

# The Educational Practice and Influence of Shaanxi Educator During the Republic of China Period Driven by the Concept of "Saving the Nation by Education"

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## ABSTRACT

During the Republic of China period, the concept of "saving the nation by education" was prevalent, and many Shaanxi educators were inspired by this and actively engaged in educational practice. Educators such as Yang Songxuan, Du Bincheng, and Li Zheng take it as their responsibility to save the country. By establishing schools, they have had a profound social impact on the development of modern education, talent cultivation, and the transformation of social atmosphere in Shaanxi Province. During this special historical period, they have made outstanding contributions to the education industry and provided historical references for the development of contemporary education.

**Keywords:** *The Republic of China period, Shaanxi educators, Saving the nation by education, Educational practice, Social influence.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the period of the Republic of China, China was deeply mired in a dual dilemma of internal and external troubles, with severe political turmoil, difficult economic development, significant gaps between cultural and educational undertakings and the world's advanced level, and an unprecedented crisis of national survival. In this historical context, the trend of "saving the nation by education" emerged and rapidly spread, becoming an important consensus for the intellectual and educational communities to respond to the crisis of the times. This trend advocates for the development of education to enlighten the people, cultivate talents, and lay the foundation for national prosperity and rejuvenation. As an important inland province in China, although Shaanxi has limitations in transportation and information dissemination due to its location in the northwest, the concept of "saving the country through education" still takes root here. A group of visionary educators deeply recognize that education is the core driving force for changing the backwardness of regions and

promoting social progress. Yang Songxuan, Du Bincheng, Li Zheng and other outstanding representatives, supported by the belief of "saving the nation by education", overcame difficulties under difficult educational conditions, and injected modern vitality into the education cause in Shaanxi through the establishment of schools and the reform of education models.

## 2. THE ORIGIN AND DISSEMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF "SAVING THE NATION BY EDUCATION"

### 2.1 *The Emergence of the Concept of "Saving the Nation by Education" in Modern China*

The idea of "saving the nation by education" is rooted in the profound crisis of modern Chinese society. The idea of "saving the nation by education" emerged in Qing Dynasty, the policy of isolationism caused China to disconnect from the global development trend, and Western powers

forcibly opened China's doors with their strong ships and cannons, putting the country in a difficult situation of internal and external troubles. In this context, knowledgeable people began to reflect on the limitations of traditional education, recognizing that the poverty and weakness of the country are closely related to the low quality of the people, and the idea of "the Central Shaanxi Plain" emerged.

### *2.1.1 The Early Reformists Had Already Recognized the Relationship Between Talent Cultivation and National Development*

In 19th century China, internal and external troubles intertwined, and the accumulated shortcomings of traditional education became increasingly prominent, making it difficult to meet the demand for talent in the era. In this context, early reformists represented by Wang Tao and Zheng Guanying, with profound insights and reflections on the current situation, took the lead in proposing a series of new insights on talent and Western education, injecting new vitality into China's educational reform.

Wang Tao deeply criticized the narrowness of the traditional talent concept. Under the traditional Chinese educational ideology, talents are mostly judged by the winners of the imperial examination, and the talent standards are limited to "cultivating the state and governing the peace". The imperial court also often uses the imperial examination achievements as the only measure of talent. Wang Tao pointed out that those who are only good at contemporary literature and obtain the name of "talent" through scientific examinations are actually mostly nominal but without substance. They have no special skills except for reading and teaching contemporary literature, and it is difficult for them to play a practical role in practice. If such people are allowed to master the seal and ribbon to govern the country, it will inevitably "harm the country and the people". Wang Tao believed that "in times of chaos, talent is also abundant", and the key lies in the court's "poor methods of selecting talents, lack of specialization in seeking talents, and inability of those above to discern true talents" [1]<sup>44</sup>. He emphasized that the urgent task of governing the country lies in talent storage, and the key to talent storage lies in reforming the school education system, hoping to build an ideal talent storage model of "learning for daily use and using for temporary use" [2]<sup>127</sup>. Zheng Guanying stood at the height of the rise and fall of national destiny,

closely linking talents with the destiny of the country. He pointed out that "schools are where talents come from, talents are where national strength comes from" [3]<sup>276</sup>, believing that talents are the foundation of national prosperity, and there is an inherent connection between national prosperity and science and technology, as well as talent cultivation. In his view, talent should be specialized, including technical and managerial talents.

