional education could not be solely emphasized while liberal arts education could make people receive professional education better. The European general education model represented by the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge is a kind of liberal education in a broad sense. The United States learned from the European general education model and re-created it based on its own characteristics. It published the *Yale Report* in 1828, which pointed out: "The goal of universities is not to teach a single skill, but to provide a broad general foundation; it is not to bring up experts in a certain industry, but to cultivate generalists who lead the ethics of leaders. What students gain from universities is not the supply of fragmentary knowledge or the sale of vocational skills, but the stimulation and expansion of their soul, the broadness and insight of their knowledge." [12]. As a pioneer of general education, the full implementation of Harvard University's general education began with the *General Education in a Free*

Society (referred to as the *Red Book*) published by the Harvard Committee in 1945. As President Conant pointed out in the introduction of the *Red Book*, “The core of general education is the inheritance of freedom and humanistic traditions [13]. VIII “General education is a new development of liberal education in the United States. It is still humanistic in essence, as opposed to professional education. In this sense, “general education” does not represent “ordinary education” or “universal education”; “It is not a vague education about ‘general’ knowledge, nor is it an education for all people in the sense of universal education. It ... aims to train students to be responsible people and citizens [14]”. That is to say, general education is committed to solving the important problem of how to better inherit and develop the humanistic tradition in an increasingly professional era. First of all, it respects the value, dignity and individuality of people, makes people to be people and free people, and “becomes” themselves through education. On this basis, it trains people to become excellent citizens with a high sense of social responsibility, adapt to and promote social development as inheritors of a common culture, and share cultural traditions with others. Therefore, what general education pays attention to is not the development of individual ability, let alone the cultivation of talents, but the free and all-round development of human personality.

General education, with a long history and profound cultural heritage in China, can be traced back to the “Six Arts” education in ancient China. In the *Wei Zheng* chapter of the *Analects*, Confucius proposed that “the exemplary person should not be reduced to a mere instrument” (*junzi bu qi*), advocating mastery of the Six Arts—rites (*li*), music (*yue*), archery (*she*), charioteering (*yu*), calligraphy (*shu*), and mathematics (*shu*). Later in the *Shu Er* chapter, he articulated his pedagogical vision: “Set your purpose on the Way (*dao*), base yourself in virtue (*de*), rely on humaneness (*ren*), and find fulfillment through the arts (*yi*).” Zhu Xi once made annotations on this: “Instruments are each suitable for their specific uses and cannot be interchanged. A person of accomplished virtue has all aspects of the moral character embodied within, so their application is comprehensive. They are not merely capable of a single talent or skill.” This means that a gentleman, in cultivating his moral character, should engage in a non-utilitarian and comprehensive study of knowledge in various fields. One should not be as limited in function as an instrument. On the basis of achieving mastery through a comprehensive understanding of things, one should pay attention to the guiding role of moral cultivation. In China, the research and practice of modern general education began with the pilot work of quality education launched by the Ministry of Education in 52 universities in 1995. Since the 21st century, disciplinary education has gradually faded, and general education has gradually heated up. Some universities have spontaneously set off teaching reform and clearly put forward the slogan of general education. In 2001, Peking University held an experimental class of “Yuanpei” program. Students can choose courses freely. Under the guidance of supervisors, they can choose professional fields for further study according to their interests and characteristics. A flexible academic system of 3 ~ 6 years is implemented, and mixed accommodation is implemented to create conditions for mutual communication and learning. In the same year, Beijing Normal University held an experimental class of

encouraging people, trying to “get through arts and sciences and highlight general education”. In 2004, Wuhan University revised its talent cultivation plan and began to implement “general” education. In 2005, Fudan University established “Fudan College”, where 3,700 freshmen, regardless of major, took a one-year general education before entering the professional study stage. In order to embody the concept of general education, Fudan University has established core courses in seven modules, adjusted the teaching contents and methods, optimized the structure of lecturers in core courses, strengthened the construction of teaching assistant system, and actively promoted the small class discussion system. In addition to the above-mentioned universities, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University, Nanjing University, Sun Yat-sen University and other universities have successively set up colleges of this kind, pushing the exploration of general education to a climax. The academic research on general education mainly focuses on the overall study of general education, and has achieved fruitful research results in concept construction, curriculum system and educational mode.

2.2 The Development History and Chinese Practice of University Residential College System

The core idea of the residential college system is rooted in the “College” tradition of medieval universities in Europe. Since the 15th century, the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge have gradually formed an educational model with residential universities as the core. Its core feature is to realize the simultaneous cultivation of academics and personality through tutorial system and community life. For example, Magdalen College at the University of Oxford not only provides accommodation for students, but also guides students to explore subject issues in depth and develop critical thinking through weekly Tutorial sessions. The residential college of the University of Cambridge further emphasizes “interdisciplinary communication”, and mix accommodation of students of different majors to promote knowledge collision and horizon expansion. At the beginning of the 20th century, American universities began to learn from this model. Harvard University President A. Lawrence Lowell believes that residential college should “bring together promising youths from different family backgrounds, religious beliefs and academic interests”, with the aim of creating “academic communities that cross social identities and disciplinary boundaries” [15]. Harvard established the first batch of 12 Houses in 1930. Each House was equipped with an independent library, canteen and activity space, and a professor served as the House Master. They regularly held academic salons and cultural festivals, creating an integrated scene of academics and life. Yale University followed and established 12 residential universities in 1933. The Master and Scholar in Residence jointly take charge of students’ academic guidance and community building.

