

Integrating Ideological and Political Education into After-School Services in Chinese Primary Schools under the "Double Reduction" Policy: Value Logic, Practical Dilemmas, and Optimization Pathways

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Abstract: Under the "Double Reduction" policy, after-school services in Chinese primary schools have shifted from a supplementary care arrangement to an important component of the school education system. This transformation creates a new institutional space for implementing the fundamental task of moral cultivation and for integrating ideological and political education with students' everyday learning, social participation, labor experience, cultural identity, and behavioral development. Based on policy analysis and a synthesis of relevant research, this study examines the value logic, current practices, practical dilemmas, and optimization pathways of integrating ideological and political education into primary school after-school services. The analysis shows that after-school services possess distinctive advantages in experiential learning, flexible curriculum organization, cross-subject integration, and collaborative education. They can complement classroom-based moral education by converting abstract values into observable actions and lived experiences. However, current practice is constrained by conceptual separation between care and education, formalistic activity design, fragmented curricula, insufficient age differentiation, teacher workload and capability gaps, uneven regional resources, weak home-school-community coordination, and evaluation systems that emphasize participation rather than value formation. To address these problems, the paper proposes an integrated framework centered on moral cultivation, organized through four developmental dimensions and multiple thematic modules, supported by experiential and project-based pedagogy, professional teacher communities, multi-stakeholder governance, differentiated support for rural and border schools, and process-oriented evaluation. The study argues that ideological and political education should not be mechanically added to after-school services; rather, it should be embedded in curriculum objectives, activity processes, organizational culture, and reflective evaluation in an age-appropriate, life-oriented, and non-formalistic manner. This transformation can improve the educational quality of after-school services and contribute to a more equitable and coherent basic education ecosystem.

Keywords: After-School Services, Double Reduction Policy, Ideological and Political Education, Moral Cultivation, Primary Education, Five-Education Integration.

1. Research Background and Problem Statement

The comprehensive implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy has reshaped the governance logic of compulsory education in China. By reducing excessive homework and off-campus academic training, the policy seeks not only to relieve students' burdens but also to strengthen the main role of schools in educating students and to improve the overall quality of school-based provision [1,2]. After-school services have consequently expanded from local responses to the "3:30 p.m. dilemma" into a nationwide institutional arrangement. Their function has also changed: they are no longer limited to supervision, homework completion, or delayed pick-up, but increasingly include sports, arts, science, reading, labor, social practice, and interest-based activities.

The expansion of after-school services provides an important opportunity to reconsider how primary schools implement ideological and political education. At the primary level, ideological and political education should not be understood as the simple transplantation of abstract

theoretical instruction designed for older students. Its core task is to help children develop basic political identity, moral judgment, civic consciousness, collective responsibility, respect for rules, cultural confidence, labor habits, ecological awareness, and care for others through experiences that match their cognitive and emotional development. The Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools emphasize ideals and beliefs, socialist core values, traditional Chinese culture, ecological civilization, and mental health, and require these elements to be implemented through curricula, culture, activities, practice, management, and collaborative education [3]. After-school services are especially suitable for these implementation pathways because they are flexible, activity-rich, and closely connected with daily life.

Nevertheless, the moral and ideological potential of after-school services has not yet been fully realized. In many schools, after-school programs are still divided into two disconnected parts: homework tutoring is treated as the "main task," while moral education is reduced to occasional theme days, slogan-based publicity, or short ceremonial activities. In other cases, schools attempt to strengthen ideological and political education by adding excessive political terminology

to unrelated activities, thereby weakening children's interest and producing formalism. These practices reveal a deeper problem: the integration of ideological and political education requires not only additional content, but also a reconstruction of educational goals, curriculum organization, teaching methods, teacher cooperation, resource allocation, and evaluation standards.

Existing studies on after-school services mainly focus on policy implementation, parental satisfaction, teacher workload, curriculum diversity, resource supply, and collaborative governance [4]. Research specifically examining the systematic integration of ideological and political education remains relatively limited, particularly with regard to age-appropriate curriculum structures, experiential mechanisms, rural and border school contexts, and the measurement of educational outcomes. This study therefore addresses four questions: What is the policy and theoretical basis for integration? What educational advantages and practical forms currently exist? What dilemmas hinder effective implementation? What kind of governance, curriculum, teacher, resource, and evaluation mechanisms can support high-quality integration? By answering these questions, the paper seeks to extend after-school service research from the perspective of service provision to the perspective of comprehensive moral cultivation[5].

