

## Research on Li Da's Youth Education Thought and Its Contemporary Enlightenment

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**Abstract:** In this thesis, the rich theoretical and practical experience in modern school management was accumulated by Li Da, a distinguished philosopher, propagandist, educator, and writer in China, during his tenure as the principal of Hunan University and Wuhan University. The optimization of school management functions according to the requirements of the times, the advancement of teaching reforms by following educational principles, and the enlightenment of Li Da's modern school management thought on contemporary education are elaborated upon. Li Da's views on improving the school leadership system, perfecting the teaching leadership institutions, establishing teaching management systems, adhering to educational principles in teaching reforms, and focusing on practical teaching are summarized.

**Keywords:** Li Da; School Management; Contemporary Enlightenment

### 1. Introduction

Li Da (October 2, 1890 - August 24, 1966), also known as Tingfang, with the style name Yong Xi and the pen name He Ming, was born in Lingling, Yongzhou, Hunan Province. He experienced traditional private school education and modern schools such as middle schools and higher normal schools. The schools he founded or managed, including the People's Girls' School and the Self-study University, were places where he innovated in systems and methods. These experiences were part of his attempts to establish and manage modern schools. After the founding of New China, Li Da served as the president of Hunan University and Wuhan University, where he accumulated rich experience in modern university management. Li Da focused on the development of schools, including the growth of teaching and research, student development,

and teacher development.

For instance, when he established the Shanghai People's Girls' School in 1922, he stated that "although the future development is still unknown", it would be "a school unlike any other before", "the first school established for the liberation of women", and "the first step towards a new society". [1] After the founding of New China, as the president of Hunan University, he considered it his duty to "make Hunan University a revolutionary university that meets the needs of the people", "to cultivate political, economic, and cultural construction cadres for the new country", which he saw as "a glorious and arduous task". [2] After transferring to Wuhan University, he continued in the same vein. Therefore, he always approached development and the improvement of work efficiency from a political perspective and the overall interests of the nation and the people, proposing and practicing guiding principles with a principled approach, and engaging in effective work practices.

### 2. Optimizing School Functions in Line with the Requirements of the Times

Throughout his extensive educational practice, Li Da consistently emphasized the need for educational innovation to adapt to the demands of the times. This focus was on the innovation of educational philosophy and policies, educational content, and school systems. During his tenure as the president of Hunan University and Wuhan University, he placed significant emphasis on transforming and developing higher education to establish universities for the people and fully implement China's educational line and policies. He attached great importance to establishing and improving various school management systems. To enhance work efficiency and teaching quality, he reformed and established a scientific management system to ensure that all school work serves the central tasks of

research and teaching, maintaining a stable and standardized operation of the school.

### **2.1 Improving the School Leadership System**

Upon becoming the president of Hunan University, Li Da put forward that higher education in the new China era should be based on the cultural and educational policies of new democracy as stipulated by the Common Program. It should cultivate senior construction talents suitable for China's needs and dedicated to serving the people wholeheartedly. "This cannot be achieved without improving administrative efficiency", he stated. Given this, the necessity to "adjust administrative institutions" and implement a leadership system that combines "collective leadership and hierarchical responsibility" is emphasized [3]. The school administration practiced a principal-led system, with the principal leading a school affairs committee to assist in school affairs. The secretary's office was divided to set up a general affairs department responsible for general affairs, and the academic affairs department was divided to establish a teaching research department to unify the leadership of teaching. With five departments including the library, each with distinct responsibilities, work efficiency was enhanced. The system of assigning research assistants to professors was implemented, and the construction and leadership of school departments (offices) were strengthened, focusing on relying on departments (offices) to strengthen the implementation of work.

### **2.2 Improving Teaching Leadership Institutions**

It was proposed by Li Da that "to successfully complete our tasks, it is first necessary to strengthen comprehensive leadership in teaching". [4] Upon becoming the president of Hunan University, the establishment of a teaching research department was suggested. This department would organize and develop teaching plans according to the national educational policies, research and correct teaching content and methods, and be responsible for overseeing and leading the teaching organization and work throughout the university. Under the teaching research department of the university, a large course committee and a general study association

were established. Each college teaching committee and department teaching committee managed teaching work, while faculty and students formed various study groups and study sessions within. The large course committee included four groups: the history of social development, dialectical materialism, new democracy, and political economy, responsible for teaching ideological and political education courses and collaborating with the general study association to lead the political studies of the entire university. Through hierarchical responsibility and reporting work at each level, the comprehensive leadership and hierarchical responsibility, as well as the combination of communication between upper and lower levels, were fully utilized.