China’s modern university residential college system has two institutional sources, namely, the residential college system of ancient Chinese residential college system and European and American universities. Ancient Chinese residential college system was a special form of educational institution in feudal society, which undertook multiple functions such as lecturing, research, writing and collecting books. The important

connotations of residential college spirit include equal cultivation of moral and professional development, academic freedom, coexistence of teachers and students, and mutual promotion of learning and teaching [16]. On the basis of inheriting ancient residential college system, the modern Chinese university residential college system draws lessons from the organizational structure and management mode of western residential universities [17]. Meanwhile, however, the two are different in the theoretical background, the path of emergence and the realistic basis of development, which determines that China's modern residential college has its own characteristics in physical space and organizational structure. Therefore, modern residential college system has been transplanted from western residential universities in organizational structure and functions, but it is rooted in China's traditional and realistic cultural environment, and is essentially a new university education management mode with Chinese characteristics. The residential college system model was first innovated, explored and implemented by Chinese universities. After it became basically mature and achieved positive results, it gradually rose to the national system. In 2012, the Circular of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on the Pilot Project of National Education System Reform in Universities Directly Affiliated and the Inspection of the Implementation of the "Three Majors and One Big" Decision-making System affirmed the effectiveness of Fudan University in exploring and practicing the residential college system and deepening the reform of undergraduate talent cultivation mode. In 2014, many universities defined the direction of residential college construction in their charter, which were approved by the Ministry of Education. After 2017, residential college system began to officially enter official documents. Policy texts such as *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Education System and Mechanism* (2017), *Annual Work Points of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education* (2018-2021), and *Opinions on Implementing the Training Plan 2.0 for Top-notch Students in Basic Disciplines of Six Departments of the Ministry of Education* (2018) all mentioned exploring the residential college system and put forward the functional orientation of "integrating the past, the present, China and the world and combining immersion, cultivation, and education" for residential colleges. This fully demonstrates the state's recognition of the effectiveness of residential college system, and at the same time put forward higher requirements for the reform of improving and optimizing residential college system talent cultivation mode in universities in the new era and new journey. After years of exploration and practice, as of December 2023, among China's 42 world-class universities, 34 universities have built 152 residential colleges. The residential colleges of universities have continuously promoted general education, innovated the "all-round education" mode, promoted in-depth communication between teachers and students, and stimulated the endogenous motivation of students' growth, etc., and accumulated some useful experiences and achieved remarkable results.

2.3 Consistency in Philosophy between General Education and Residential College System

Residential college system, as a unique mode of talent cultivation in higher education, implements general education

for students on the basis of inheriting and carrying forward the fine traditions of ancient residential colleges, such as teachers and students progressing together and students helping each other. The core value of residential college system lies in constructing an ecological education system by comprehensively integrating the educational potential of all campus spaces, especially highlighting the student-centered educational philosophy. John Henry Newman once profoundly pointed out that universities should regain the tradition of liberal education and devote themselves to cultivating individuals with complete personalities [18]. Under the ecological pattern of all-round education, residential college system provides natural soil for the implementation of general education. Residential college system mode breaks the traditional university organizational form with professional departments as the framework, and makes full use of the educational significance and tension of space. It breaks the oneness of traditional education relying on classes and classrooms, and gradually shifts the educational function to student communities. Residential college system uses dormitories as the carrier to build an educational ecosystem, skillfully integrating the functions of life, teaching, learning, culture and social interaction, and stimulating the educational potential of students in their living environment. Residential college system mode can make up for the shortcomings of general education in traditional college education, and has its unique advantages in cultural education function. From the aspects of historical evolution, educational goals, teaching models and talent cultivation methods, residential college system is not only an important practical carrier of general education, but also promotes the implementation of the concept of general education to a certain extent.

2.3.1 Consistency of educational objectives

The core idea of general education is to cultivate "complete people"; that is, to pay attention to students' knowledge breadth, thinking depth and personality cultivation, rather than just professionals in a single discipline. Whether it is the western liberal education tradition or the "academic freedom" and "moral and professional cultivation" advocated by ancient Chinese residential colleges, it embodies general education's concept of all-round cultivation of people. Residential college production is a community-based education model, which is highly consistent with general education in educational goals. For example, the residential college of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge promote the simultaneous cultivation of academics and personality through tutorial system, while the Chinese University of Hong Kong promotes classic reading courses in residential college, so that students can improve their humanistic quality and critical thinking ability in an atmosphere of free discussion. This training mode, which not only pays attention to academic ability, but also emphasizes personality cultivation, is consistent with the comprehensive quality training goal emphasized by general education. In addition, the reform of residential college system carried out by China in recent years also reflects the core values of general education. For example, Peking University's "Yuanpei College" implements an interdisciplinary training mode, allowing students to freely choose their major under the guidance of tutors, while Fudan University's residential college course covers seven modules

of general education, and strengthens the interaction between teachers and students through small class teaching. These practices all emphasize providing a broader learning space outside professional education, ensuring that students can expand interdisciplinary knowledge and cultivate independent thinking ability and critical thinking while receiving professional training.