2. Policy Evolution and Analytical Framework

2.1. From Care Provision to Comprehensive School Education

China's after-school service policy has developed through a clear process of functional expansion. The 2017 Guiding Opinions on Providing After-School Services for Primary and Secondary School Students established the principles of voluntariness, public welfare, school responsibility, safety, and priority support for students with urgent care needs [1]. At this stage, the principal policy concern was to solve the practical difficulty faced by working families after the end of the school day. Although educational enrichment was encouraged, the service was still widely perceived as an extension of care.

The 2021 "Double Reduction" policy marked a major turning point. It required schools to improve the quality of after-school services, extend service time, enrich service content, and better meet students' diverse needs [2]. The widely implemented "5+2" model and various "1+X" curriculum structures transformed after-school services into a regular part of school operation. This institutionalization created conditions for schools to coordinate homework guidance with reading, sports, arts, science, labor, and social practice. The policy objective therefore moved from solving a time-management problem to improving the school's overall educational capacity.

Subsequent policy developments further strengthened this orientation. The Opinions on Deepening Education and Teaching Reform and Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Compulsory Education called for the coordinated development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education and emphasized curriculum-based, cultural, activity-based, practical, managerial, and collaborative approaches to moral education [4]. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan (2022 Edition) highlighted core

competencies, integrated learning, practical activities, and school-based curriculum development [7]. The Outline for Building a Leading Country in Education (2024-2035) linked the improvement of after-school service quality with the implementation of the new-era moral cultivation project [10]. The Education Development Plan for the Fifteenth Five-Year Period continued to emphasize the coordinated advancement of "Double Reduction," school quality improvement, and enriched after-school services [11]. Together, these policies position after-school services as an integral part of the school education system rather than an optional appendix.

2.2. Policy Basis for Integrating Ideological and Political Education

The integration of ideological and political education into after-school services is grounded in the fundamental educational principle of moral cultivation. The Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools provide the most direct framework for primary education. They define differentiated goals for lower and upper primary grades and identify multiple implementation channels, including classroom teaching, campus culture, thematic activities, social practice, school management, and home-school cooperation [3]. These channels correspond closely to the organizational features of after-school services. An after-school club, a labor project, a community visit, a reading circle, or a team sports activity can therefore become a concrete carrier of value education when its objectives and reflection processes are deliberately designed.

The 2019 Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era emphasized the coordinated construction of ideological and political theory courses across primary, secondary, and higher education, the political and value-guiding role of such courses, and synergy between specialized courses and other curricula [5]. The 2020 implementation plan further clarified the progressive goals and content of ideological and political education across school stages [6]. For primary school students, the emphasis should be on emotional identification, behavioral habits, basic knowledge, and concrete experience rather than concept-heavy exposition. This developmental requirement is highly compatible with the informal, experiential, and project-based nature of after-school activities.

The Patriotic Education Law, effective from January 2024, requires schools to integrate patriotic education throughout the educational process and to combine classroom teaching with extracurricular practice and experience [8]. The Family Education Promotion Law also provides a legal basis for strengthening family responsibility and home-school-social cooperation in children's moral development [9]. These policies imply that after-school services should connect school education with public cultural institutions, local history, community life, family practices, and social responsibility. Ideological and political education in this context is not confined to a single subject; it is a coordinated process of values, knowledge, emotion, will, and action.

2.3. Value Logic of Integration

First, integration responds to the requirement that education must answer the fundamental questions of whom to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom education is conducted. After-school services occupy a substantial part of students' school day. If this time is treated merely as care or

academic remediation, schools may reproduce the very tendency toward narrow score orientation that the "Double Reduction" policy seeks to correct. Embedding moral cultivation ensures that the expansion of school time leads to richer educational experiences rather than simply longer academic hours.

Second, integration supports the coordinated development of the five dimensions of education. Moral education is not a separate activity placed alongside intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education; it provides value orientation for each dimension. Scientific inquiry can cultivate truth-seeking, social responsibility, and ethical awareness. Sports can foster perseverance, rule consciousness, teamwork, and respect. Arts can strengthen cultural identity, empathy, and aesthetic judgment. Labor education can develop responsibility, dignity of work, cooperation, and care for public resources. When these values are made explicit through activity goals and reflection, after-school services become a practical platform for five-education integration.