### **2.3 Establishing a Teaching Operation System**

It is required that all departments, bureaus, libraries, colleges, departments, offices, and committees establish and strictly enforce work systems including meeting systems, reporting systems, daily duty systems, and leave systems. In principle, a meeting is required to be held weekly to research, review, and assign work, and joint meetings are to be held when necessary. A reporting system should be established where subordinates seek instructions before and report back [5] after actions to superiors. Problems and difficulties are to be presented to superiors, and some work is to be carried out after seeking instructions, with regular reports on work progress.

### **3. Complying with the Laws of Education and Propelling Teaching Reform**

According to Li Da, the main task of comprehensive universities is to cultivate specialized talents for research or teaching in theoretical or basic sciences, including natural and social sciences. [6] To enable students to possess a high level of theoretical knowledge and a broad range of scientific knowledge, to understand the general laws of natural or social sciences, and to gradually develop the ability to independently and creatively conduct research work, and to be adept at solving certain theoretical and practical problems in their professional fields based on the methodology of Dialectical materialism. This

reflects a principled understanding of the education in comprehensive universities.

### **3.1 Advocating for Acting in Accordance with the Principles of Education Policy**

From the advocacy of Li Da, acting in accordance with educational policy principles is important, and the importance of diligently studying Dialectical materialism was emphasized. It was believed that only when teachers' Dialectical materialism theoretical level is improved can they possess the ability to discern right from wrong and successfully manage the school. He proposed that one characteristic of comprehensive university majors is the setting of specialized courses. Specialized courses are designed to further enhance expertise beyond the foundation and professional courses and to prepare for the thesis. According to the experience of Soviet universities, such courses are not easily increased, which requires China to "combine learning from the advanced experiences of the Soviet Union with China's actual conditions". [7] This involves meeting various needs of China's development and construction, such as the development of industry and agriculture, financial and economic conditions, democratic construction, social reform, the teaching situation in higher education institutions, the work situation of scientific research institutions, and the teaching situation in secondary schools, in conjunction with the specific conditions of comprehensive universities, such as faculty, facilities, and student levels, to set up specialized courses. [8]

### **3.2 Focusing on Carrying out Practical Courses**

In teaching plans and course arrangements, practical courses were highlighted by Li Da, the principle of integrating theory with practice was implemented, and the tendency towards dogmatic teaching that focuses solely on theory, from concept to concept, was opposed. Support was provided for philosophy department students and faculty members to step out of the classroom to participate in practical activities and research. Exhibitions of the investigation reports and personal reflections written by students and faculty were organized, serving as a model for the practical teaching courses across the university.

[9] Li Da further proposed integrating theory with practice, seeking technical cooperation with various cultural research institutions and industrial and mining enterprises, conducting special studies, "opposing the reading of dead books, dead reading, advocating the reading of dead books alive and the application of dead books", thereby enhancing the level of scholarship. [10]

### **4. Conclusion**

Li Da's engagement in educational work was marked by a strong sense of mission and responsibility, and many of his school management ideas have significant innovative value for the times. The university institutional reforms proposed by Li Da, including the establishment of teaching and research groups based on curriculum development, defining them as the basic teaching organizations of the school, directly leading the teaching and research work of one or several related courses, are still considered the main link for cultivating and improving teaching staff in China today. The way Li Da proposed for preparing teaching plans and syllabi, preparing teaching materials, applying and improving teaching methods, guiding students' self-study, experiments, and internships, as well as conducting subject research, all executed by teaching and research groups, is a work method that has been preserved and used by Chinese universities. Each teaching and research group formulates work plans under the leadership of the department, implements work responsibilities according to the system, and promotes business through methods such as inspection lectures and work supervision. The way teachers are highly responsible in engaging in teaching and research activities has become the basic practice followed by the grassroots teaching units of Chinese higher education.

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