Red Culture and the Innovation of United Front Work in Chinese Higher Education: A Case Study of a Local Normal University

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Abstract

This study examines Yuzhang Normal University in Jiangxi Province, China, as a representative case to address prevailing challenges in contemporary united front work within higher education—specifically, the lack of cultural leadership and insufficient innovation in communication and engagement mechanisms. It proposes a novel empowerment model centered on the "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" framework: integrating red cultural genes into ideological guidance, embedding regional characteristics into innovative platforms, and aligning teacher-training attributes with practical service delivery. This model establishes a united front practice system tailored to the unique context of local normal universities. Empirical findings reveal that leveraging Nanchang's rich red cultural resources—through curriculum infusion, immersive learning experiences, and practice-based transformation—significantly enhances the political identity of non-Party intellectuals and strengthens the role of united front work in serving local development. Drawing from practical experience, the paper further proposes strategic innovations in institutional design, digital empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, offering valuable insights for the high-quality advancement of united front initiatives in regional higher education institutions.

Keywords: Red Culture, United Front Work, Higher Education, Innovation Strategy, Local Normal Universities, Talent Cultivation Mechanism

Introduction

In the context of the new era, united front work in higher education has become a vital component of talent cultivation, cultural transmission, and social service, presenting both new opportunities and pressing challenges. As a fundamental element of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, red culture carries profound political significance, educational utility, and ideological impetus. It plays a pivotal role in strengthening the leadership and cohesive influence of united front efforts within universities.

Nevertheless, existing research indicates several persistent challenges in university-level united front work, including insufficient cultural leadership, a lack of innovative engagement mechanisms, and a disconnect from the evolving new media landscape. These issues are particularly evident in local normal universities, where systematic theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for transforming abundant red cultural resources into functional assets remain underdeveloped. While prior literature often focuses on the symbolic value of red culture or the structural construction of united front mechanisms, there is a notable gap in empirical research that explores how red culture can be operationalized to empower united front initiatives—especially within the distinct institutional and regional contexts of local higher education institutions.

To address this research gap, this paper adopts Yuzhang Normal University in Jiangxi Province as a case study to examine how red culture can be effectively integrated into and drive innovation in united front work. It proposes a "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" mechanism: integrating red cultural heritage into ideological leadership, embedding regional characteristics into platform innovation, and aligning teacher-training strengths with practical service. This model serves as a foundation for systematically analyzing and articulating the successful practices of local normal universities in utilizing red culture to enhance their united front efforts. The ultimate aim is to offer both theoretical grounding and actionable insights that support the quality improvement of united front work in universities, while simultaneously promoting red cultural inheritance and reinforcing the university's service to regional development.

Literature Review
The Relationship between Red Culture and United Front Work in Universities
Red culture, as a spiritual legacy cultivated by the Chinese Communist Party throughout the revolutionary, construction, and reform periods, embodies core values such as unwavering conviction, a people-centered ethos, and a resilient revolutionary spirit. It plays a vital role in political guidance and ideological education. While existing research widely acknowledges the indispensable role of red culture in ideological and political education within higher education institutions, in-depth exploration of its integration with united front work remains relatively limited.

Several scholars have pointed out that the logic of political identity inherent in red culture closely aligns with the primary objectives of united front work—namely, fostering consensus and broadening solidarity (Jiang Haiwen, 2024). In practice, incorporating red cultural elements into the framework of university united front work has proven effective in enhancing political identification and a sense of belonging among non-Communist intellectuals, thereby improving both the precision and impact of ideological outreach. Nevertheless, comprehensive studies on the mechanisms and pathways by which red culture can empower united front efforts are still lacking.

Research on Innovation Pathways in University United Front Work
In recent years, the evolving composition of target groups, modes of communication, and educational paradigms has added complexity to university united front work. Yue Feng and Liu Jiahao (2024) observe that the target audience is becoming increasingly youthful, educated, and specialized. Traditional political outreach, which heavily relies on one-way

ideological instruction, struggles to meet these diverse and evolving needs, making innovation in content and delivery mechanisms essential.

