

Connotations of Foreign Language Education in Military Academies in the New Era

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Abstract. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, foreign language education in China has gone through more than 70 years. Wen Qiufang has divided the history of foreign language education into four stages: the exploration period, the development period, the acceleration period, and the new era. Each stage has made great contributions to the nation's foreign language education. Today, in the education context of "Nurturing Morality and Fostering Talent" in the new era, foreign language education in military academies has been endowed with new connotations. Therefore, this article will explore the new connotation of military foreign language education under the consideration of these various new changes and needs of military foreign language education.

Keywords: foreign language education, military academy, new era, nurturing morality and fostering talent

1 Introduction

Since the 1970s, the international academic community has begun to focus on the macro research of foreign language education. Linguist Halliday proposed that language is a social symbol, and language communication is a social behavior [1]. Sociologist Hymes first proposed the concept of language communication ability from a sociological perspective [2]. As a result, linguistic research has gradually shifted from a focus on static descriptions of language to the dynamic language use, which has prompted foreign language education to a shift from emphasizing the instrumental aspects of language to the function of cultivating people's humanistic qualities.

After the 9/11 attacks, the American Language Center has started to study foreign language education issues from a strategic perspective. A series of language strategies and plans have been introduced, such as *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, And Cultural Capabilities: 2011-2016*. These strategies have established a diversified development path and have combined instrumental and humanistic aspects in their foreign language education [3]. The EU also has been adopting a policy of linguistic diversity among its member states to promote economic and cultural exchanges among them. In the 1990s, more scholars began to analyze and discuss the macro characteristics of cultural dissemination and the ethnic identity in foreign language education from multiple different perspectives, such as language and politics, language and culture, and language and society.

However, the debate between “foreign language teaching” and “foreign language education”, as well as the debate between its “instrumental” function and “humanistic” function has lasted for a long time in China.

In the 1980s, Mr. Xu Guozhang called for the need to distinguish the two concepts. Many scholars believe that the confusion between them is still unclear, and the theoretical understanding of foreign language education is still not accurate and comprehensive enough. Until now, too much emphasis has been put on the instrumental function of language teaching, while the humanistic function has been neglected for a long time. This has led to many problems such as the decline in the students’ comprehensive quality, their lack of wide knowledge as well as imagination or creativity[4-5]. These problems have greatly restricted the effective improvement of foreign language education quality. Today, in the education context of “Nurturing Morality and Fostering Talent”, foreign language education in military academies has been endowed with new connotations. Therefore, on the basis of further clarifying the connotation of “foreign language education”, this article will explore the new connotation of military foreign language education under the consideration of these various new changes.

2 Connotation of Foreign Language Education

When it comes to foreign language education, there are some concepts that are often used by foreign language education administrators and researchers in China, such as “foreign language training”, “foreign language imparting”, “foreign language teaching”, and “foreign language educating”. Usually, many people who are engaged in foreign language education, management and research use these concepts indiscriminately, or carry out foreign language education management and practice according to their own understanding. Strictly speaking, these concepts have different connotations, and requires different practices. It is necessary for us to clarify these concepts and understand the connotations behind them.

According to the *Macmillan’s English-Chinese Dictionary*, the concept of “foreign language training” refers to “training, drilling or helping someone grasp certain skills in a planned and systematic way”; “foreign language imparting” refers to “training workers , professionals, government functionaries, etc .”; “foreign language teaching” refers to “passing knowledge, skill, etc. to others to help them learn something in a school, college, university etc. by giving lessons or to help them to learn skills by showing them how to do it”; while “foreign language educating” means “education and preparation of the younger generation for future participation in the society world, primarily referring to instruction giving to children, teenagers and youths in educational institutions”[6].