### *2.1.2 The Educational Reform of the Bourgeois Reformists*

The defeat of the Sino Japanese War of 1894-1895 thoroughly exposed the limitations of the Westernization Movement in learning only from Western artifacts. The reformists represented by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao deeply realized that the fundamental reason for China's backwardness was the lack of talent, and the cultivation of talent relied on educational reform. Kang Youwei pointed out in his book "Please Open a School" that "the reason why Taixi is prosperous and strong is not because of artillery, weapons, and soldiers, but because of poor reasoning and persuasion to learn." [4]<sup>130</sup> He advocated for a comprehensive study of the Western education system, the establishment of new-style schools, the teaching of natural sciences, social sciences, and other knowledge, and the cultivation of talents with innovative spirit and international vision. Liang Qichao also emphasized in his "General Discussion on Reform" that "the foundation of reform lies in cultivating talents; the prosperity of talents lies in opening schools",<sup>[5]<sup>10</sup></sup> and regarded education reform as the key to reform and strengthening. They vigorously promoted the idea of "saving the nation by education" by establishing newspapers, organizing societies, and other means, and promoted the education reform movement during the Wuxu Reform period, such as establishing the Beijing Normal University School and abolishing the Eight-legged Scholar Program, which opened up a new path for the development of modern education in China.

### *2.1.3 Practice of the Concept of "Saving the Nation by Education"*

The Xinhai Revolution overthrew the feudal monarchy, but the country did not achieve true independence and prosperity. Warlords ruled and fought fiercely, and society was in turmoil. At this time, a group of educators who studied in Europe

and America and were deeply influenced by advanced Western educational concepts, such as Cai Yuanpei, Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, etc., further pushed the idea of "saving the country through education" to the practical level. During Cai Yuanpei's tenure as the Minister of Education of the Provisional Government, he proposed the educational policy of "developing five aspects simultaneously", namely military education, utilitarianism education, civic morality education, worldview education, and aesthetic education [6]<sup>132</sup>, emphasizing the cultivation of citizens with sound personality and social responsibility through comprehensive development education, laying the foundation for the construction and development of the country. His educational ideas and practices had a profound impact on the education industry at that time, promoting the transformation of Chinese education from traditional to modern.

## **2.2 *The Dissemination of the Concept of "Saving the Nation by Education" in Shaanxi***

With the advancement of modernization, new ideas have gradually permeated into the inland land of Shaanxi, and the concept of "saving the country through education" is also included. Intellectuals and enlightened gentry in Shaanxi have become an important force in spreading this concept, keenly aware of the crucial role of education in changing the backward face of Shaanxi. Some Shaanxi students who returned from studying in Japan, such as Yu Youren, have personally experienced the charm of Western advanced education and the close connection between national prosperity and educational development overseas. After returning to their home country, they actively engaged in educational propaganda and practical activities. Yu Youren not only made significant achievements in the field of culture and education, founding multiple schools, but also spread advanced educational concepts in the Shaanxi intellectual community through his influence. He emphasized the importance of education in enlightening the people's intelligence and cultivating patriotism, and called on all sectors of society to attach importance to education. "Without education, how can a country be established? To save the nation and ensure its survival, we must first cultivate the wisdom of the people; to cultivate the wisdom of the people, we must first promote education. Educators not only impart knowledge, but also forge the soul of the nation, cultivate patriotism, and make everyone aware of the danger of the

country and the pain of the nation, and rise up to save them. All sectors of society should regard promoting education as an urgent task, educating people as their duty, and not using education as a slow plan or promoting education as a virtual task."<sup>[7]<sup>53</sup></sup>

At the same time, some local newspapers and magazines in Shaanxi have become important platforms for spreading the concept of "saving the country through education". At that time, influential newspapers such as Qin Zhong Guan Bao, Guan Long Bao, and Guang Hui Bao often published articles on education reform and the introduction of new educational concepts, popularizing the idea of saving the country through education to the general public. Under the influence of these newspaper articles, more and more people have begun to pay attention to education and realize the important significance of education for personal growth and national development.