2.3.2 Knowledge breadth and interdisciplinary integration

General education emphasizes interdisciplinary integration and encourages students to establish connections different disciplines to broaden their horizons. In this respect, residential college system provides an ideal practice platform. For example, the residential college system course promoted by Fudan University through “Fudan College” enables students to receive systematic training in one year’s general courses before entering professional studies, and promotes interdisciplinary exchanges through residential college activities such as “Starry Sky Salon”. Peng Kang Residential College of Xi’an Jiaotong University offers the course of “Humanities Classics Tutoring” for science and engineering students, and invites professors from the College of Liberal Arts to lead students to study *Historical Records*, so as to promote the integration of science and engineering and humanities and social sciences through tutorial system. These practices embody the “wide-caliber” training mode emphasized by general education, so that students can gain a broader vision of disciplines besides professional education. Also, residential college system’s accommodation model also creates conditions for interdisciplinary learning. By mixing the accommodation of students from different majors, the residential colleges of Oxford, Cambridge, Yale and other universities encourage students from different discipline backgrounds to complement their knowledge in daily communication. Such interdisciplinary interaction and sharing can not only improve students’ comprehensive literacy, but also conform to general education’s concept of cultivating talents with multiple thinking abilities.

2.3.3 Community-based learning and teacher-student interaction

General education pays attention to the construction of learning community, emphasizing the promotion of learning through dialogs, communication and cooperation, and residential college system’s community model just provides such a learning environment. Compared with the traditional college system, residential college pays more attention to the interaction between teachers and students and among students, forming a “academic-life” integrated learning community. For example, the residential college system of the Chinese University of Hong Kong emphasizes the close interaction between tutors and students. Students can not only get academic guidance in the residential college, but also establish in-depth contact with tutors at the life level, thus forming a good atmosphere of “teaching and learning”. In addition, residential college system’s mode of “small-scale, strong interaction” is also in line with general education’s “conversational” teaching philosophy. The residential college of Fudan University adopts small-class seminar teaching to encourage students to have in-depth academic exchanges with their tutors, while Yuanpei College of Peking University

adopts a mixed accommodation mode to encourage communication between students from different backgrounds in their daily life. Compared with the traditional class teaching system, residential college system provides a more interactive and community-based learning mode, which enables students to continuously expand their cognition in real academic and social situations.

2.3.4 Flexible learning mode and independent development

General education encourages students to choose their own learning path and emphasizes the individualized development of learning, while residential college system provides a flexible learning platform, which enables students to freely explore knowledge according to their personal interests and needs under the guidance of tutors. For example, Yuanpei College of Peking University implements a flexible academic system, which allows students to freely choose and adjust their major direction; the residential college of Fudan University encourages students to choose courses across departments, and helps students plan their academic development through personalized guidance from residential college tutors. This flexible education mode not only improves students’ autonomous learning ability, but also conforms to general education’s “student-centered” training concept. In addition, the openness and sharing of residential college also provide students with richer learning resources. For example, Peng Kang Residential College of Xi’an Jiaotong University integrates academic advising, career planning, and interdisciplinary research resources to make equitable educational resources available to all students. This mode breaks the professional barriers under the traditional college system, promotes the rational allocation of educational resources, and conforms to the goal of educational fairness and individualized development emphasized by general education.

3. The Dilemma and Challenge of Current Chinese Residential College System Reform

After more than 10 years of exploration, China’s university residential colleges have achieved certain results in promoting general education, enhancing teacher-student interaction, expanding dormitory education function, and promoting students’ self-education, but the challenges are still severe.

3.1 The Contradiction of Administrative System Between the Residential College and the College

The ideal relationship between the residential college and the college should be a typical matrix structure, in which each performs its duties, cooperates and educates students together in talent cultivation. However, in reality, the relationship between the two is often not as smooth as ideal, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, there is a conflict in the division of responsibilities between the residential college and the college. From the perspective of system design, the college is responsible for professional education and academic innovation, while the residential college is mainly responsible for the management of general education and student life. The responsibilities may seem clear, but they are not in practice. The development of students’ knowledge, ability and quality is an organic whole,

and students' study and life are also highly continuous. It is difficult to simply divide all aspects of students' development into two parts and entrust them to different educational subjects. However, the unclear responsibilities have led to the mutual evasiveness between the residential college and the college in talent cultivation, and even the vacuum zone has appeared. Secondly, there is a conflict in educational functions between the residential college and the college. After the founding of the residential college, conflicts between them inevitably arise in terms of resource allocation, time arrangement and staffing. For example, the college thinks that the residential college occupies the time of professional education, fearing that it will weaken the core position of professional education, affect students' recognition of the profession and the construction of professional community, and worries about the negative impact of residential college activities on professional learning. Residential college, on the other hand, believes that the college only focuses on disciplinary development and research, neglects the support for the development of the residential college, and lacks attention to the responsibility of students' growth and development. At present, the permanent staff in many residential colleges are only counselors, while teachers still affiliate to professional departments. Professional departments have the power to formulate and revise cultivation objectives, curriculum setting, and manage and evaluate teachers in talent cultivation, and the development of students needs the guidance and support of professional teachers. To some extent, this resource dependence weakens residential college's independence in educational discourse, and then leads to the conflict in the educational functions between the residential college and the college. Finally, there is a conflict in student management between the residential college and the college. After the reform of residential college system, many universities have formed two parallel student management systems: "university-college-professional class" and "residential college-apartment-floor-dormitory". The former focuses on student status management and academic affairs, while the latter focuses on daily management and value education. The two parallel student management systems often have friction in the division of responsibilities, distribution of benefits, communication and coordination, etc., which increases the difficulty of coordination between the residential college and the college.

