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The Value and Practical Pathways of Wenzhou Traditional Family Instruction Culture Integrated into Ideological and Moral Education of College Students

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Abstract: Wenzhou' s traditional family instruction culture is an important part of Ouyue culture and preserves substantial resources for moral education. It begins with self-cultivation and moral conduct,then extends to family order and responsibility for the state.This value orientation is consistent with the goal of moral education in universities,which seeks to prepare young people to take responsibility for national rejuvenation. Based on representative Wenzhou family instruction texts and their main ideas, this paper discusses why this local tradition matters for ideological and moral education in universities. With the help of four practical forms of integration approaches: courses,campus culture,social practice, and digital media, local family instruction culture can be turned into usable educational resources in the university setting,and effectively enhance the actual effect of cultural education.

Keywords: Wenzhou Traditional Family Instructions, Ideological and Moral Education in Universities, Cultural Integration, Practical Pathways.

1. Introduction

Ideological and moral education in universities is intended to improve students' moral qualities and support their overall development. This work does not take place in isolation. Students' values and everyday habits are shaped by the cultural environment around them, often in gradual and indirect ways. For this reason, culture is not only part of the content of moral education; it is also one of the conditions that make such education possible. The Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, calls for excellent traditional culture to be incorporated into ideological and moral education. This direction also provides a basis for bringing local cultural resources into moral education in universities.

Traditional family instruction is an important form of excellent traditional Chinese culture[1]. It can also serve as a concrete resource for the cultivation of core socialist values among college students. Wenzhou has a long tradition of family instruction[2]. Over time, local families developed moral rules and forms of social teaching with clear regional features. Bringing these materials into higher education can broaden the content of moral education and give new life to local traditional culture. However, Wenzhou family instruction has not been studied systematically enough, especially in relation to higher education. The present paper therefore focuses on its main ideas, educational value, and possible practical pathways of integration.

2. Core Connotations of Wenzhou' s Traditional Family Instruction Culture

2.1. Representative Texts of Wenzhou' s Traditional Family Instruction Culture

2.1.1. Wang Shipeng' s Jiazheng Ji: An Ethical System Centered on Filial Piety

Jiazheng Ji (Collected Writings on Family Governance), written by Wang Shipeng of the Southern Song dynasty, is one of the most complete classical works among Wenzhou' s historical family rules and instructions. The text contains approximately 24,900 Chinese characters. In addition to the Preface, it comprises five sections:"On Origins and Ancestors," "On Carrying Forward Ancestral Aspirations," "On Serving One' s Mother," "On Husband and Wife," and "On Brothers." In the Preface, Wang writes: "Between father and son, filial devotion and parental benevolence should prevail; among brothers, affection; and between husband and wife, mutual harmony." This ideal gradually developed into a family ethos of "governing the family through filial piety, making Confucian learning one' s vocation, fostering affection among brothers, maintaining harmony between spouses, and sustaining harmony throughout the household." On this basis, Wang proposed five principles of family governance in Jiazheng Ji: revering ancestors, carrying forward their aspirations, practicing filial respect, showing mutual respect, and cultivating fraternal affection[3].

The distinctive value of Jiazheng Ji lies in its scope. It is not confined to practical rules for internal family affairs. Instead, it treats "ordering the family" and "governing the state" as interconnected ethical practices. Family instructions thus rise from household moral norms to an intellectual text with implications for social governance. In the Preface, Jiazheng Ji defines a dual responsibility for the "scholar-gentleman": in public life, one should administer public

affairs to benefit the people; at home, one should govern the household well and educate descendants[4]. Wang Shipeng followed this principle throughout his life. After entering official service, he further elevated the ethical spirit of "filial piety" into the virtue of "loyalty."