Third, integration contributes to educational equity. Students from families with abundant cultural and social resources often have access to museums, travel, sports clubs, volunteer activities, and guided discussion outside school, while disadvantaged students may have fewer opportunities. High-quality after-school services can provide common access to public culture, social practice, moral dialogue, and collaborative activities. In rural, border, ethnic minority, and migrant-receiving areas, localized ideological and political education can also connect national identity with local culture, community memory, ethnic unity, ecological protection, and everyday responsibility, thereby avoiding a one-size-fits-all model.

Fourth, integration transforms ideological and political education from abstract transmission into life-oriented practice. Primary school students develop values through repeated participation, emotional experience, observation of adults, peer interaction, and reflection on concrete situations. After-school services offer extended time, smaller activity groups, cross-grade cooperation, and flexible spaces, making it possible to organize service learning, role play, project inquiry, community visits, campus governance, and collective creation. These experiences help students move from knowing moral norms to feeling their significance and acting upon them.

2.4. An Analytical Framework: Goals, Content, Process, Support, and Evaluation

To avoid superficial integration, this study adopts a five-dimensional analytical framework. The goal dimension asks whether after-school services include clear, age-appropriate objectives related to moral character, civic responsibility, cultural identity, rule consciousness, and social participation. The content dimension examines whether ideological and political elements are systematically embedded in diverse courses rather than limited to isolated theme activities. The process dimension focuses on pedagogy, student agency, experience, dialogue, cooperation, and reflection. The support dimension includes teacher competence, workload, funding, facilities, external resources, safety, and governance. The evaluation dimension considers whether schools assess changes in participation, behavior, responsibility, cooperation, reflection, and value judgment through developmental and non-ranking methods. These five dimensions are interdependent: strong content without suitable pedagogy

becomes preaching; rich activities without clear goals become entertainment; ambitious goals without teacher and resource support become formalism.

3. Current Practices and Educational Functions

3.1. Existing Service Models and Integration Scenarios

After the nationwide expansion of after-school services, schools have developed varied implementation models. The "5+2" timetable provides a stable time foundation, while the "1+X" model usually combines basic care or homework guidance with multiple enrichment options. Some schools organize mixed-age clubs, rotating thematic modules, student societies, class-based activities, or school-community partnerships. In economically developed areas, museums, science centers, universities, sports organizations, and professional institutions may participate in curriculum delivery. In rural areas, schools often rely more heavily on existing teachers and local resources. These differences shape both the possibilities and risks of ideological and political integration.

Integration currently occurs in several typical scenarios. The first is theme-based moral education, including activities related to national days, the Constitution, heroes and role models, national unity, gratitude, public etiquette, and safety. The second is subject-linked integration, such as reading patriotic literature, exploring the history of scientific development, discussing fairness in sports, studying local environmental problems, or learning traditional crafts. The third is practice-oriented integration, including campus labor, community volunteering, visits to memorial sites, ecological observation, and public-service projects. The fourth is organizational and cultural integration, in which students participate in club rules, team leadership, peer support, exhibitions, performances, and shared decision-making. The fifth is digital integration through online museums, digital storytelling, virtual visits, and resource-sharing platforms.

3.2. Curriculum Forms for Ideological and Political Education

3.2.1. Theme-Based and Narrative Activities

Narrative is particularly effective for primary school students because stories connect values with concrete people, choices, emotions, and consequences. After-school reading circles can use stories of historical figures, scientists, ordinary workers, community volunteers, and contemporary role models to explore courage, responsibility, honesty, collective interest, and dedication. The educational focus should not be on memorizing conclusions but on asking developmentally appropriate questions: What difficulty did the person face? Why did the person make that choice? How did the choice affect others? What can we do in a similar situation? Such discussion turns a story into moral reasoning and personal reflection.

3.2.2. Discipline-Integrated Activities

Ideological and political education can be embedded in almost every type of after-school course. In science and technology activities, students can examine the relationship between innovation, national development, safety, environmental responsibility, and research ethics. In language and reading activities, they can explore cultural memory,

family and community narratives, respect for diversity, and responsible expression. In arts programs, traditional music, calligraphy, drama, and local crafts can strengthen cultural confidence while encouraging creativity rather than imitation. In sports, teachers can make teamwork, fair play, resilience, respect for rules, and collective honor visible as learning objectives. In labor activities, students can plan, divide tasks, solve problems, care for tools, and reflect on the value of work.