3.2 Inadequate Exertion of Educational Function in Practice

Educational function is the core starting point of the existence of residential college, but at present, it is difficult to give full play to the educational function of many residential college, and the effect is not significant. First of all, the narrowing function of the residential college is a prominent problem. The residential colleges of most universities are still limited to the traditional management functions. After established, they mainly focus on the improvement of student safety management and student services, while the educational and cultural functions are very limited. Although these residential colleges strive to organize various activities, it is difficult to achieve the expected educational results due to the low level and low quality of activities and limited student participation. Secondly, the educational content in residential colleges lacks

systematic design. The design and implementation of educational content is the key factor that affects the learning effectiveness of students in residential colleges. The educational content of residential colleges should be systematically designed under the guidance of clear talent cultivation objectives, and an effective evaluation mechanism should be established to evaluate the achievement of educational effect. However, except for a few research universities, the residential college reform of mainland universities often lacks the overall planning of educational content. The talent cultivation objectives in residential colleges are unclear, the educational content is too scattered and fragmented, and the linkage with universities is insufficient. Students are left confused in many scattered residential college activities with limited gains. Lastly, residential college's educational activities are less adapted to students' needs. Although activities in residential colleges of many universities are rich in forms and seemingly lively, these activities are often more of the display of residential college's image or face-saving projects, lacking the design based on students' needs and interests. Therefore, students are not active in participation, and activities even become mandatory task allocation; the effect can be imagined.

3.3 Questioning over the Rationality and Legitimacy of Cultivating General Talents by Residential College System

Although the number of residential colleges is growing, the voices of questioning and criticizing residential college have never stopped, and a consensus on the reform of residential college system has not yet been reached. First, the rationality of residential college is questioned. Rationality refers to whether the internal operation mode of the residential college, from ideas to rules, working methods and various activities carried out, can form coherence in academic theory and educational purposes, whether it is necessary for education, and whether residential college is irreplaceable. Many people think that the functions of student management, general education and life education undertaken by the residential college can be completely undertaken by the traditional college model, and there is no need to set up a residential college at all. The educational activities carried out by many residential colleges are not significantly different from those of the colleges, and the level is low. Secondly, the legitimacy of residential college is questioned. In China, university operations must comply with the requirements set forth by higher authorities. Without explicit policy documents to provide institutional support, the implementation of the residential college system by universities becomes an autonomous initiative, thereby calling into question its legitimacy. At present, the education authorities have not yet issued guiding opinions and normative documents on the construction of residential colleges, and the higher authorities still put the role of student management in colleges. Within China's higher education system, with the exception of Southern University of Science and Technology, the residential college reforms of other universities have yet to be incorporated into their respective University Charters. Consequently, the institutional legitimacy of these collegiate systems remains fundamentally unresolved. Third, the effectiveness of residential college system reform has also been questioned. Many people think that the reform of

residential college system has increased the management subjects and levels, which made the governance structure of universities more complicated, led to the teaching disorder and disturbed students' professional study. The reform of residential college system is full of contradictions and conflicts, and the obvious achievements have not yet appeared, and the effect of the reform is not obvious.

4. Practical Exploration of Typical Universities

4.1 Chinese University of Hong Kong: Cultural Inheritance and Institutional Innovation

The residential college system of the Chinese University of Hong Kong is an important feature of its higher education system, which is unique in Hong Kong's university system. Residential college complements the main body of the University, providing students with an education system with "all-round education" as the core, strengthening the interaction between teachers and students, promoting interdisciplinary exchanges, and enhancing students' sense of belonging to the residential college and the University. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), founded in 1963, originated from three founding residential colleges: New Asia College (established 1949), Chung Chi College (1951), and United College (1956). The university subsequently expanded its collegiate system with the addition of Shaw College, Morningside College, S.H. Ho College, C.W. Chu College, Wu Yee Sun College, and Lee Woo Sing College. As of 2007, the total number of residential college has reached nine, forming a relatively complete residential college system. The formation of this system is similar to the residential college model of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, which reflects a certain historical accumulation and institutional evolution. However, unlike classical British residential college system, although the residential college of the Chinese University of Hong Kong enjoys certain administrative and financial autonomy, it has no independent power to enroll students or grant degrees. This feature is closer to the residential college system of American universities.

General education is an important part of the bachelor's curriculum system of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Its concept combines the humanistic ideal of traditional Chinese education with the core value of western liberal education, aiming at promoting the extensive acquisition of knowledge and the all-round development of personality. According to the unique cultural background and educational philosophy, each residential college provides distinctive general courses, covering classic reading, social responsibility, cultural heritage and other aspects. In addition, residential colleges attach great importance to life education and encourage students to participate, share and communicate so as to cultivate their teamwork ability and social responsibility. The General Education Committees of residential colleges oversee curriculum development with the dual objectives of broadening students' intellectual horizons and cultivating well-rounded development – emphasizing personal growth, social responsibility, and global citizenship alongside academic pursuits. For example, Chung Chi College emphasizes "unity of knowledge and action", encouraging students to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, cultivate

the ability to solve practical problems, and practice the core values advocated by residential college in their daily lives.