In addition, some academic groups and educational institutions in Shaanxi actively promote the dissemination of the concept of "saving the nation by education". After its establishment, the Shaanxi Education Association organized multiple educational seminars and lectures, inviting education experts and scholars from inside and outside the province to come and exchange ideas and give lectures. They introduced advanced educational experiences and concepts in China and foreign countries at the meeting, discussed the development direction of education in Shaanxi, and stimulated the enthusiasm of education professionals in Shaanxi to engage in educational reform. Through the efforts of these academic groups and educational institutions, the concept of "saving the nation by education" has been widely spread and recognized in the intellectual and educational circles of Shaanxi, laying a solid ideological foundation for educators in Shaanxi to engage in educational practice.

## **3. EDUCATION PRACTICE OF SHAANXI EDUCATORS DURING THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA PERIOD**

During the Republic of China period, educators in Shaanxi actively carried out educational practices driven by the concept of "saving the nation by education". Yang Songxuan founded the private Xianlin Middle School in 1919, hiring progressive individuals to teach and offering multiple modern courses. He emphasized the

integration of education and labor, and established departments such as farms to promote labor education. He also implemented a work study system to help poor students enroll and cultivate their moral character in accordance with school regulations. When Du Bincheng was appointed as the principal of Yulin Middle School, he put forward the educational principle of emphasizing both morality, intelligence, and physical fitness. He hired excellent teachers with high salaries, organized teachers to visit Beijing and Tianjin, established the "Shaanbei Education Promotion Association", hired progressive individuals to teach, and cultivated talents such as Liu Zhidan. Li Zheng led the relocation of Beijing Normal University to the west, established relevant schools in Shaanxi and Gansu, advocated for public education, established multiple experimental zones, and guided students to participate in social education and serve the Anti-Japanese War. In addition, Wu Yunfang and others also founded schools to promote educational development.

### **3.1 Yang Songxuan and Xianlin Middle School**

#### **3.1.1 Educational Background and Motivation**

Yang Songxuan (1872-1928), originally named Henian and styled Songxuan, also known as Buzhuoxuan, was a famous patriotic educator and founder of Xianlin Middle School. He was born in Huazhou, Shaanxi (now Huaxian). Yang Songxuan lived during the turbulent period of the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, and the social conditions of poverty, weakness, and national suffering deeply saddened him. He has been diligent and eager to learn since childhood, studying under the great Confucian scholar Liu Guyu and deeply influenced by his progressive ideas. Liu Guyu advocated for "practical application" and advocated learning advanced Western technology to achieve national prosperity and strength. This ideology had a profound impact on Yang Songxuan's life.

In 1905, Yang Songxuan applied for the position of principal at Lintong Yujin Second Class Primary School, where he actively promoted modern education, reformed teaching content and methods, and cultivated students' patriotism and scientific literacy. In 1909, Yang Songxuan joined the Chinese Revolutionary League. He hoped to change China's destiny through revolution.

After the Xinhai Revolution, he was appointed as the Deputy Director of the Provincial Education Department, but the corruption and socializing in the officialdom left him deeply disappointed. He resolutely resigned and returned to his hometown, determined to devote himself to the education cause, cultivate more outstanding talents for his hometown, and realize the ideal of saving the country through education.

During the Republic of China period, education in Shaanxi was very backward, with very few middle schools, and many students had to travel to other places to study. Yang Songxuan saw it in his eyes and was anxious in his heart. He was determined to establish a modern middle school to provide better educational opportunities for children in his hometown. On April 8, 1919, with his unremitting efforts, the private Xianlin Middle School officially opened. This school carried Yang Songxuan's educational ideals and national salvation aspirations, and also brought new hope for the development of education in Shaanxi.

#### **3.1.2 Characteristics and Practices of Education**

Yang Songxuan has put in a lot of effort to run Xianlin Middle School well. He was well aware of the truth that "the stones of other mountains can be used to polish jade", and in 1915, he went to Hankou, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nantong, and Japan to study advanced educational concepts and educational experiences. During the inspection process, he witnessed firsthand the development of education in advanced countries, which deeply touched him and strengthened his determination to reform education.