3.2.3. Social Practice and Service Learning

Social practice is one of the strongest advantages of after-school services. Schools can organize small, sustained projects rather than one-time visits. For example, students may investigate water use on campus, design a conservation campaign, record changes, and report results; interview elderly community members about local history; create accessible signs for public spaces; maintain a school garden; or provide peer assistance to younger students. These projects link knowledge with public responsibility and allow students to experience the consequences of cooperation. Service learning is most educational when it includes preparation, action, guided reflection, and presentation, rather than treating students as passive visitors.

3.2.4. School Culture and Student Participation

The hidden curriculum of after-school services is as important as formal activity content. Students learn values from how teachers distribute opportunities, resolve conflicts, recognize contributions, manage mistakes, and respond to differences[10]. A club that promotes equality but allows only high-performing students to lead sends a contradictory message. Schools should therefore design democratic and orderly participation mechanisms suitable for children, such as rotating responsibilities, student proposals, peer mediation, shared rule-making, and public reflection. These practices cultivate rule consciousness, responsibility, respect, and a sense of belonging through daily organizational experience[11].

3.3. Positive Outcomes and Educational Potential

Current research and practice indicate that after-school services can reduce family care pressure, support homework completion, broaden access to enrichment activities, and improve student satisfaction. From an ideological and political education perspective, their most important potential lies in the continuity between knowledge and action. Classroom moral education often faces time limitations and may remain at the level of understanding. After-school activities can provide repeated opportunities to practice cooperation, perseverance, public responsibility, labor, communication, and self-management. They also create settings in which teachers can observe students outside conventional academic tasks and provide individualized guidance.

After-school services can also reduce the separation among different educational domains. Mental health activities may be combined with responsibility and mutual care; sports may be combined with rules and collective identity; reading may be combined with cultural confidence; science may be combined with national development and ethical reflection; and labor may be combined with community service. This integration helps prevent ideological and political education from becoming a stand-alone lecture. It also supports students' learning engagement and emotional well-being by

providing meaningful, participatory experiences.

3.4. Regional and School-Level Differences

The quality of integration varies considerably among regions and schools. Urban schools with strong resources may offer robotics, drama, orchestras, museums, legal education, and volunteer programs, and can invite professionals to provide specialized guidance. However, more resources do not automatically produce better ideological and political education. Some programs remain commercially packaged, achievement-oriented, or disconnected from the school's educational goals. Conversely, rural schools may lack specialized teachers and facilities but possess rich local resources, including agricultural practices, ecological environments, community traditions, ethnic cultures, border experiences, and intergenerational knowledge. The key issue is whether schools can transform available resources into coherent curricula[12].

Rural and remote schools face more severe structural constraints. Teachers may be responsible for multiple subjects and extended service hours, external professionals may be difficult to recruit, and digital equipment or transport may be limited. Families may also have less time to participate because of migration or work patterns. These conditions can narrow after-school services to homework supervision and simple recreation. Therefore, equity should not be measured only by whether a school offers after-school services, but by whether students have access to sustained, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate experiences. National and regional policies should provide differentiated rather than uniform support.

4. Practical Dilemmas in Integrating Ideological and Political Education

4.1. Conceptual Separation and the Risk of Formalism

The first dilemma is a conceptual misunderstanding of integration. Some schools regard after-school services as a neutral time block whose only purpose is care, and therefore exclude explicit moral and civic objectives. Others treat ideological and political education as an additional political task and mechanically attach slogans, quotations, or theme labels to existing activities. Both approaches separate values from educational practice. Genuine integration requires teachers to identify the moral significance already present in cooperation, inquiry, labor, artistic expression, rule observance, and community participation, and then design opportunities for students to experience and reflect on that significance.

Formalism also appears when activities are organized primarily for inspection, publicity, or photographic evidence. One-time ceremonies, crowded theme calendars, and highly scripted performances may create visible outputs but limited student understanding. Primary students need repetition, continuity, personal participation, and emotional relevance. A modest weekly responsibility project may be more educational than a large annual event. Therefore, quality should be judged by the depth of participation and behavioral continuity rather than by the number of activities or the political intensity of their titles.