In the implementation of general education, the residential college system of the Chinese University of Hong Kong was deeply influenced by both Chinese and western educational concepts. On the basis of inheriting the traditional Chinese residential college of "lecturing and reading scriptures" and teachers and students progressing, it absorbed the core features of western residential college system that emphasized teacher-student sharing, classic reading and discussion and exchange. For example, New Asia College offers the course of "Classic Reading", which selects traditional Chinese cultural classics for study, and conducts in-depth discussions in combination with the modern social background to help students understand the essence of Chinese culture and improve their critical thinking ability. This cultural atmosphere of "inclusiveness and combination of Chinese and Western cultures" enables students to form a global vision in their study and life in residential college, look at different cultural traditions more rationally, and have the ability of cross-cultural communication and cooperation in future international affairs.

In addition, the residential college system emphasized the important role of tutorial system in education. Tutors not only provide guidance to students in the academic field, but also guide students to grow in an all-round way in personality shaping, social cognition and emotional development through daily communication. This relationship of "bother teacher and friend" makes residential college education not only limited to classroom knowledge imparting, but also extended to daily life, truly realizing the goal of "all-round education". The residential college system of the Chinese University of Hong Kong not only promotes students' individual growth, but also lays a solid foundation for their future career development and social integration through the combination of academic guidance and community learning.

4.2 Fudan University: Systematic Management and Community Learning

General education is a people-oriented quality education structure model. Since 1980s, Fudan University has taken the lead in exploring and understanding it. At the same time, Xie Xide, the former president, also advocated that we should fully introduce the excellent western higher education experience and try out the advanced concept of "generalist education". Therefore, in September 2005, Fudan University took the lead in China in implementing the reform of general education and established Fudan College. After several years of development, Fudan University has formed a general education training system with core curriculum as the main axis, accommodation residential college system and tutorial system as the auxiliary wings. According to its historical and cultural characteristics, Fudan University has established five residential colleges: Zhide, Tengfei, Keqing, Renzhong and Xide. The five residential colleges of Fudan University are named after the respected former presidents in Fudan history. On the one hand, the old presidents lead and inspire students to keep advancing with their noble spiritual temperament; on the other hand, they also drive the development of residential college culture. In addition, each residential college has its

own unified cultural elements such as iconic colors, door plaque fonts and residential college couplets.

The implementation of the general education through residential colleges makes Fudan University different from other universities in China. The student work groups of the residential colleges of Fudan College are responsible for their respective student affairs management, league and student associations, student associations and research activities, and the college is responsible for the overall education, teaching and student management. All freshmen stay in Fudan College in the first academic year and receive general education; after choosing a major in the second academic year, they are assigned to various professional colleges. The reform broke the traditional education mode of directly entering professional colleges after enrollment, and posed a challenge to the original education, teaching, teacher and student management and dormitory management system. It was necessary to rethink a series of issues such as management methods, organizational functions, institutional settings and mechanism formation. The management of freshmen, as one of the work focuses, has attracted the attention of all parties. The University Party Committee and the Student Work Department also attached great importance to the team of counselors. To this end, Fudan University has made careful arrangements for the staffing of each residential college's student work group, whose leader is an experienced full-time teacher who has been engaged in student work for many years. Each of the four residential colleges oversees 10-11 class units, with each unit assigned one primary counselor and two assistant counselors. The primary counselor team comprises part-time early-career faculty from administrative divisions, reserve members of the Talent Development Program, graduate students, and a limited number of full-time counselors. Assistant counselors are selected from outstanding senior undergraduates or graduate students across academic departments. The college implements the resident system of counselors, and the management objectives, authority and responsibilities are clearly assigned to each person. This measure not only strengthens the dormitory management, but also ensures the effective implementation of various general education plans from the system, so that students can adapt to the university environment, connect their studies, inquire about research, enrich their lives, coordinate their time and handle their interpersonal relationships in an orderly manner.

The implementation of residential college system in Fudan University is closely related to the development of its general education system. Each residential college is equipped with a tutor team composed of full-time, part-time or specially appointed teachers, who serve as bridges between life in residential colleges and general education. Fudan University provides a learning platform with wide coverage and rich content for all undergraduates through a general curriculum system of six modules (such as classics of literature and history, dialogue among civilizations, etc.). The core curriculum of general education in the University is mainly divided into six modules, and each course is taught by a senior teacher, thus forming a distinctive teaching mode such as classic reading guidance, teaching assistant system, small class discussion, multiple assessment and network interaction. These courses not only pay attention to the cultivation of

students' academic ability, but also strengthen the training of students' social responsibility and interdisciplinary thinking. For example, the classics of literature and history module help students understand Chinese and world history and culture through systematic reading of cultural classics, and provides students with a vision of interweaving history and modernity; the civilization dialog module guides students to engage in multi-cultural and multi-civilization dialog, and cultivates students' international vision and cross-cultural communication ability. Fudan University has also promoted interdisciplinary exchanges through residential college activities (such as "Starry Sky Salon"), providing a rich platform for extracurricular learning. Residential college not only serves as an extension of scholarship, but also creates a community for students to freely express their ideas and exchange experiences. Under this mode, students can have in-depth communication with classmates from different backgrounds across disciplinary boundaries, which plays a vital role in cultivating students' critical thinking, innovative thinking and interdisciplinary ability.