2.1.2. Family Instructions of the Yingqiao Wang Clan: A Family Model of Integrity, Diligence, and Uprightness

The Yingqiao Wang clan of Longwan traces its origins to Langya. It migrated to Yingqiao in Yongjia during the Song dynasty and has continued for more than seven hundred years. After retiring from office and returning home, Wang Che, the eighth-generation ancestor, upheld the principle that "an official should serve the state, while a resident at home should benefit the local community." He embodied this conviction in the Wang Clan Covenant, a text of more than 12,000 Chinese characters[5]. The covenant contains ten sections covering ancestral-hall rites; junyi, or rites for sharing sacrificial food; selection and appointment; records and assessment; collected instructions; capping and marriage rites; funerals and sacrifices; domestic governance; exemplary sayings; and good deeds. Its content addresses clan rituals, marriage and funeral customs, everyday norms, and moral admonitions.

The family instructions of the Yingqiao Wang clan consciously preserved Wenzhou's intellectual resources, especially the thought of the Yongjia School of the Southern Song dynasty. The Yongjia School emphasized pragmatism and practical achievement. Many of its ideas were absorbed and adapted in the Wang Clan Covenant. In matters of conduct, the covenant states that "one must be filial in serving one's parents, respectful in serving elders, affectionate as an elder brother, and deferential as a younger brother." It also expresses the expectation that "those whose governance and conduct are outstanding and whose beneficence reaches the people shall be recorded in the genealogy after death." By contrast, it warns that "those dismissed for greed or cruelty shall have their official titles removed from the genealogy." These rules helped transmit a family ethos of integrity, diligence, uprightness, filial respect, reverence for elders, commitment to righteous deeds, and observance of national law across generations[6].

2.1.3. The Xiang Family Instructions of Yongjia and Other Representative Texts

In addition to the representative texts above, Wenzhou preserves many other family instruction writings with distinctive characteristics. The Xiang family instructions of Yongjia were written by Xiang Qiao in the Ming dynasty. Xiang Family Instructions contains six themes: "be filial to parents, respect elders, maintain harmony with neighbors, educate descendants, attend properly to one's livelihood, and refrain from wrongdoing." These rules instruct descendants to regulate their words and actions according to Confucian ritual norms. In the preface, Xiang Qiao states: "Ordering the family is difficult, whereas governing all under Heaven is easier. From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, the principle is the same. However one must first accomplish the difficult task before proceeding to the easier one." Its forty-seven rules are all grounded in the meaning of the six maxims of the Sacred Edict. They emphasize the principle that "only after the self is cultivated can the family be put in order."

In addition, the genealogy of the Zhou clan of Huangtang, Yueqing, contains the Zhou Clan Norms, which gives equal weight to filial piety and fraternal respect. The Xu family instructions of Fenglin, Yongjia, advocate "integrity in public service" and "diligent learning and moral cultivation." They stress that "the aim of study is to become a sage and worthy person, not merely to obtain an examination degree." The Cheng family instructions of Yitou, Lucheng, contain ten rules. Their core teachings include "never fail in filial duty to both parents," "personally practice integrity and frugality," and "diligently study the classics and arts." The Yu family ethos of Rui'an centers on "study, prudent conduct, moral integrity, dedication, and frugality." It represents a typical scholarly family tradition. Together, these texts form a rich landscape of Wenzhou's traditional family instruction culture[7].

2.2. Core Ideas of Wenzhou's Traditional Family Instruction Culture

Traditional Chinese family instructions generally take Confucian ethics as their intellectual core. They also reflect the distinctive historical contexts and social groups in which they were written. Recorded in written form, they were intended to serve as models for later generations. Wenzhou's traditional family instruction culture likewise takes Confucian thought as its spiritual core. It uses the educational practices of benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and music as its basic path. Through everyday ethical relations, family members are expected to cultivate virtue and refine their conduct. The ultimate ideal is the moral character of the Confucian sage and the exemplary person. Its core ideas can be summarized as follows.