4.2. Fragmented Curriculum and Insufficient Age Differentiation

Many after-school programs consist of isolated activities without a progressive curriculum structure. Similar themes are repeated across grades, while objectives, tasks, and evaluation remain unchanged. This limits cumulative development. Lower-primary students require concrete routines, stories, imitation, emotional identification, and simple responsibilities. Upper-primary students can engage in inquiry, comparison, role discussion, project planning, public expression, and preliminary moral reasoning. Without age differentiation, content may be either too abstract for younger students or too superficial for older students.

Curriculum fragmentation is also reflected in the separation among specialized moral education, subject clubs, sports, arts, labor, and social practice. Teachers may not recognize shared educational objectives, resulting in duplicated content and missed opportunities. For example, a sports club may evaluate only skills and competition results, while ignoring fairness and teamwork; a science club may celebrate innovation but omit safety and ethics; a traditional culture activity may focus on technique without exploring cultural meaning. A coherent curriculum map is needed to align courses with developmental values and avoid random addition.

4.3. Teacher Workload, Motivation, and Professional Capability

Teachers are the central actors in after-school services, but extended working hours and additional responsibilities can lead to fatigue and reduced motivation. Compensation, flexible scheduling, time-off arrangements, and workload recognition remain uneven across regions. When teachers are already under pressure, ideological and political integration may be perceived as an extra documentation burden rather than an educational opportunity. This is especially problematic when schools require teachers to produce detailed plans, photographs, and reports without providing planning time or professional support.

Capability gaps are equally important. Subject teachers may possess strong disciplinary knowledge but limited experience in moral dialogue, project facilitation, service learning, conflict mediation, or developmental evaluation. Some teachers worry that value discussions may become preachy, while others rely on predetermined answers and suppress students' questions. External instructors may have specialized artistic, scientific, or sports skills but lack understanding of school educational goals, child development, and political or ethical boundaries. Sustainable integration therefore requires shared training, co-planning, observation, and professional learning communities rather than one-time lectures.

4.4. Weak Multi-Stakeholder Coordination and Governance Risks

After-school services involve government, schools, families, communities, professional institutions, volunteers, and public cultural organizations. However, cooperation is often temporary and dependent on personal relationships. Schools may lack clear procedures for selecting, training, supervising, and evaluating external providers. Families may receive information but have little opportunity to contribute to curriculum design or reflection. Community resources may be used for visits without sustained educational collaboration.

These weaknesses reduce continuity and may introduce safety, commercial, or value-orientation risks.

The inclusion of external resources must therefore balance openness and educational leadership. Schools should remain responsible for curriculum objectives, child protection, content review, and evaluation. External participation should supplement rather than replace school responsibility. Written agreements, qualification checks, safeguarding rules, co-teaching arrangements, and feedback mechanisms are necessary. Community experts and parents can contribute valuable knowledge, but their participation should be embedded in a coherent school plan rather than organized as isolated presentations.

4.5. Evaluation Misalignment

Most existing evaluation systems focus on easily measured indicators such as attendance, number of courses, parent satisfaction, teacher participation, or student products. These indicators are useful for management but insufficient for assessing ideological and political education. Value formation is gradual, contextual, and not suitable for high-stakes testing. Schools need evidence of students' responsibility, cooperation, rule observance, empathy, persistence, cultural understanding, and reflective ability, but these qualities cannot be reduced to a single score.

A second evaluation problem is the tendency to reward visible performance. Students who speak confidently, win competitions, or produce polished artifacts may receive more recognition than those who make quiet progress in responsibility or cooperation. This can undermine equity and encourage performative participation. Developmental evaluation should compare students primarily with their own previous performance, use multiple forms of evidence, and recognize different ways of contributing. Evaluation should guide improvement rather than label students morally.

4.6. Resource Inequality and the Special Needs of Rural and Border Schools

Resource inequality affects both the breadth and depth of after-school services. Urban schools can more easily access professional organizations, digital platforms, public cultural institutions, and specialist teachers. Rural and border schools may depend on a small number of teachers and limited facilities. If policy expectations are identical, disadvantaged schools may resort to superficial compliance. Moreover, imported urban course packages may ignore local culture and students' lived experience, weakening relevance.

At the same time, rural and border areas should not be defined solely by scarcity. Their local environments can support distinctive curricula on agriculture, ecology, ethnic unity, national territory, community cooperation, traditional crafts, local heroes, and border responsibility. The challenge is to provide teachers with curriculum development support and to connect local resources with national educational goals. Regional resource centers, university partnerships, mobile teacher teams, shared digital materials, and inter-school communities can help transform local experience into high-quality educational content.