He believed that "the main body of the school lies in the students, and the spirit of the school lies in the teachers" [8]<sup>28</sup>, so he recruited knowledgeable individuals to teach at the school. He inquired everywhere and actively invited teachers with real talents, practical learning, and progressive thinking to teach at Xianlin Middle School. After the May Fourth Movement, he hired progressive figures such as Wei Yechou and Wang Fusheng, one of the founders of the Shaanxi local organization of the Communist Party of China, to teach at Xianlin Middle School. Wei Yechou spread Marxist ideology in school and organized students to carry out patriotic movements against imperialism and feudalism, making Xianlin Middle School a platform for the dissemination of progressive ideas in Shaanxi at that time.

In terms of curriculum design, Yang Songxuan kept up with the pace of the times and emphasized that students should learn new knowledge. The school offered a rich and diverse range of modern courses such as Chinese, history, geography, mathematics, trigonometry, geometry, chemistry, foreign languages, and physical education, breaking the traditional education system that focuses on classics. This allowed students to have access to a comprehensive knowledge system and cultivates their overall quality.

At the same time, he also emphasized the combination of education and labor, making students useful talents in society. Xianzhong had attached departments such as farms, hospitals, printing houses, flour mills, shops, and public storage bureaus, which require students to take turns attending "labor education" classes. On the farm, students learned how to grow crops and gain knowledge about agricultural production; In the hospital, they learned basic medical rescue skills; At the printing house, they mastered printing technology... Through these practical activities, students had not only learned practical skills, but also cultivated the spirit of hard work and teamwork ability. In addition, Yang Songxuan also established a work study system to help students from poor families to enroll for further studies. He was well aware that many students were unable to receive education due to poverty, which would be a loss to society. Therefore, through the work study system, he allowed students to earn a certain amount of compensation through labor in addition to their studies, solving their living difficulties and also exercising their abilities.

Yang Songxuan attached great importance to the cultivation of students' moral character. In the school rules of Xianlin Middle School, a twelve character "motto" is proposed for students' behavior: first honesty - still true, not fraudulent; second pure - emphasizes frugality, not extravagance; third strong - energetic, not timid; fourth knows - having multiple intelligences and avoiding ignorance; fifth diligence - enduring hardship and not be lazy; sixth being cautious - being able to scrutinize with caution and not act recklessly; seventh rightness - loyalty and forgiveness, no selfishness; eighth fairness - achieving neutrality and impartiality; ninth compassion - advocating kindheartedness, not being cruel; tenth concessions - emphasizing humility and not being arrogant or boastful; eleventh rectification - maintaining order and avoiding disorder; twelfth cleanliness - cultivating integrity and not being vulgar.[9]<sup>67</sup> He guided

students to establish correct values and moral values, and cultivated their good character and behavior habits through words and deeds.

### **3.2 *Du Bincheng and Yulin Middle School Education Reform***

#### **3.2.1 *Background of Educational Reform***

Du Bincheng (1888-1947) was a renowned educator and political activist in modern China, and an early leader of the Chinese Democratic League. In the summer of 1917, Du Bincheng graduated from the History and Geography Department of Beijing National Higher Normal School and returned to his hometown Yulin to teach at Yulin Middle School. At that time, Yulin Middle School had outdated teaching concepts, outdated teaching methods, a single curriculum, and relied mainly on traditional Confucian classics and cultural and historical knowledge, which was difficult to meet the needs of cultivating new-style talents. The school's teaching staff is weak, and most teachers lack modern educational concepts and professional knowledge, resulting in low teaching quality.

Du Bincheng was deeply influenced by democratic revolutionary ideas. During his studies in Beijing, he was exposed to advanced educational concepts and ideas, and gained a profound understanding of the current state of education in China. He believes that in order to change China's destiny, it is necessary to cultivate new talents with modern knowledge and patriotic spirit, and Yulin Middle School, as the highest institution of education in northern Shaanxi, shoulders the responsibility of cultivating talents and must undergo comprehensive reforms. So he decided to reform Yulin Middle School to realize his ambition of saving the country through education.

#### **3.2.2 *Innovative Measures and Achievements***

Du Bincheng proposed the educational purpose of cultivating new talents who are diligent in learning, patriotic, and coordinated in development, emphasizing the equal importance of moral, intellectual, and physical education. He believed that secondary education must improve the quality of teaching, enabling students to acquire basic knowledge of natural and social sciences that national citizens should possess, cultivate aesthetic, martial, and labor abilities, and develop strong physical fitness. Special attention should be paid to

cultivating students' noble character and enterprising spirit. To achieve this goal, he took a series of innovative measures.