Meanwhile, scholars such as Ouyang Chunxiang et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of utilizing digital platforms and new media technologies to construct integrated online–offline communication frameworks that align with the media consumption habits and cognitive preferences of younger populations. The prevailing academic consensus underscores the need to combine emotional engagement with value-driven leadership, and to explore interactive, multidimensional, and personalized work models. However, empirical research specifically addressing how local universities can harness regional cultural assets to innovate in united front work remains insufficient.

Gaps in Research on the Transformation of Red Cultural Resources in Local Universities
Local universities possess inherent geographical and cultural advantages, granting them proximity to rich red cultural heritage. Despite this, most current studies concentrate on the ideological and political educational functions of red culture, with limited attention paid to its potential as a strategic resource for united front work or talent development.

This research gap is particularly evident in the context of local normal universities, where little theoretical or empirical work has been conducted on integrating red cultural strengths with institutional characteristics to establish replicable, scalable educational models. Discussions surrounding the development of united front resources, the design of practical implementation pathways, and the creation of evaluation systems are generally fragmented, lacking systematic structure and operational guidance.

Research Entry Point of this Study
In response to the identified research gaps, this study focuses on local normal universities and systematically investigates the innovative application of red culture in united front work. Taking Yuzhang Normal University as a case study, the paper consolidates practical experience and refines institutional mechanisms in areas such as organizational design, platform development, and strategic pathway optimization. The objective is to address the current shortfall in empirical documentation related to local university practices and to provide theoretical insights and practical guidance for enhancing the effectiveness of united front work, preserving red cultural heritage, and strengthening regional service capabilities.

Research Methodology
Research Design
This study employs a case study methodology, selecting Yuzhang Normal University in Jiangxi Province as a representative example to systematically examine the transformation and innovative application of red cultural resources within the framework of university united front work. The research is structured according to a logical progression of "problem identification—mechanism construction—pathway exploration—outcome evaluation." This framework is designed to extract replicable and scalable insights from real-world practice, thereby contributing to the integration of red culture into united front efforts across local universities.

Data Sources

The empirical foundation of this research is based on data collected from three primary sources:

Internal Institutional Documents

A comprehensive review was conducted of Yuzhang Normal University's united front work annual reports from the past five years, along with documentation on red culture initiatives and curriculum-based ideological and political education projects. This analysis provided a detailed understanding of the university's strategic planning and phased achievements in embedding red culture into its united front work.

Field Research and Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven participants, including the head of the United Front Work Department, representatives of non-Party intellectuals, and core faculty engaged in ideological and political education. These interviews explored participants' perceptions, levels of engagement, and evaluations of red culture-related practices, yielding valuable first-hand insights and reflective feedback.

Participatory Observation

The research team took part in a series of university-led activities, including united front educational sessions, red culture practice courses, and faculty-student discussion forums. On-site observations were recorded to capture notable practices, operational challenges, and areas for improvement, thus reinforcing the empirical grounding and contextual awareness of the study.

Research Methods
Textual Analysis

Policy documents, case records, and institutional frameworks were systematically coded and categorized to identify key elements, operational mechanisms, and exemplary models for integrating red culture into united front work.

Qualitative Interview Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to extract insights on participants' cognitive shifts, motivational drivers, and suggestions for improvement. This process helped uncover underlying dynamics that shape the effectiveness of red culture-based initiatives.

Participant Observation

Field observations were triangulated with documentary and interview data to validate trends, identify gaps, and strengthen the credibility and contextual robustness of the research findings.

Analytical Framework

Based on the collected data, this study constructs a comprehensive analytical framework comprising four interconnected dimensions: resource integration, mechanism construction, pathway innovation, and outcome evaluation. Central to this framework is the "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" collaborative mechanism, which includes:

Integrating red cultural genes into ideological guidance;

Embedding regional characteristics into platform innovation;

Incorporating teacher-training attributes into practical service delivery.