4.7. Digital Expansion and Ethical Risks

Digital platforms can expand access to museums, expert lectures, cultural resources, and cross-regional exchange. They are especially valuable for schools with limited local resources. However, digital expansion also introduces risks:

passive screen-based activities may replace real participation; commercial platforms may prioritize attractive products over educational value; student data and images may be inadequately protected; algorithmic content may expose children to inappropriate information; and technology may widen gaps between schools. Ideological and political education in digital after-school services should therefore include media literacy, responsible communication, privacy, respect, and critical use of technology, while preserving sufficient offline practice and interpersonal interaction.

5. Optimization Pathways

5.1. Establish an Integrated Governance and Planning Mechanism

Schools should incorporate after-school services into their overall moral education plan rather than manage them as a separate administrative project. At the beginning of each academic year, a school-level committee can map educational objectives across grades, subjects, clubs, festivals, labor activities, community projects, and family participation. The plan should specify what values and competencies are emphasized, how they develop progressively, which courses provide major learning opportunities, and how evidence will be collected. This approach prevents duplication and ensures that ideological and political education is distributed across ordinary activities rather than concentrated in a few theme events.

Government departments should clarify responsibilities for funding, teacher workload, external provider regulation, rural support, and quality evaluation. Policy evaluation should reduce excessive paperwork and focus on actual curriculum implementation and student experience. Schools should be given sufficient flexibility to localize content while maintaining clear bottom-line requirements related to political direction, child protection, public welfare, non-commercialization, and equity. Governance should combine common standards with contextual autonomy.

5.2. Construct a "One Core, Four Dimensions, Multiple Modules" Curriculum System

A coherent curriculum system can be organized around one core: moral cultivation and the development of responsible young citizens. The core should be expressed through four developmental dimensions. The first dimension, self-development, includes honesty, self-discipline, perseverance, emotional regulation, safety, and healthy habits. The second, interpersonal and community life, includes respect, cooperation, empathy, public etiquette, service, and rule consciousness. The third, nation and culture, includes patriotism, national identity, ethnic unity, cultural confidence, historical memory, and understanding of national development. The fourth, humanity and nature, includes labor, scientific spirit, ecological civilization, digital ethics, and responsibility for a shared future.

Within these dimensions, schools can develop multiple modules: ideals and role models; socialist core values and civilized behavior; Chinese excellent traditional culture; rule of law and public safety; labor and responsibility; ecological protection; mental health and resilience; scientific innovation and ethics; national unity and local culture; digital citizenship; and community service. Not every school must offer identical modules. The curriculum should reflect school characteristics, regional culture, available resources, and student needs.

However, each module should include clear objectives, age-specific tasks, participation opportunities, reflection, and evidence of learning.

Progression across grades is essential. In grades one and two, activities should emphasize routines, emotional attachment, stories, imitation, simple cooperation, and concrete responsibilities. In grades three and four, students can compare choices, undertake short projects, explain rules, and participate in group decisions. In grades five and six, students can investigate community issues, debate age-appropriate dilemmas, plan service projects, analyze media messages, and reflect on the relationship between personal goals and collective responsibility. This progression helps ideological and political education develop from feeling and habit toward understanding, judgment, and action.

5.3. Use Experiential, Project-Based, and Dialogic Pedagogy

The pedagogy of integration should follow the sequence of experience, inquiry, action, and reflection. Teachers can begin with a real situation, story, problem, artifact, or community need; guide students to ask questions and collect information; support them in planning and acting; and finally organize reflection on what was learned, how decisions were made, and how actions affected others. This sequence gives values a concrete context and avoids abstract preaching.

Project-based learning is especially suitable for after-school services because projects can extend across several weeks. Examples include a "civilized campus" observation and improvement project, a local cultural heritage digital exhibition, a community waste-reduction campaign, a school garden responsibility system, a reading project on scientists and national development, or a peer-support initiative. Projects should be achievable, safe, and connected to students' real environment. Teachers should ensure that every student has a meaningful role and that reflection addresses both task outcomes and values such as fairness, responsibility, cooperation, and perseverance.