4.3 Xi'an Jiaotong University: Humanistic Breakthrough in a Polytechnic University

The residential college system education in Xi'an Jiaotong University can be traced back to the "Wenzhi Garden" established in October 2005, and it was officially renamed Wenzhi Residential College in 2007. In 2006, the school established Pengkang Residential College, which marked the official implementation and promotion of residential college system in Xi'an Jiaotong University. On the basis of the successful experience of Peng Kang residential college, seven residential colleges have been set up one after another, including Wenzhi, Zonglian, Qide, Zhongying, Lizhi, Chongshi and Nanyang. These residential colleges are based on the residential areas of students in various universities, and students from 78 majors are divided into 8 residential colleges according to the principle of horizontal integration. Qian Xuesen Residential College was established in 2016, focusing on the cultivation of top-notch talents. Xi'an Jiaotong University has adopted a unique "Residential College-College" Dual Mode, which realized the intersection and integration of different disciplines and majors on the basis of relatively concentrated majors. Under this mode, the residential college and the college work together to share the responsibility of educational management. Focusing on professional education, the college is oriented around academic professional development and mainly cultivates students' professional knowledge, academic skills and research and innovation ability. Residential college, on the other hand, pays more attention to the development of students' comprehensive quality by organizing all kinds of study, campus cultural activities and social practice outside the classroom. The Dual System not only ensures the depth of professional education, but also broadens the breadth of general education, providing students with a more comprehensive and personalized educational environment.

The residential colleges of Xi'an Jiaotong University mainly implement the general education by offering practical training courses and characteristic cultural activities, with the aim of improving students' literacy in all aspects. Residential colleges offer practical training courses as elective courses in

general education, which usually start in the July summer session, and have certain credit requirements. For example, the “Five Merits of Wenzhi” course offered by Wenzhi Residential College cultivates students’ ability and interest from five aspects: speculation, Chinese studies, career planning, language expression and regional culture. The speculation course helps students form their goal consciousness in the form of discussion and interaction between teachers and students; The course of Chinese studies invites well-known experts and scholars at home and abroad to help students know the classics of Chinese studies in the form of lectures, forums and study tours; The career planning course invites HR from well-known enterprises to help students improve their employability in the form of lectures; The language expression course help students train their English expression ability in the form of competitions, games and salons. The regional culture course relies on the cultural background of Xi’an to help students understand the local folk culture. The course of “Art of Public Speaking” offered by Zonglian Residential College invited a team of tutors of the residential college to give lectures to train students’ speech art from the aspects of correct voice, initiating dialog, analysis logic, and dialog etiquette. Characteristic cultural activities are special educational activities carried out by the residential colleges according to relevant training concepts. For example, Pengkang Residential College’s “Pengkang Night” activity selects talented contestants from the whole university in the preliminary round and let the contestants to compete in the art performance in the final round, providing a stage for teachers and students to show their own charm; Chongshi Residential College’s “Westward Movement Spirit Reading Club” activity, resting on the founding history of Xi’an Jiaotong University, explores the westward movement spirit in the new era by reading classics and tasting stories.

The residential college system reform of Xi’an Jiaotong University paid special attention to making up for the shortcomings of humanities education in science and engineering universities. As an important residential college of Xi’an Jiaotong University, Pengkang residential college offered the course of “Humanities Classics Tutoring” for science and engineering students, and invited professors from the College of Liberal Arts to interpret the ancient Chinese classic *Historical Records* for students. The purpose of this course was to expand the knowledge of science and engineering students by exposing them to and learning historical and cultural classics, and to help them understand the historical context of social and human development. In this course, students could not only feel the ideological charm of humanistic classics, but also better understood the application of humanistic spirit in modern society. In addition, Xi’an Jiaotong University has further strengthened the comprehensive training of students through the dual-track support mode of “academic tutor + counselor”. In this mode, academic tutors mainly provide professional academic guidance for students, while counselors are responsible for students’ value education and life management. This dual-track support effectively solved the problem that traditional science and engineering universities often lack sufficient humanistic care, and ensures that students can get full support in professional learning and personal growth. The reform of residential college system also paid attention to cultivating students’ sense of social responsibility and

humanistic quality. Through various activities in the residential college, students can be exposed to the diversity and complexity of society, which not only enriches students’ extracurricular activities, but also encourages students to pay more attention to social issues in their future careers. Thanks to the efforts of Pengkang Residential College, Xi’an Jiaotong University has not only trained a large number of engineering and technical talents, but also trained compound talents with humanistic qualities for the society.