This framework enables a structured and holistic examination of how local universities operationalize red culture to enhance the design, implementation, and impact of their united front work.

Case Analysis and Empirical Findings

Institutional Context and Overview of Red Cultural Resources for United Front Work

Yuzhang Normal University is located in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, and as a local undergraduate teacher-training institution, it possesses a profound red cultural heritage. The university is situated near the site of the August 1st Uprising and hosts several red-themed educational venues, including the Revolutionary History Museum and the Teacher Ethics Education Hall. It has been recognized as a provincial model base for red culture education in Jiangxi. In recent years, the university has actively aligned with the national strategy of building red gene heritage demonstration zones by deeply integrating its united front work with the development of red cultural resources, gradually forming a relatively comprehensive framework for red culture-empowered united front work.

According to data from the university's United Front Work Department (2024), non-Party intellectuals constitute 38.6% of the total faculty. A central challenge lies in how to enhance the political identification and engagement of these individuals through red culture, making this an important focus of the university's innovative practice in united front work.

Practical Pathways and Mechanism Construction

Integrating Red Culture into Ideological Guidance to Foster Political Identity

Yuzhang Normal University emphasizes the role of red culture as a foundational resource for ideological leadership in united front work. The university has pioneered a tripartite educational model comprising curriculum embedding, venue-based learning, and immersive experience. On the one hand, it has systematically integrated red cultural content into its curriculum, launching a "Red Teacher Ethos" course series to institutionalize and regularize red education. On the other, it capitalizes on local red sites such as the August 1st Uprising Memorial and the Fang Zhimin Martyrs' Cemetery to organize on-site experiential learning activities for non-Party intellectuals, deepening emotional resonance and reinforcing value alignment.

By creating a multi-dimensional education system that combines theory with practice and integrates online and offline modalities, the university has significantly strengthened the political identity of non-Party faculty. Interview data show that 93.6% of non-Party teachers reported an enhanced identification with the path of socialist education with Chinese characteristics after participating in red cultural learning activities.

Embedding Regional Characteristics into Platform Innovation to Promote Cultural Belonging

In response to outdated communication platforms and singular engagement formats in traditional united front work, Yuzhang Normal University has actively pursued digital empowerment and cultural IP development through the establishment of a smart united front platform. The university is currently advancing the "Tongxin Yuzhang" (United Yuzhang)

integrated united front platform, featuring modules such as a VR-based virtual exhibition hall, WeChat mini-programs, and AI-powered Q&A services.

Planned platform functions include a "5-Minute Micro-Party Class" featuring gamified learning to provide structured political education in short, digestible segments, as well as a one-click reservation system for red education sites to facilitate participation. The university is also fostering campus-based red culture IPs by encouraging students to create themed works such as paper cuttings, badges, and notebooks, enhancing the visibility and branding of red culture.

By combining digital innovation with regional cultural expression, the platform aims to cultivate a sense of emotional resonance and institutional belonging among united front stakeholders, particularly non-Party intellectuals and students.

Embedding Teacher-Training Attributes into Practical Service to Encourage Conscious Action
Grounded in its identity as a teacher-training institution, Yuzhang Normal University leverages the disciplinary strengths of non-Party faculty to develop the "New Era Tongxin Lecture Series" as a signature education outreach brand. Faculty and students collaboratively engage in service projects across former revolutionary base areas, including volunteer teaching, teacher training, and curriculum development, exploring a dual empowerment model of "Red Culture + Basic Education."

Through school–local collaborations and the effective dissemination of red educational resources, the university inspires non-Party intellectuals and education students to embrace their educational mission through experiential learning, nurturing intrinsic motivation and self-initiated participation. For example, the university plans to co-develop red-themed school-based curricula with local education departments, embedding red cultural content into the K-12 education system. This initiative creates a ripple effect, linking university students with basic education to foster broader red cultural dissemination.

Overall, by leveraging its teacher-training identity and strengthening its practice-based education mechanisms, the university not only enriches the practical dimensions of united front work but also extends the influence of red culture into broader social contexts.