By comparison, we can find that the first two concepts, “foreign language training” and “foreign language imparting”, focus more on the improvement of skills. The concept of “foreign language teaching” centers on helping learners master knowledge or skills. However, the concept of “foreign language education” goes beyond the focus on skills and knowledge, and pays more attention to the individual’s development. It puts more emphasis on helping the students better adapt to and serve the society in the future. Foreign language education is a more macro concept that encompasses multiple education aspects such as language teaching objectives, cultural education objectives, and moral education objectives. The ultimate goal of

foreign language education is not only to help students acquire basic skills and knowledge of foreign languages, but also to educate them and enable them achieve the goals of understanding foreign cultures, broadening international horizons, developing individual personality, cultivating critical thinking, and developing good behavior, etc.[7]. It not only focuses on the cultivation of language skills, but also emphasizes the close connection between language, culture, and their ways of thinking. It pays more attention to the cultural function of language, emphasizes the cultivation of ideological qualities, and emphasizes the comprehensive improvement and development of students in language ability, mental ability, and humanistic literacy [8-9].

3 The Connotation of Foreign Language Education in Military Academies in the New Era

Wen Qiufang has divided the history of foreign language education into four stages: the exploration period(1949-1977), the development period(1978-1998), the acceleration period (1999-2011), and the new era (2012-)[10]. In terms of talent cultivation models, Hu Wenzhong has divided the history of foreign language education into three stages: the period of cultivating language skills(1949 to the mid-1980s), the period of cultivating inter-disciplinary foreign language talents(mid-1980s to 2010), and the new period of cultivating multi-layer talents foreign language talents (2010-)[11]. Each stage's development has a profound historical background. It should be said that foreign language education in China has gone through an extraordinary journey and it has always been in line with the nation's development strategies. It has been providing a strong intellectual support and talent guarantee for promoting Chinese economic and social development, expanding cultural exchanges between China and other countries, enhancing the overall literacy of its people, and for participating in international governance.

Foreign language education in military academies, which has been an irreplaceable part of Chinese foreign language education, not only has its particularity but also maintains a close internal logical relationship with the development of the times. In the new era, China is increasingly moving towards the center of the world stage. The chances of its armed forces participating in diversified military tasks and international military exchange activities are becoming increasingly frequent. Language, as the main tool of communication, embodies a country's ideology and values. Its role and function in international military exchanges are becoming more and more important. Thus foreign language education in military academies is facing new opportunities and challenges. Then what is the new connotation of foreign language education in military academies in the new era? We will explore it from three aspects: talent cultivation objective, curriculum teaching content, and teaching methods.

3.1 Talent Training Objective

In November 2019, President Xi delivered an important speech at the opening meeting of the All Military Academy President Training, calling for the comprehensive implementation of the new era's military education policy. He asked the military academies to carry out reforms, with the aim of cultivating high-quality and specialized new military talents with both moral integrity and talent in the future. Undoubtedly, foreign language proficiency has become an

important component of the new era's military talent's combat capability system. The concept of "cultivating high-quality and specialized new military talents with both moral integrity and talent" points out a clear direction for the future foreign language education in the military academies.

As for the training talent objective, it should first highlight the cultivation of high-quality and specialized new military talents and focus on the construction of inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural knowledge. In the new era, in order to win local wars under the conditions of informatization and improve the combat capabilities based on information systems, it is necessary to cultivate a large number of high-quality new military talents who are proficient in foreign language. They not only need to be able to obtain foreign military information directly, but also need to be able to engage in communication with foreign forces in joint exercises, as well as perform multi-tasks such as border or maritime patrols, escort tasks, etc. Therefore, it is important to improve the students' comprehensive foreign language quality, making them high-level military foreign language talents who can proficiently use foreign languages, who can possess cross-cultural communication skills, and who are proficient in military professional knowledge.

Second, the goal of cultivating foreign language talents in military academies should make the ideological and value education as the fundamental principle. The concept of "nurturing morality and fostering talent" proposed by the new era military education policy determines that the fundamental task and goal of foreign language education in military academies is to cultivate new talents with both morality and talent. In the centennial development of the CPC, foreign language education in military schools has always been closely linked to the revolutionary cause of the Party, with its distinctive political attributes and value orientation. Undoubtedly, strengthening the cultivation of morality, cultivating students' patriotism and international perspective should be the unchanged cornerstone of foreign language education in military academies.