5. Optimization Strategy of Residential College System Reform under the Philosophy of General Education

5.1 Clarifying Value of Residential College System

It is of great significance to form a scientific and rational cognition on the key issues of residential college for promoting the consensus of reform. The general education of residential colleges not only broadens the discipline vision and knowledge base of professional education, but also gives students a broader thinking framework, so that they can have stronger adaptability and innovation ability in their future professional development. Therefore, we must recognize that the goal of residential college education is not to weaken or replace professional education, but to serve as a powerful supplement and extension to provide students with opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration and multi-dimensional growth. In the meantime, residential college education takes “students’ learning and development” as the core, and builds a supportive learning community, which provides a practical carrier and diversified growth paths for the professional education of universities. In this process, residential college not only undertakes the expansion function of course learning, but also plays a unique role in cultivating students’ critical thinking, communication skills, interdisciplinary collaboration and social responsibility. Therefore, the core of residential college system reform lies in “taking students’ growth as the center”, and its ultimate goal is to create an interactive and supportive learning environment for students, encourage them to actively integrate into residential college’s life and actively participate in academic, cultural and social practice activities. Only when students are deeply involved in residential college’s study and life can the educational value of residential college be truly brought into play and its talent cultivation function be promoted. In addition, the effective operation of residential college needs to seek a reasonable balance between “serving student management” and “promoting student development”. Standardized management system is the cornerstone of students’ healthy growth, and promoting students’ all-round development is the core competitiveness of residential colleges. Residential college should not only undertake daily management affairs, but also create rich learning resources and development opportunities, so that students can improve their comprehensive literacy through free exploration and practice. Therefore, the key indicators to measure the effectiveness of residential college reform lie in students’ participation, growth and satisfaction. Only by realizing the benign interaction between accurate service and personalized development can the residential college truly become a high-quality educational carrier to promote students’ growth and play a greater role in the reform of higher education in the

new era.

5.2 Innovating the Curriculum System

The core goal of general education is to cultivate “complete people” with sound personality and broad vision. Residential colleges should give full play to their own characteristics and resource advantages, promote the development of general education system that integrates science and technology with humanities, and realize the collaborative cultivation of knowledge, abilities and values. In classroom teaching, teachers should not only impart academic knowledge, but also pay attention to the enlightenment of ideas, rational guidance and shaping of interdisciplinary thinking, encourage students to establish contacts among different disciplines, and improve their critical thinking and innovative ability. Meanwhile, residential colleges should build a diversified learning platform through rich extracurricular practice, so that students can deepen their knowledge understanding, improve their cultural literacy, forge their moral sensibility in real situations, and further gain the power of sustained growth under the nourishment of general education resources. Under the background of education and teaching reform, we should actively build a talent cultivation system with collaboration between “the first classroom, the second classroom and the third classroom” to promote the all-round development of innovative talents. The first classroom is the “classroom of knowledge”, which emphasizes the deep integration of general education and professional education, and establishes a curriculum system covering basic science, humanities, social sciences and other fields, so as to ensure that students can broaden their multi-disciplinary horizons and form systematic cognitive ability while mastering basic knowledge. The second classroom is the “practical classroom”, in which through diversified practical activities such as engineering practice, social investigation and volunteer service, students’ ability to solve complex problems is cultivated, and their sense of social responsibility and teamwork spirit are enhanced. The third classroom is the “cultural classroom”. It relies on the residential college and combines with cultural and artistic centers, international exchange programs, interdisciplinary salons and other carriers, to improve students’ humanistic literacy and comprehensive ability in a multicultural environment, and achieve the educational goal of “integrating knowledge with action and applying what has been learned”. Through the combination of inside and outside class and classroom linkage, general education not only enriches students’ knowledge reserve and learning interest, but also promotes the all-round development of their personality, cultural accomplishment and moral sensibility. As an important platform for general education, residential college should constantly explore new modes of educating people, optimize curriculum setting, innovate learning methods, and build a high-quality general education ecology, so that students can grow into high-quality talents with global vision, social responsibility and innovative ability through broad academic vision and profound humanistic edification.

5.3 Reforming the Management Mechanism

As a complex organization with multiple functions, the university residential colleges’ organizational characteristics are mainly reflected in looseness, autonomy and humanity.

These characteristics enable residential colleges to adapt to the rapidly changing educational needs and form a dynamic educational ecology. In the residential college of western universities and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, residential colleges can maintain vigorous vitality, partly because they stick to following the characteristics of the residential college organization and maintain a certain degree of autonomy. Such autonomy provides residential colleges with flexibility, enabling them to better cope with various educational challenges and play an active role in teaching and management. Under the residential college system model, universities should give residential colleges a certain degree of autonomy. This can not only improve the autonomy of residential colleges, but also stimulate the innovation potential of residential colleges. Especially in the residential college, the traditional bureaucratic hierarchical system should gradually fade and a flat management structure should be implemented instead. Flat management helps to lower management levels and simplify communication processes, thereby improving decision-making efficiency and execution. At the same time, this management mode can better reflect the autonomy and flexibility of the residential college, enabling teachers and students to learn and grow independently in a relatively relaxed environment. In addition, the organization of the residential college should advocate the principles of autonomy, spontaneity and self-government, and encourage every student to actively participate in various activities of the residential college. This not only contributes to the all-round development of students, but also enhances their sense of belonging and identity with the residential college. In such an environment, teachers should be both “a teacher and a friend” to students. Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but also serve as guides and companions throughout students’ developmental journey. The establishment of such relationship can help students get more support and help in academic and personal growth, and form a more intimate and interactive learning community.