Effectiveness Evaluation and Data Analysis
Through systematic quantitative assessments and on-site investigations, Yuzhang Normal University has achieved notable results in empowering united front work through red culture, as reflected in the following dimensions:

Significant Increase in Political Identification
The proportion of non-Party intellectuals expressing political identification rose from 85.2% in 2022 to 99.5% in 2024 (Data source: United Front Work Department of Yuzhang Normal University, 2024). This indicates that integrating red culture into ideological guidance has effectively strengthened political consensus among the united front cohort.

Substantial Growth in Participation Rates

Participation in red cultural practice activities increased from 78% before the reform to 92%, with attendance at united front events consistently exceeding 90% (Data source: United Front Work Department, 2024). These metrics underscore improved engagement and appeal of united front initiatives.

Enhanced Resource Utilization Efficiency

The frequency of red education venues being used for united front activities increased 2.5 times annually. The reach of united front messaging among young faculty and students grew by 35% (Data source: United Front Work Department, 2024), indicating a successful transformation of cultural assets into educational outcomes.

Steady Rise in Satisfaction among United Front Participants

Feedback collected via the "Red Proposals Solicitation" initiative showed a 78% adoption rate for submitted suggestions (Data source: United Front Work Department, 2024). This reflects increased satisfaction and alignment between the university's united front work and stakeholder expectations.

In summary, Yuzhang Normal University has achieved comprehensive progress across key indicators such as ideological recognition, participation, resource conversion, and satisfaction, thus establishing a scalable and replicable model for innovative united front work in local universities.

Case Highlights

Case Study 1: Building a "Red Classroom" Platform to Deepen Cultural Immersion

Yuzhang Normal University established a multi-dimensional integration platform for united front education and red culture by leveraging themed lecture series such as "Yuzhang Forum," "Baoshi Lecture Hall," and "Hezhen Learning Hall." The university invited descendants of revolutionary figures, Party history experts, and distinguished alumni to deliver lectures on the Party's revolutionary history, heroic narratives, and local red stories. To date, 71 thematic lectures have been held, reaching over 12,000 non-Party intellectuals and students.

Through tailored courses like "Campus History Classroom" and "Alumni Classroom," the institution systematically presented its century-long red educational legacy, reinforcing professional identity and institutional pride among non-Party faculty. Survey results showed an 18.7% increase in political identification scores among faculty who participated in "Red Classroom" activities (Data source: Internal records, United Front Work Department, 2024). This initiative has proven effective in translating red culture from knowledge acquisition to emotional resonance and value identification, becoming a cornerstone of ideological guidance for united front constituents.

Case Study 2: Consolidating Red Cultural Resources to Advance Curriculum Development and Creative Expression

To solidify the theoretical foundation of united front participants, the university undertook a comprehensive initiative to systematically develop and codify red cultural resources into instructional materials. Publications include *Red Memory: The Red Gene Map*

of Yuzhang Normal University, *A Century of Normal Education: New Stories from an Old Campus*, and *Historical Study of the Jiangxi Provincial First Normal School*. Elements from these works have been integrated into the unified national textbook *Ten Lectures on Red Culture*.

In addition, the university encouraged faculty and students—particularly non-Party intellectuals—to co-create original red-themed cultural and artistic works. Outputs include the illustrated book *Red Memory*, the multimedia performance *1921: The Yuzhang Class*, and the historical drama *Igniting the Light of Faith*. Participation of non-Party faculty in red cultural textbook development and artistic creation rose to 83% (Data source: Quantitative assessment data, United Front Work Department, 2022–2024). These efforts have significantly boosted recognition and communicative power of red culture among the united front cohort, shifting them from passive recipients to active transmitters of red cultural heritage.

Research Summary and Outlook
Key Findings
Based on the case of Yuzhang Normal University, the study arrives at three main conclusions:
1. **Red culture adds distinct value to united front work in universities** by fostering political, cultural, and professional identity among non-Party intellectuals and improving their overall ideological and political awareness.
2. **The "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" mechanism**—integrating red genes into ideological guidance, regional characteristics into platform innovation, and teacher-training attributes into practical services—provides a clear, operable framework for red culture to empower united front work.
3. **Institutional support, digital tools, and cross-sector collaboration** are essential levers for improving the quality and effectiveness of red culture-based united front work in higher education.