Firstly, he focused on the crucial aspect of selecting teachers. He deeply understood that teachers are the core force of school education, and only with excellent teachers can outstanding students be cultivated. So he ran around and recruited talented people. He not only invited well-known local figures with a strong foundation in traditional Chinese studies, Du Douyuan and Li Dingming, but also hired Mr. Dong Zhuli, Li Keting, Xia Jiaju and other professors to teach various courses in natural sciences. These people later became university professors. In order to attract excellent teachers, he paid out of the box, with some teachers earning a monthly salary of up to 130 silver dollars, far higher than the official standard of 60 silver dollars for public high school teachers. His thirst for talent had attracted a large number of excellent teachers to teach at Yulin Middle School, greatly improving the school's teaching staff level.

Secondly, in 1922 and 1923, he organized two visits by all school teachers to Beijing and Tianjin to learn advanced educational concepts and teaching methods.[11]<sup>789</sup> During the visit, the teachers personally experienced the charm of advanced education, broadened their horizons, and updated their educational concepts. After returning to school, they applied what they had learned to teaching practice, promoting the school's teaching reform. At the same time, he advocated the establishment of the "Shaanbei Education Promotion Association" to carry out educational and teaching research. Through this organization, teachers can exchange teaching experience, explore educational issues, and jointly improve their teaching level.

In addition, after the May Fourth Movement, he keenly realized the changes of the times and actively recommended Li Dingming, Cao Yingsheng, and Bai Boying to leave school and take up political positions, providing them with broader development opportunities. Meanwhile, he hired progressive figures such as Wei Yechou and Li Zizhou to teach at the school, fully ensuring the school's educational direction and faculty strength. Wei Yechou, Li Zizhou, and others spread Marxist ideology in schools and organized students to carry out patriotic movements against imperialism and feudalism, making Yulin Middle School the cradle

of revolutionary ideas in northern Shaanxi.[12]<sup>154-156</sup>

Under his efforts, Yulin Middle School has cultivated a large number of outstanding talents such as Liu Zhidan and Zhang Desheng. Liu Zhidan became an outstanding member of the CPC, one of the main founders of the Red Army and revolutionary base areas in northern Shaanxi, and made outstanding contributions to the Chinese revolutionary cause; Zhang Desheng also played an important role in the revolutionary struggle and contributed his own strength to the establishment and construction of New China. The cultivation of these talents not only laid a solid foundation for the revolutionary cause in northern Shaanxi, but also made important contributions to China's revolution and construction.

### ***3.3 Li Zheng and the Westward Migration of Beiping Normal University and the Practice of Popular Education***

#### ***3.3.1 Background and Process of Westward Migration***

Li Zheng (1895-1975) was a staunch defender of the independent establishment of higher normal education in China, a pioneer of modern popular education in China, and also the helmsman of Beijing Normal University's westward relocation to Shaanxi and Gansu during the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan. After the September 18 Incident, Northeast China fell, North China was in crisis, and the national crisis became increasingly severe. After the Lugou Bridge Incident in 1937, Pingjin University faced a crisis of survival. The artillery fire of the Japanese aggressors threatens the safety of the school, and the lives of teachers and students are seriously threatened. In order to continue the Chinese cultural context and serve the cause of the comprehensive anti-Japanese war, Beiping Normal University, Beiping University, and Beiyang Institute of Technology traveled to Xi'an and Hanzhong as backbone universities, and successively established Xi'an Temporary University and Northwest United University. After the dissolution of Northwest United University, Beiping Normal University was renamed Northwest Normal University, and then continued to move westward to Lanzhou for education.

During his westward migration, Li Zheng faced many difficulties. The journey is long and transportation is inconvenient, forcing teachers and

students to travel long distances and endure hardships. Shortage of funds, teaching equipment, and materials have seriously affected the normal development of teaching. Living conditions are difficult, and teachers and students often face the threat of hunger and disease. According to historical records, in 1938, teachers and students from Northwest Associated University moved from Xi'an to Hanzhong. After trekking hundreds of miles on foot for half a month, they arrived in Hanzhong and were respectively placed in three counties and six places: Chenggu, Nanzheng, and Mianxian.<sup>[13]</sup><sup>6</sup> Li Zheng led the vast number of teachers and students to overcome numerous difficulties with tenacious will and firm belief. He actively communicated and coordinates with all parties, striving for funding and material support, organized teachers and students to do it themselves, build school buildings, and made teaching equipment, and cared about the lives of teachers and students, and did his best to solve their living difficulties. Under his leadership, the school persisted in running the school in a difficult environment and cultivated batches of outstanding talents for the country.