2.2.1. An Ethical Foundation based on Filial Piety and Fraternal Respect

Filial piety and fraternal respect are core categories of Confucian ethics. They are also the primary moral principles of Wenzhou's traditional family instruction culture. Wenzhou family instructions generally place filial piety first and treat it as the starting point of family moral education. Wang Shipeng's Jiazheng Ji is organized around filial piety. Across its five sections, it constructs five major ethical relationships: individuals and ancestors, fathers and sons, mothers and sons, husbands and wives, and brothers. Its purpose is to "cultivate virtue and perform good deeds," practice self-cultivation, and govern the family well. It ultimately seeks to establish an ideal family moral order centered on filial piety. Wang further proposes five principles of family governance: revering ancestors, carrying forward their aspirations, practicing filial respect, showing mutual respect, and cultivating fraternal affection. This system extends filial piety beyond a one-way duty toward parents. It turns filial and fraternal ethics into norms covering the entire family and makes them a spiritual bond for family unity[8].

The first rule of the Xiang family instructions of Yongjia is "be filial to parents," supported by the statement that "a child's life originates from his or her parents." The Zhou Clan Norms of Huangtang, Yueqing, gives equal weight to filial piety and fraternal respect and requires that "the young have rules to follow and the elders have standards to uphold." The first rule of the Cheng family instructions of Yitou, Lucheng, is "never fail in filial duty to both parents," placing filial devotion at the center[9]. Although these texts use different wording, all take filial piety and fraternal respect as their foundation. They therefore reveal a consistent moral starting point across Wenzhou family instructions.

2.2.2. A Responsibility System based on Family-State Isomorphism

The governance model of "family-state isomorphism" in traditional Chinese society profoundly shaped the intellectual orientation of Wenzhou's family instruction culture. As a concrete expression of Confucian ethics at the household level, family instructions connect personal cultivation with state governance. Wenzhou's traditional family instructions move beyond the boundaries of the household. They link personal cultivation, family governance, and responsibility to the state.

In Jiazheng Ji, Wang Shipeng states that "there is governance of public affairs and governance of one's private household." He argues that a "scholar-gentleman" who aspires to serve the country has two responsibilities. In public life, such a person should administer public affairs to benefit the people. At home, he should govern the household properly and educate descendants. The Wang Clan Covenant of the Yingqiao Wang clan expresses the same idea of family-state isomorphism. Wang Che, the eighth-generation ancestor, embodied the ideal that "an official should serve the state, while a resident at home should benefit the local community" in the covenant[10]. For family governance, the covenant requires that whether one is "a commoner, a scholar, a senior official, or a ministerial aide," one should "take diligence and frugality as the foundation." It further stipulates that "all descendants who hold office must be incorruptible, diligent, and upright; serve the state with full loyalty; and strictly observe the standards of official conduct." The Wang clan also incorporated the Yongjia School's emphasis on pragmatism and practical achievement into the covenant. As a result, the text values moral cultivation while also stressing the practical character of statecraft and socially useful action.

2.2.3. A Value Orientation that Esteems Learning and Education

Wenzhou family instructions generally attach great importance to education and cultural transmission. Valuing learning and education is one of their distinctive orientations. Wenzhou clans understood the importance of "sustaining the family through farming and study." They regarded reading and learning as fundamental to family prosperity and the cultivation of talented descendants.

The Xu family instructions of Fenglin, Yongjia, advocate "integrity in public service" and "diligent learning and moral cultivation." They emphasize that "the aim of study is to become a sage and worthy person, not merely to obtain an examination degree." This elevates learning from the pursuit of rank and material benefit to the level of character cultivation. The Yu family ethos of Rui'an places "study" first and centers on the ten-character maxim "study, prudent conduct, moral integrity, dedication, and frugality." An ancestor, Yu Yingyao, expressed his lifelong principles of "diligent learning, prudent conduct, and moral integrity" in poems such as Reading and Diligent Learning and Prudent Conduct. The Cheng family instructions of Yitou, Lucheng, require descendants to "diligently study the classics and arts," treating such study as part of everyday family life. The Xiang family instructions of Yongjia also list "educating descendants" as an important rule and require families to value the cultural education of younger generations. Through institutional measures such as establishing charitable schools and supporting students from poor families, Wenzhou clans translated the ideal of valuing learning into concrete practice. These measures provided strong institutional support for the intergenerational transmission of family instruction culture[11].