Dialogue is equally important. Ideological and political education should allow students to express uncertainty, compare perspectives, and learn to justify choices. Teachers can use open but guided questions, role play, scenario discussion, and reflective journals. For primary students, dialogue should remain concrete and supportive, with clear value boundaries and respect for developmental differences. The purpose is not to create relativism, but to help students understand why certain values matter and how they apply in real situations.

5.4. Build Professional Teacher Communities and Improve Incentives

Teacher support should combine material incentives, workload adjustment, professional development, and recognition of educational expertise. Schools and local governments need transparent compensation mechanisms, reasonable rotation schedules, opportunities for time off, and limits on excessive administrative documentation. Participation in after-school curriculum development should be recognized in teacher evaluation, professional learning, and school-based research. Without such support, high-quality integration cannot be sustained.

Professional development should move from general policy explanation to practical curriculum design. Training can focus on age-appropriate moral goals, activity design,

project facilitation, story discussion, conflict mediation, service learning, reflective evaluation, and the integration of subject knowledge with value education. Schools can establish co-planning groups that include moral education teachers, subject teachers, class teachers, Young Pioneers counselors, psychologists, and external instructors. Joint lesson study, observation, student-work analysis, and case discussion can gradually build shared competence.

External instructors should receive orientation on child protection, school values, developmental characteristics, and curriculum goals. Whenever possible, external specialists should co-teach with school staff so that professional expertise and educational responsibility are combined. Universities and teacher education institutions can provide curriculum consultation, volunteer support, and action research, particularly for rural and border schools. Such partnerships should be long-term and reciprocal rather than limited to short-term publicity activities.

5.5. Strengthen Family-School-Community Collaborative Education

Families should be treated as educational partners rather than only service users. Schools can explain curriculum goals, invite parents to contribute appropriate occupational or cultural resources, provide simple home reflection tasks, and collect feedback on students' behavior outside school. However, cooperation should not transfer school responsibilities to parents or create additional academic burden. Family participation should be voluntary, inclusive, and sensitive to differences in time, education, income, and family structure.

Community collaboration should move from occasional visits to jointly developed learning sequences. Public libraries, museums, memorial halls, science centers, courts, fire stations, ecological sites, farms, social organizations, and local enterprises can become extended learning spaces. Each collaboration should include preparation before the activity, meaningful student tasks during participation, and reflection or action afterward. In this way, the community becomes a social classroom and ideological and political education becomes connected with real public life.

5.6. Provide Differentiated Support for Rural, Border, and Resource-Constrained Schools

Equity-oriented policy should provide additional funding, teacher support, transport assistance, digital infrastructure, and curriculum development services to under-resourced schools. Regional education authorities can establish shared curriculum resource centers and mobile specialist teams, organize inter-school teacher communities, and coordinate partnerships with universities and public institutions. Digital materials should be designed for adaptation rather than copied as fixed packages, and offline alternatives should be available where connectivity is limited.

Localized curriculum development should be encouraged. Rural schools can integrate agricultural labor, food security, water conservation, local biodiversity, village governance, and intergenerational knowledge. Border schools can connect patriotism, national unity, cultural diversity, frontier history, national security awareness, and community service in ways that are concrete and meaningful to students. Ethnic cultural resources should be presented with respect, accuracy, and a clear orientation toward shared national identity. Local content should enrich rather than replace common national

educational goals.

5.7. Develop Process-Oriented and Multi-Dimensional Evaluation

Evaluation should focus on development rather than ranking. A multi-dimensional system can collect evidence from participation records, observation notes, student portfolios, project products, reflective writing or drawing, peer feedback, teacher comments, and family observations. Indicators may include responsibility, cooperation, rule observance, persistence, care for others, public participation, cultural understanding, labor habits, ecological action, and the ability to explain reasons for choices. Indicators should be few, understandable, age-appropriate, and linked to curriculum objectives.

Students should participate in evaluation through self-assessment and peer reflection. Younger children can use simple prompts, picture scales, or oral sharing; older students can write project reflections, explain their contribution, and identify areas for improvement. Teacher evaluation should emphasize narrative feedback and specific evidence rather than moral labels. School-level evaluation should examine curriculum coherence, teacher support, equity of participation, student voice, resource use, and long-term improvement. Parent satisfaction should remain one source of information but should not dominate educational judgment.