### 3.3.2 *Practice and Philosophy of Public Education*

Li Zheng believed that 'the mandate of the nation lies in education' and firmly believed that only by taking the path of education can we save the country. He advocated that in all stages of education and different ways of implementing education (school education, social education), the main themes should always be "cultivating national consciousness" and "cultivating national consciousness". He deeply realized that the strength of a country cannot be achieved without the efforts of all its people, and improving the quality of the people is an important mission of education.

Public education is an important way for him to achieve education and save the country. During his time at Columbia University, he visited and inspected rural schools in the central and southern United States, gaining a deep understanding of public education in the country. After returning to China after completing his studies, he firmly believed that public education was the only way out for China based on an analysis of its national conditions. He believed that China is a large agricultural country, and the cultural quality of the people in rural areas is relatively low. Only by carrying out public education, improving the

cultural level and ideological consciousness of the people, can the modernization of China be achieved. Therefore, he advocates that "teacher training schools should also provide social education, so that schools and society can integrate and transform society" [15].

He guided students to actively participate in public education, hoping to mobilize the people to resist and save the country. He thought that if students cannot go to the front line to kill enemies, they should do their utmost to serve in the rear, in order to enhance the country's resistance against Japan. Simultaneously running social education is the simplest and most feasible way of service, and it is also the best opportunity for university students to serve the country. Many students actively participated in the practice of public education as a result. They went deep into the countryside, integrated with farmers, and made their own contributions to the victory of the Anti-Japanese War.

### 3.4 *The Contributions of Other Shaanxi Educators to Education*

In addition to educators such as Yang Songxuan, Du Bincheng, and Li Zheng, there are many other educators in Shaanxi who have also made important contributions to the local education industry. For example, Ms. Wu Yunfang contacted celebrities in the education sector in Shaanxi and established the "Xi'an First Women's Civilian Vocational School" in 1928, which was later renamed as the "Shaanxi Private Peihua Women's Junior Dyeing and Weaving Vocational School" and is now the predecessor of Xi'an Peihua College. In old China, women's status was low and life was difficult. Wu Yunfang and others hoped that through vocational education, women could master livelihood skills, achieve economic independence, and thus obtain equal status. The school adopted a teaching format of half work and half study, with half day classes to learn cultural knowledge and professional skills, and half day visits to internship factories to practice operations. Students learned while doing, and each student can receive a monthly salary of up to 15 yuan, with some as low as 6 yuan."<sup>[16]</sup><sup>35</sup>

The female students in Peihua pursue independence, equality, and self-reliance, setting an example for women. After graduation, they returned to their hometown and established various "women's training centers", which drove local women's employment and economic development. From 1933 to 1935, the Education Department of

Shaanxi Province conducted a survey and statistics on the employment of three-year graduates from schools. It was found that more than 20 types of training centers and factories were established by civilian female vocational graduates, almost covering all counties in Guanzhong.[16]<sup>17</sup> During the Anti-Japanese War, Peihua teachers and students actively supported the war. On December 3, 1937, the Shaanxi Provincial Support Association and the Shaanxi Provincial Injury Relief Association requested the school to produce 500 cotton quilts. All teachers and students concentrated their efforts on attending classes in the morning and putting them into production in the afternoon. In May 1938, Peihua students spontaneously organized the sewing of 100 blankets to be given to the wounded soldiers who returned to Xi'an from the Battle of Zhongtiao Mountain [16]<sup>32-33</sup>, reflecting a high degree of patriotism.