2.2.4. Moral Norms of Integrity, Diligence, and Uprightness

Wenzhou's traditional family instructions set clear and strict requirements for incorruptibility, self-discipline, and diligent public service. Integrity, diligence, and uprightness constitute a core moral norm throughout these texts. This norm sets basic expectations for the personal character of clan members. It also provides a way for families to participate in social governance and public affairs.

The Wang Clan Covenant of the Yingqiao Wang clan takes "integrity, diligence, and uprightness" as a core admonition. It requires that "all descendants who hold office must be incorruptible, diligent, and upright; serve the state with full loyalty; strictly observe the standards of official conduct; and govern with such excellence that their beneficence reaches the people." The covenant thereby turns integrity, diligence, and uprightness into behavioral standards with institutional force. It also warns clan members: "All shengyuan are among the most excellent members of the clan. They should cultivate virtuous conduct, observe propriety, esteem moral resolve, and serve as exemplars for the clan. If they pursue profit alone, disregard reputation and righteousness, frequent government offices, and interfere in the affairs of neighboring counties, such conduct is contemptible[12]. How could such a person be called a scholar-gentleman?" This admonition draws a clear moral boundary between a true scholar-gentleman and one who fails to meet that standard. It requires clan elites to place moral integrity above personal gain.

Other Wenzhou family instructions also value integrity, diligence, and uprightness. The Xu family instructions of Fenglin, Yongjia, advocate "integrity in public service" and take "incorruptibility, prudence, and diligence" as core principles for officeholders. The Cheng family instructions of Yitou, Lucheng, require descendants to "personally practice integrity and frugality." The Yu family ethos of Rui'an centers on "moral integrity" and "diligence and frugality." From different perspectives, these texts reinforce the moral norm of integrity, diligence, and uprightness. They therefore provide local cultural resources for integrity education within ideological and moral education in universities.

3. The Value of Integrating Wenzhou's Traditional Family Instruction Culture into Ideological and Moral Education of College Students

3.1. Conceptual Alignment: Guidance for the Goal of Fostering Virtue Through Education

The fundamental task of ideological and moral education in universities is to foster virtue through education. Traditional Chinese family instructions commonly place self-cultivation, family order, state governance, and social responsibility within one moral sequence. Wenzhou's family instructions follow a similar logic. They begin with personal moral cultivation and move toward the responsibilities of family and state. In this respect, they are consistent with the educational aim of preparing young people to shoulder the responsibility of national rejuvenation.

Family instruction culture can also influence students in less direct ways. Its stories, norms, and examples offer

materials through which students can reflect on everyday conduct and public responsibility[13]. In Wenzhou, these local traditions share common ground with the cultivation of core socialist values, particularly in moral education, practical activities, and cultural learning.

3.2. Content Enrichment: Expanding Resources for Moral Education of College Students

Traditional family instructions cover many aspects of moral life, including personal aspiration, self-discipline, conduct toward others, and family responsibility. Wenzhou texts add a strong local dimension to these themes. They discuss filial piety, honesty, frugality, integrity in public life, and concern for family and country. Such materials can make moral education in universities more concrete by linking general values with familiar regional history and cultural examples.

These traditions may also contribute to the moral development of young people. Many Wenzhou family instructions ask descendants to respect parents, treat others properly, and value independence, self-improvement, and self-respect. They also stress responsibility and service. When introduced critically rather than mechanically, these ideas can give students historical references for thinking about character, social responsibility, and personal growth.