5.8. Establish Quality Assurance and Risk Prevention Mechanisms

Quality assurance should include curriculum review, safeguarding, provider qualification, financial transparency, student workload monitoring, data protection, and complaint channels. Schools should prevent after-school services from becoming disguised academic training, commercial promotion, competitive selection, or excessive performance preparation. Activities involving travel, physical risk, digital platforms, or external personnel require clear procedures and emergency plans. Ideological and political content should be accurate, age-appropriate, and integrated naturally with educational activities.

A dynamic improvement cycle can be established through planning, implementation, observation, feedback, and revision. Schools should periodically review whether activities remain meaningful, whether some groups of students are excluded, whether teacher workload is sustainable, and whether intended values are actually reflected in student participation. Quality improvement depends on honest diagnosis rather than decorative reporting. External evaluation should therefore include classroom and activity observation, student interviews, and curriculum evidence, not only document inspection.

6. Research Prospects

Future research should strengthen empirical evidence on the effects of integrating ideological and political education into after-school services. Current literature often relies on policy interpretation, single-site cases, or satisfaction surveys. Longitudinal and cross-regional studies are needed to examine how participation influences responsibility, cooperation, school belonging, civic awareness, cultural identity, mental health, and learning engagement over time. Mixed-method designs can combine questionnaires, observations, interviews, student work, and behavioral

evidence. Because moral development is context-dependent, researchers should avoid simplistic causal claims and develop transparent, developmentally appropriate indicators.

Greater attention should be paid to student voice. Children are not merely recipients of policy; their interests, interpretations, and experiences influence whether activities have educational meaning. Research can investigate which forms of storytelling, project work, service, dialogue, and digital learning students find engaging; how different groups experience participation; and how students understand values in relation to real dilemmas. Comparative research should examine differences by grade, gender, region, family background, migration status, disability, and access to resources, while avoiding deficit assumptions.

Teacher research is another priority. Studies should examine how after-school service responsibilities affect workload, professional identity, collaboration, and willingness to innovate. Action research can explore how teachers learn to integrate value education with subject expertise and how professional communities support improvement. Research should also evaluate different staffing models, including teacher rotation, co-teaching with external specialists, university partnerships, volunteer participation, and regional mobile teams.

Digital transformation requires sustained study. Future research should evaluate whether online resources genuinely broaden access or merely increase screen time; how virtual museums, artificial intelligence tools, and cross-regional classrooms can support moral dialogue and cultural learning; and how data privacy, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and digital citizenship should be addressed in primary after-school settings. Technology should be examined as part of an educational ecosystem rather than as an isolated solution.

Finally, research should deepen international comparison while maintaining cultural and institutional sensitivity. International after-school programs offer useful experience in service learning, community partnerships, child participation, quality standards, and professional staffing. However, direct transplantation may ignore China's policy goals, school structure, family expectations, and cultural context. Comparative research should therefore identify transferable mechanisms rather than imitate surface forms, and should clarify how local practices can contribute to broader discussions of moral, civic, and holistic education.

7. Conclusion

The "Double Reduction" policy has created a historic opportunity to transform after-school services from an arrangement focused on care and homework into a high-quality educational platform. Integrating ideological and political education is essential to this transformation because it gives after-school services a clear value direction and connects diverse activities with the fundamental task of moral cultivation. The distinctive contribution of after-school services lies not in repeating classroom instruction, but in providing flexible, experiential, collaborative, and life-oriented opportunities through which students can practice responsibility, cooperation, rule consciousness, labor, cultural identification, scientific ethics, ecological action, and public participation.

Effective integration requires avoiding both value neutrality and mechanical politicization. Ideological and political education should be embedded in goals, curriculum content, activity processes, organizational relationships,

teacher behavior, community cooperation, and reflective evaluation. A coherent curriculum structure, age differentiation, experiential pedagogy, professional teacher support, multi-stakeholder governance, equity-oriented resource allocation, and developmental evaluation are the key conditions for success. Particular attention should be paid to rural and border schools, where differentiated support and localized curriculum development can transform regional characteristics into educational strengths.

Moving forward, the quality of after-school services should be judged not only by coverage, duration, or the number of courses, but also by whether students gain meaningful experiences that support healthy, comprehensive, and responsible development. When moral cultivation becomes the organizing principle rather than an added label, after-school services can become an important bridge between classroom learning and social life, between individual growth and collective responsibility, and between burden reduction and quality improvement. In this way, they can contribute to a more coherent, equitable, and sustainable basic education ecosystem.

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