#### **4. THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE ON SHAANXI PROVINCE**

##### ***4.1 Developing Education and Talent Cultivation***

###### ***4.1.1 Dual Growth of Schools and Student Numbers***

The educational practices of educators in Shaanxi during the Republic of China period injected development momentum into the popularization of education in the region, resulting in an increase in both the number of schools and the size of students. Starting from Xianlin Middle School founded by Yang Songxuan, private middle schools gradually emerged in various parts of Shaanxi. These schools have broken the monopoly of traditional educational resources by a few people and provided more opportunities for aspiring young people to receive secondary education. Xianlin Middle School has trained many leadership talents and renowned scholars in the fields of science, technology, culture, and education, making contributions to revolution and construction, and is known as the "Shaandong Academy".[17]<sup>511</sup> Du Bincheng's reform and development of Yulin Middle School not only improved the teaching quality and reputation of the school, but also drove the overall progress of secondary education in northern Shaanxi, resulting in a significant increase in the number of secondary schools in northern

Shaanxi during the mid to late period of the Republic of China.

After Li Zheng led the relocation of Beijing Normal University to the west, he established multiple normal universities and affiliated schools in Shaanxi, Gansu and other places, forming a relatively complete teacher education system. "Since the Republic of China, higher education in the northwest region has been developing slowly and at a relatively low level. The 'Northwest Associated University' has made significant progress in improving this phenomenon. It not only comprehensively planned the modern higher education framework in the northwest region, especially in Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, from the aspects of engineering, teacher education, agriculture, medicine, business, law, humanities, etc., but also laid the foundation for later higher education in the northwest region." [17]<sup>541</sup> These normal universities have trained many qualified teachers for the local area, alleviating the shortage of basic education teachers and indirectly promoting the development of primary education.

###### ***4.1.2 Cultivating Outstanding Talents in Various Fields***

These schools cultivate talents in various fields such as politics, military, culture, and education, becoming an important force in promoting social development. In the political field, Liu Zhidan, Zhang Desheng, and others trained at Yulin Middle School, with the progressive ideas and education they received at school, devoted themselves to the revolutionary cause and became important leaders of the Chinese revolution. According to the "Collected Works of Liu Zhidan", Liu Zhidan said that he "studied at Yulin Middle School for his youth, and was taught by Mr. Du Bincheng. It was then that he realized the depth of the country's crisis and the severity of the people's suffering. From then on, he established the original intention of saving the country and the people, and vowed to fight for the liberation of China and the rejuvenation of the nation for life." [18]<sup>46</sup>

In the field of education, students who graduated from Beijing Normal University and later Northwest Normal University have become pioneers and main forces in developing education and serving the social construction of Northwest China. From 1939 to 1949, Northwest Normal University trained a total of 1677 graduates.[17]<sup>256</sup> They brought advanced educational concepts and teaching methods to various regions in Northwest

China, playing an important role in the development of education in the region.

In the field of culture, a group of outstanding scholars and cultural workers have emerged. Lei Wuzhai, Qu Wu, Yan Youmin, and others who graduated from Xianlin Middle School received systematic cultural education at school. They not only inherited and promoted traditional culture in Shaanxi, but also actively introduced and disseminated new ideas and culture. They have promoted the prosperity and development of Shaanxi's cultural industry and enhanced the cultural soft power of the Shaanxi region through writing books, establishing newspapers, and organizing cultural activities.

## **4.2 Promoting the Modernization of Education in Shaanxi Province**

### *4.2.1 Innovation in Educational Philosophy and Methods*

The educators in Shaanxi during the Republic of China actively introduced and borrowed advanced educational concepts and methods from both Chinese and foreign sources, injecting new vitality into the modernization of education in Shaanxi. After examining education both domestically and internationally, Yang Songxuan integrated advanced concepts such as "integration of knowledge and action" and "complete personality" into the educational practice of Xianlin Middle School. He focused on cultivating students' comprehensive qualities and practical abilities. By offering diverse courses and conducting rich practical activities, he broke the traditional mode of knowledge transmission in education, making education more in line with social reality and students' development needs.

Du Bincheng emphasized the comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, and physical fitness in the educational reform of Yulin Middle School, adopting new teaching methods such as heuristic and discussion-based approaches to encourage students to actively think and explore. He implemented the "problem-based teaching method" at Yulin Middle School, requiring teachers not to directly impart knowledge, but to ask questions and guide students to explore and discuss solutions independently. This method broke the traditional "cramming" teaching and greatly stimulated students' learning initiative. He also emphasizes the diversification of teaching evaluation, not only focusing on students' academic

performance, but also on their moral cultivation and practical ability. This teaching philosophy and method have had a strong impact on traditional education models and promoted the renewal of Shaanxi's educational philosophy. Li Zheng emphasized the professionalism and uniqueness of teacher education, focusing on cultivating students' educational teaching and research abilities, laying a solid foundation for the modernization of teacher education in Shaanxi.