3.3. Methodological Insights: Lessons for Moral Education of College Students

Over time, Wenzhou family instructions developed their own ways of moral teaching. They did not rely only on direct explanation or formal instruction. Moral habits were also shaped through family example, daily rules, shared customs, and the surrounding environment. This form of gradual influence is different from simple knowledge transmission. It offers useful ideas for the current reform of ideological and moral education in universities[14].

These traditional methods should not be copied as they stand. Their useful elements can be retained and reinterpreted in a modern educational context. Teaching by example, connecting knowledge with action, and making use of the educational environment can be combined with current teaching methods and digital tools. This may make moral education in universities more relevant to students' lives and more effective in practice.

4. Practical Pathways for Integrating Wenzhou's Traditional Family Instruction Culture into Ideological and Moral Education of College Students

4.1. Curricular Integration: Building a Teaching System that Brings Family Instruction Culture into the Classroom

Courses remain one of the most direct ways to bring excellent traditional Chinese culture into moral education in universities. For Wenzhou family instruction culture, classroom teaching therefore provides a practical starting point.

4.1.1. Moral Education Courses Can Include Focused Units on Wenzhou Family Instructions and Contemporary Moral Issues.

The purpose is not simply to add historical material. Teachers can use examples such as the filial ethics in Wang Shipeng's Jiazheng Ji and the integrity rules of the Yingqiao Wang clan to connect traditional texts with present-day questions of conduct and responsibility. In this way, local cultural materials can enter both teaching materials and classroom discussion.

4.1.2. Universities Can Develop Courses with a Stronger Local Character, Such as Ouyue Family Instructions and Contemporary Moral Education.

Such courses may introduce the main ideas, historical development, and present relevance of Wenzhou family instructions in a more systematic way. Course materials should explain the original historical meaning of these texts while also showing how selected ideas can be understood in a contemporary setting.

4.1.3. Online Courses Can Widen Access to These Materials.

A digital course does not need to depend mainly on written explanation. Images, short videos, recordings, and other media can be used to present historical texts and local stories more clearly. This is especially useful for helping students grasp ideas that may otherwise seem distant from their everyday experience.

4.2. Cultural Integration: Creating a Campus Ecology for Education Through Family Instruction Culture

Campus culture also affects how students understand values and behavior[15]. For this reason, the integration of Wenzhou family instruction culture should not be limited to formal courses. It can also become part of the cultural environment in universities.

4.2.1. Family Instruction Culture Can Be Represented in Visible Campus Spaces.

Display areas, walls of selected maxims, or exhibitions of family stories can give students regular contact with local moral traditions. Wenzhou Medical University, for example, created a 16-meter family-culture wall titled "What Makes a Family?" It included one philosophical ode, five family letters, and fourteen classic family instruction texts. The project shows how historical material can be placed in an everyday campus setting.

4.2.2. Campus Activities Can Give These Materials a more Participatory Form.

A Wenzhou Family Instruction Culture Festival, readings of classic texts, knowledge contests, or poetry recitation can connect traditional culture with student life[16]. Wenzhou Medical University has also experimented with linking family-ethos education to forms of contemporary youth culture. Such activities can make local traditions easier to approach and discuss.

4.2.3. Student Organizations Can Provide Space for Sustained Study.

A student society devoted to Wenzhou family instruction culture could organize text reading, interviews, and local fieldwork. The "Zhiyu Shiwen" Practice Team at Wenzhou University used family instructions, family history, and family rules as materials for field research. Through this

process, students engaged with ideas such as frugality, integrity, benevolence, loyalty, and filial piety. This kind of participation can deepen understanding more effectively than passive reception alone.

4.3. Practice-Based Integration: Extending the Social Classroom for Practicing Family Instruction Values

The purpose of ideological and moral education is not only to explain moral concepts. Students also need opportunities to apply them in real situations. Practical activities can therefore connect classroom learning with social experience and make traditional cultural resources part of lived moral practice.