5.4 Promoting Technical Support

Under the residential college system mode, the implementation of general education can significantly improve the teaching quality, enhance the interaction between teachers and students, and promote personalized learning experience with the help of modern information technology. First of all, the application of information technology has expanded the spatial boundary of residential college’s education. Through the integration of online learning system, virtual classroom, MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) and digital resource library, students can obtain high-quality learning resources anytime and anywhere, breaking through the time and space limitations of traditional classrooms. It not only enhances the flexibility of learning, but also creates conditions for cross-regional and interdisciplinary knowledge exchange. Secondly, the introduction of big data analysis and artificial intelligence technology enables residential colleges to accurately track students’ learning journey, interest preferences and knowledge mastery, thereby optimizing course content, adjusting teaching strategies and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. Through the intelligent recommendation system, the residential college can match suitable learning content for students with different needs, and provide personalized counseling, avoiding the

“one-size-fits-all” teaching mode and improving the pertinence and effectiveness of learning. In addition, the application of technology has effectively promoted the interaction between teachers and students and the construction of learning communities. With the help of online discussion platform, intelligent question-answering system, real-time feedback mechanism and virtual tutor mode, the residential college can build a closer communication channel between teachers and students, and encourage students to deepen their understanding and expand their thinking through interaction. At the same time, blended learning combines the advantages of online and offline teaching to make classroom discussions more efficient and enhance students’ learning initiative and participation. Through the deep integration of modern technology, general education under the residential college system can further achieve efficient, personalized and interactive teaching goals, promote the continuous improvement of education quality, and cultivate high-quality talents with independent learning ability, interdisciplinary thinking and social adaptability.

5.5 Rooted in Traditional Culture

The development of university general education is closely related to cultural inheritance, and its core goal is to recognize and carry forward excellent traditional Chinese culture, cultivate students’ cultural consciousness and self-confidence, and enhance cultural aesthetic ability and discrimination. Compared with the traditional college education, the residential college system pays more attention to the function of cultural education, and relies on the community space outside the classroom to build a platform for communication between teachers and students and among students, so as to make cultural education more life-oriented and experiential. The cultural enlightenment function of the residential college not only depends on the construction of physical space, but also reflects in the shaping and inheritance of its unique cultural characteristics. By building a distinctive cultural brand and strengthening cultural influence, the residential college can not only form a lasting educational atmosphere, but also lay a foundation for its own sustainable development. In this process, student associations, as an important carrier of cultural interaction and communication, play an important role that cannot be ignored. Community activities can promote cultural identity and enhance students’ sense of belonging to residential college culture. Their influence has a far-reaching inheritance effect between grades and even generations, which provides strong support for the cultural sedimentation and development of residential college. While promoting the construction of associations with characteristics of the residential college, we should also pay attention to creating high-quality activities with rich cultural connotations. These activities can not only enhance the brand value of residential college, enhance the uniqueness of cultural education, but also effectively stimulate students’ enthusiasm for participation and inject lasting vitality into the residential college. Therefore, the residential college’s advantage in general education lies in its high spontaneity, flexibility and individuality, which is highly consistent with the core concept of cultural education, and helps to cultivate all-round talents with both cultural literacy and social responsibility.

6. Conclusion

The reform of the residential college system under the philosophy of general education is an important way to solve the dilemma of “emphasizing specialty over literacy” in traditional higher education. Facing the profound changes brought about by informatization and globalization, the goal of higher education is no longer limited to cultivating single talents with professional skills, but pays more attention to the cultivation of students’ comprehensive literacy, critical thinking ability and social responsibility. The residential college system provides an ideal carrier for the implementation of general education through interdisciplinary integration, community learning, in-depth interaction between teachers and students and innovation of management mode. By constructing the coordinated education mode of “the first classroom, the second classroom and the third classroom”, the residential college system has shown significant advantages in promoting the integration of professional education and general education, promoting students’ individualized development, and strengthening the function of cultural education, which has laid an institutional foundation for cultivating “all-round” talents. However, in practice, the reform of residential college system still faces many challenges. First of all, the dual management mode brings about the overlapping and coordination problems, which lead to some conflicts between the residential college and the college in resource allocation, teacher allocation and educational functions, which affects the overall advancement of the reform. Secondly, when some universities implement the residential college system, they failed to fully integrate academic and administrative management, which leads to the problems of vague functions and scattered responsibilities in curriculum system construction, teacher support and student affairs management in residential colleges. Furthermore, the imbalance in resource allocation requires urgent resolution. Certain residential colleges remain underdeveloped in terms of physical infrastructure, faculty capacity, and curriculum development, which ultimately compromises the educational efficacy of the residential college system. In view of the above problems, the future reform of residential college system needs to further strengthen policy support and top-level design, and promote the simultaneous development of theoretical research and practical innovation. The government and education authorities should provide more policy guarantees, optimize the allocation of funds, teachers and infrastructure, and ensure that residential colleges can operate efficiently on the basis of balanced allocation of resources. In the meantime, universities should actively explore the development mode of residential college system suitable for their own characteristics, strengthen the organic integration of academic and administrative management, and improve the educational quality and management efficiency of the residential college system. Moreover, empowered by information technology, they can advance the development of smart residential colleges. Through big data analytics, online learning platforms, and AI-powered tutoring systems, they can enhance pedagogical interactivity and personalized cultivation of residential college system. The reform of residential college system is an important measure for the modernization of higher education, and it is also an important way to cultivate compound talents with global vision,

interdisciplinary ability and innovative spirit. By continuously optimizing the management mechanism, deepening the development of general education system, improving resource allocation and using scientific and technological innovation, the residential college system is expected to become an important support for the reform of higher education in the new era, help Chinese universities to cultivate high-quality talents with both ability and political integrity and all-round development, and promote social progress and knowledge innovation.

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