### *4.2.2 Improving the Education System*

Educators actively participate in the reform and improvement of the education system, providing institutional guarantees for the modernization of education in Shaanxi. During the process of leading the westward relocation and subsequent development of Beijing Normal University, Li Zheng carried out a series of reforms in the education system, curriculum design, and teaching management of teacher education based on the actual situation in the northwest region. In terms of curriculum design, courses closely related to the socio-economic development of the northwest region have been added, such as agricultural technology, border geography, etc., so that the students trained can better serve the local society.

## **4.3 Social Atmosphere Transformation**

### *4.3.1 Renewal of Ideological Concepts*

During the process of running schools, educators in Shaanxi have brought new ideas and culture to the region, promoting the renewal of people's ideological concepts. Yang Songxuan hired progressive teachers at Xianlin Middle School to spread advanced ideas such as Marxism, exposing students to a new worldview and values. From 1923 to 1927, more than 100 students in Xianlin Middle School successively joined the CPC or the Communist Youth League of China. The students went out of the campus, went into villages and factories, publicized Marxism and anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism ideas, and held night classes for civilians. More than 10,000 people were educated. Under the influence of these ideas, students gradually broke free from the shackles of feudal thought, began to pay attention to the fate of the country and social reality, and actively participated in the patriotic movement against imperialism and feudalism.

Du Bincheng advocated the concepts of democracy, science, and equality at Yulin Middle School, encouraging students to think independently and be brave in innovation. He abolished the feudal system of corporal punishment, advocated equality between teachers and students, and held democratic lectures, allowing young people in northern Shaanxi to be exposed to modern democratic ideas for the first time. He cultivated students' patriotism and enterprising spirit through reforming teaching content and methods, making them realize that their personal destiny is closely linked to the fate of the country, and inspiring their attention and enthusiasm for social change. In carrying out public education practice, Li Zheng focused on cultivating the national consciousness and national consciousness of the people, making them understand that the prosperity and strength of the country require the efforts of every individual, gradually freeing them from ignorant and backward thinking, and starting to view the world with a more open and rational attitude.

#### 4.3.2 *Improvement of Social Customs*

Educators not only focus on students' knowledge education, but also actively promote the improvement of social customs. Yang Songxuan organized the Women's Tianzu Zhen Society as early as the late Qing Dynasty, advocating for men to cut their braids and let their children have their feet free, bravely challenging feudal customs. In 1906, Yang Songxuan organized the Women's Tianzuzhen Society in Huazhou and personally preached, becoming a pioneer in changing customs and traditions in the Guanzhong region of Shaanxi. At Xianlin Middle School, he established strict school rules to cultivate students' good living habits and moral standards. These students returned to society after graduation and brought these good habits and standards to every corner, playing a positive role in promoting the improvement of local social customs.

Du Bincheng emphasized the cultivation of students' morality at Yulin Middle School, and guided them to establish correct values and moral values through various moral education activities. The good moral character developed by students in school has had a positive impact on the improvement of social atmosphere. At the same time, the sports and cultural activities carried out by schools have enriched the spiritual life of the

people and changed the dull and conservative social atmosphere of the past.

## 5. CONCLUSION

During the Republic of China period, guided by the concept of "saving the nation by education", Shaanxi educators such as Yang Songxuan, Du Bincheng, and Li Zheng, with their love for the country and the nation, actively engaged in educational practice in difficult and challenging environments with firm beliefs and selfless dedication. Their efforts not only promoted the development of education in Shaanxi region, cultivated a large number of outstanding talents, changed the backward appearance of education in Shaanxi, but also promoted the transformation of social atmosphere, laying a solid foundation for the modernization process of education in Shaanxi. Their educational philosophy, such as emphasizing the comprehensive development of students, emphasizing the combination of education and practice, actively introducing advanced educational ideas, and demonstrating the spirit of perseverance and innovation in the process of running schools, still has important enlightening significance for contemporary education reform and development. In the new era, it is necessary to inherit and carry forward these valuable educational legacies, constantly explore the path of educational innovation, cultivate more outstanding talents that meet the needs of the times, and contribute to the goal of building a strong education country.

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