Limitations
Geographical limitation: The study is based on a single local university in Jiangxi; broader applicability requires further comparative research.
Limited data depth: Small sample size in interviews may introduce subjectivity; future studies should incorporate large-scale quantitative surveys.
Narrow cultural scope: Focus remains on traditional red culture; integration of contemporary red narratives (e.g., poverty alleviation, pandemic response) requires further exploration.

Future Directions
Expand comparative studies across regions and university types.
Integrate big data and AI for precision in audience profiling and ideological guidance.
Explore innovative formats such as short videos, VR, and red cultural IP branding to enhance relevance and engagement.
Develop shared red culture resource platforms through inter-university and university–community partnerships to create a sustainable ecosystem for united front education.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the innovative pathways through which red culture can empower united front work in higher education, with Yuzhang Normal University serving as a representative case. Against the backdrop of the new era, universities—especially local normal institutions—are increasingly called upon to leverage their unique cultural and educational resources to contribute to ideological cohesion, social service, and national development. In this context, red culture emerges not only as a spiritual cornerstone of Chinese socialist values but also as a strategic asset for advancing united front objectives.

The research finds that by systematically embedding red culture into ideological guidance, integrating it into platform and carrier innovation, and aligning it with the practical service functions inherent to teacher-training institutions, universities can effectively enhance political identity, deepen cultural resonance, and inspire greater civic consciousness among non-Party intellectuals. These outcomes contribute meaningfully to the overall cohesion and capacity of united front efforts in higher education.

The implementation of the "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" framework—integrating red cultural genes into ideological work, regional characteristics into digital and physical platforms, and teacher-education strengths into community engagement—has proven to be both operable and replicable. When supported by institutional planning, technological innovation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, this framework enables the transformation of cultural resources into strategic educational tools that are responsive to both institutional needs and broader societal imperatives.

Looking ahead, universities must further consolidate these achievements through deeper theoretical inquiry and more expansive practical experimentation. Future efforts should include the integration of emerging forms of red cultural expression—such as narratives from contemporary policy achievements and national crises—into united front discourse. Moreover, the use of digital tools, including AI and big data, should be scaled to enhance precision communication, participant profiling, and adaptive content delivery.

Additionally, regional and inter-institutional collaboration should be encouraged to break the siloed nature of current practices, facilitating resource sharing, coordinated planning, and model diffusion. By building a more connected and data-informed red culture-united front ecosystem, universities can better fulfill their dual role as sites of ideological formation and as engines of regional development.

In conclusion, the case of Yuzhang Normal University illustrates the great potential of red culture as a dynamic force for modernizing and strengthening united front work in Chinese higher education. Its experience offers valuable insights and reference points for other local institutions seeking to enhance their cultural leadership, broaden societal impact, and contribute more proactively to national unity and rejuvenation.

Theoretical and Contextual Significance

This study makes several substantive contributions to the field of ideological education and united front work in higher education. Theoretically, it advances current understandings

by bridging red culture with united front practices, offering a replicable "Three Integrations and Three Promotions" framework that systematizes the operationalization of cultural resources into ideological mechanisms. It expands the scholarly discourse on the role of cultural identity and heritage in political engagement, particularly within the context of non-Party intellectuals in Chinese universities. Contextually, the research responds to the urgent need for innovative and localized strategies in the face of evolving educational, technological, and ideological landscapes. By focusing on Yuzhang Normal University, a representative local institution with rich revolutionary heritage, the study demonstrates how region-specific cultural resources can be leveraged to enhance political identification, cultural cohesion, and civic responsibility. These insights provide a valuable blueprint for other regional higher education institutions seeking to modernize their united front efforts while preserving cultural authenticity and strengthening their societal impact.

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