In recent years, high-level exchanges and defense consultations between our forces and foreign forces have become increasingly frequent and a comprehensive, multi-level, and wide-ranging pattern of foreign military exchanges has been formed. In order to fulfill the historical mission in the new era, and demonstrate excellent qualities and establish the image of our country as well, all types of military talents in our military should not only acquire foreign language skills, but also possess ideological and moral character and cultivate a broad international perspective. The military talents we cultivate should be judged by whether they can recognize and practice the socialist core values, whether they are loyal to the Party, whether they possess national consciousness and sentiments, and whether they are able to uphold China's position and interests on the international stage.

3.2 Course Teaching Content

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi has mentioned cultural confidence on multiple occasions. In the 13th collective learning session of the Central Political Bureau in February 2014, he proposed to "enhance cultural and value confidence"; In May and June 2016, he emphasized "cultural confidence" twice in a row. And at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work in 2018, he emphasized that "we should promote the construction of international communication capabilities, try to tell

the story of China well”[12].

Foreign language education opens up cultural spaces among different countries and ethnic groups; On the other hand, it can also eliminate cultural hegemony, express cultural stance and establish cultural confidence in a deconstructive way. To tell the story of China well, foreign language education in military academies should be more in line with the needs of the times. It should reshape the foreign language classroom content, eliminate the western centrism, resist the cultural erosion and language imperialism, and promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture. To achieve this goal, we should teach students to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures from a comparative perspective. Through language learning and cultural comparison, enhance students’ cultural character, cultivate their cultural confidence and awareness of a community with a shared future for mankind. Through the value reasoning, we can strengthen the socialist core values and achieve the transformation of the instrumental function to the ideological and humanistic function.

Therefore, it is necessary to fully tap into the excellent traditional Chinese cultural factors in the existing textbooks. In the new era, we should strengthen the education of local culture, organically integrate national values and concepts, strengthen students’ cultural identity, and help them establish correct values and outlook on life. By expressing excellent traditional Chinese culture in foreign languages, we can enhance our humanistic literacy, build our cultural confidence, cultivate our cross-cultural abilities, and help students effectively undertake the historical mission and contemporary responsibility of telling Chinese stories well.

3.3 Teaching Methods

In the era of Internet+, information technology has become an internal driving force in foreign language education. The flipped curriculum and MOOC have gradually been applied to the teaching of foreign language, which has driven the changes in curriculum teaching strategies. The development and implementation of online and offline courses, the development and sharing of learning resources, the assignment release and the peer evaluation, the language testing and evaluation, the self-directed learning, teacher training, situational experience, interactive communication, sharing and participation, and communication interaction are all closely related to the technology nowadays. In addition, teaching models such as MOOCs, micro lessons, and flipped classrooms have broken the limitations of time and space in traditional teaching and enhanced the flexibility of foreign language teaching.

With the assistance of educational technology, the relationship between teachers, students, and the curriculum has become closer and closer. The roles of teachers and students have changed. The status of students in the classroom is getting gradually more and more highlighted. However, whether it is technological changes or updates in teaching modes, the basic theory of people-oriented is indispensable in foreign language education. Only by adhering to the requirements of people-oriented theory can we ensure that various technological innovations are in line with educational development and students’ needs, and thereby help improve the implementation of education and optimize teaching levels. Therefore, in the era of Internet+, foreign language education in military academies should implement the people-oriented teaching theory, give more prominence to students’ subjectivity in the selection of teaching

methods and means, and pay more attention to the integration of humanistic value factors on the basis of deepening the connotation of foreign language education, so as to help awaken students' humanistic feelings and humanistic orientation under the impact of technology.

4 Conclusion

In the new era, the connotation of foreign language education in military academies is undergoing a transformation from language ontology to a focus on value cultivation. Only by solidly returning to the value orientation of humanistic education, can the characteristics and advantages of language education in military academies be truly demonstrated. Therefore, the value leading function of military culture and its spiritual cultivation in foreign language education should be fully utilized in military academies, so as to achieve the goal of cultivating high-quality and specialized new military talents with both moral integrity and talent.

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