4.3.1. Field Investigation Can Be Used as a Form of Social Practice.

Students may visit places such as the Wang Shipeng Memorial Hall and the Yingqiao Wang Family Ethos Hall. Historical sites provide documents, stories, and local memories that can be used for moral education. Wenzhou Vocational College of Science and Technology, for example, organized teachers and students to conduct the program "Integrity-Based Family Ethos in Rural Communities." Participants visited old villages and ancestral halls and collected local conventions and family rules related to fairness, frugality, and self-discipline.

4.3.2. Ideas from Family Instructions Can Be Connected with Volunteer Service.

Principles such as respect for parents and elders or consideration for others can be expressed through community eldercare, public talks on family ethos, and similar activities[17]. In this process, students are not only learning about traditional virtues but also practicing them. Wenzhou Open University has used family-ethos study activities in this way, combining cultural learning with social participation and education in commitment to family and country.

4.3.3. Cooperation among Universities, Families, and Communities Can Strengthen this Form of Education.

A coordinated mechanism can bring family experience, higher education teaching, and community practice into the same process. Traditional family instructions contain ideas about family education that may inform this cooperation. The Family Education Promotion Law also provides an institutional basis for linking family ethos with the educational environment of universities.

4.4. Digital Integration: Innovating Media Forms for Communicating Family Instruction Culture

New media have become an important source of knowledge for college students. Digital communication can therefore extend the reach of Wenzhou family instruction culture and make it easier to use in higher education.

4.4.1. A Digital Resource Repository Can Be Developed.

The first step is to collect and organize relevant Wenzhou family instruction texts in a systematic digital archive. A "Digital Resource Repository of Wenzhou Family Instruction Culture" could preserve texts, classify materials, and make them easier to search. It would also give teachers a practical source of materials that can be selected according to different teaching topics.

4.4.2. Communication through New Media Can Be Expanded.

New media allow historical material to be presented in more visual and accessible forms. This is useful for family instructions whose language may feel distant to contemporary students. Short videos, WeChat official accounts, dialect-based mini dramas, and animated family stories can translate written traditions into forms closer to young people's media habits. Such formats may increase cultural reach and encourage emotional engagement with local history.

4.4.3. Immersive Forms of Learning Can Be Explored.

VR and AR can be used to recreate settings, stories, or objects related to Wenzhou family instruction culture. Interactive projects such as a "Virtual Family Ethos Museum" may allow students to encounter this material in a more experiential way. Universities can also redesign existing courses as blended digital courses that combine online and offline learning. The aim is to improve interaction and help students connect cultural knowledge with personal understanding.

5. Conclusion

Wenzhou's excellent traditional family instructions were created in the long-term life of local families and clans and passed down from one generation to another. They guided descendants through admonition, example, and everyday rules. As such, they represent one local expression of traditional Chinese moral norms. Historically, these texts served several functions. They helped educate family members, maintain clan continuity, support social order, and transmit Confucian culture. Their educational purpose also has points of connection with moral education in universities, since both concern the formation of character and the broader development of the individual. Ideological and moral education in universities takes students as its main subject and aims to shape moral judgment, sound personality, and all-round development. Under the current emphasis on educating through culture, Wenzhou family instructions can therefore be treated as a local cultural resource rather than as rules to be copied directly. Their integration into higher education can contribute to the inheritance of traditional culture while also broadening the content and methods of moral education.

Against this background, this paper has examined the educational meaning of Wenzhou family instructions and considered how they can be used in universities. The proposed approaches include curriculum design, campus cultural activities, social practice, and digital communication. These routes give different forms to the same goal: drawing on useful elements of traditional family instructions for self-cultivation, moral development, and commitment to family and country. They also provide practical references for the wider integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into ideological and moral education in universities, in addition for the continued development of such education in the new era.

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