



# The History of the Third Front Construction Resources and Innovative Practice of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

## —Take the Course of “History and Culture of Third Front Construction” as An Example

Hua Wang

<sup>1</sup>School of Historical & Cultural of Sichuan University;

<sup>2</sup>School of Marxism, Panzhihua University

987605963@qq.com

**Abstract.** The Third Front Construction is a far-reaching national defense construction and industrial adjustment movement in the history of the People's Republic of China. Because of the resources richly endowed by nature and geographical advantages, Panzhihua became a key area of the Third Front Construction, and a large number of historical and cultural resources had been retained there, providing valuable resources for the innovative construction of ideological and political courses for college students. By tapping resources related to Third Front Construction to promote its curriculum construction, the history and culture of Third Front Construction course has been innovatively constructed and made into a national optional course, which puts the Third Front Construction course into practice, and better educational and teaching effects be achieved.

**Keywords:** The Third Front Construction; ideological and political courses in colleges and universities; innovative construction

## 1 Introduction

In March 2019, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech at the teachers' symposium for ideological and political theory courses in schools that reform and innovation are the spirit of the age, and the construction of ideological and political courses should change to be vibrant through reform and innovation because teenagers, who take the courses, are a group of persons with the greatest vitality. At present, the ideological and political course system for college students is in a “4+1” curriculum mode [1], and the course contents are typical of theoretical, normative and systematic features, which has given rise to another problem that the discourse is abstract, serious and boring. In December 2020, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued “Several Opinions on Deepening the

Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools for a New Era”, which required to “build a course system of compulsory courses plus optional courses in combination with the characteristics of each stage of universities, primary schools and primary schools on the basis of relatively maintaining a stable place of ideological and political courses as a compulsory one.” [2] The construction of the course system needs the support and guarantee of the course resources. Among the numerous course resources, the history of Third Front Construction of the People's Republic of China that contains rich historical and cultural knowledge and profound ideological and educational connotation is an important source of contents for the construction of the ideological and political courses in colleges and universities.

## **2 Value of the History of Third Front Construction to the Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities**

From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, when China was facing a sudden change in the international situation, the Third Front Construction, a large-scale national defense and industry construction focusing on national defense, science and technology, infrastructure as well as transportation facilities, was launched in the vast central and western regions of China by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It was of great strategic significance in the history of the People's Republic of China, and now it is of great value to enrich the knowledge system of ideological and political courses and expand the connotation and extension of the “Four Histories”, which refers to the history of the Communist Party of China, history of the new China, history of the reform and opening up and history of the socialist development.

### **2.1 History of Third Front Construction can enrich the knowledge system of ideological and political courses**

The Third Front Construction, a major strategy of national development and construction spanning three “five-year plans”, is a complete history of industrialization construction with the core goal of preparing for war, having a significant historical impact. However, the integration of the history of Third Front Construction into the ideological and political courses is not only late, but also it is insufficient in content integrity and ideological profundity. The Third Front Construction first appeared in the ideological and political courses of college students only in the 2021 version of the “Key Textbooks of Marxist Theoretical Research and Construction Project”, “Outline of Modern Chinese History”, which was just a brief summary of about 300 words. In addition, in July 2022, there are only about 500 words of descriptive records about the history of Third Front Construction in the “One Hundred Years of the Communist Party of China” published by the CPC History Publishing House. In general, at present, neither textbooks for colleges and universities nor authoritative national history monographs have presented the history of Third Front Construction in a

complete, in-depth and three-dimensional way, so that the college students cannot empathize with the “days of burning fervor” in the history of China’s construction.

## **2.2 History of Third Front Construction can expand the connotation and extension of the “four histories”**

The Third Front Construction, which covered a wide area and lasted for a long time with a large number of participants joining in, a huge construction scale and a great strategic impact, can be regarded as a microcosm of the history of the Communist Party of China, the new China, the reform and opening up and the socialist development. In terms of party history, the Third Front Construction was a concentrated reflection of the party government relationship, the central local relationship, the governance model of campaign style, and the advancement of party members under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. As for the history of the People’s Republic of China, the Third Front Construction involved various aspects in the process of national development, such as politics, economy, society, culture and national defense. For the history of reform and opening up, the capacity expansion, transformation and upgrading of the Third Front enterprises represented by Panzhihua Iron and Steel Company in the new period were an important part of the reform of state-owned enterprises and market-oriented reform after the reform and opening up. From the perspective of the history of socialist development, the Third Front Construction was a reflection on the Soviet Union’s economic and social model and a bold exploration and effective attempt to take the socialist road with Chinese characteristics in the process of China’s socialist economic construction. [3]

## **3 Putting Panzhihua’s Third Front Construction Resources into Curriculum Practice**

Because of the superior strategic position in the southwest interior and the strategic resource reserve richly endowed by nature, under the condition of “preparing for war and famine” Panzhihua became a strategic rear area that the CPC Central Committee and Mao Zedong focused on and it was once “a synonym for the Third Front Construction”. The majority of the builders in Third Front Construction, being not afraid of difficulties and hardships, built a large number of enterprises in many fields in Panzhihua, such as steel, mining, coal, electricity, transportation, etc., leaving a large number of material heritage and spiritual wealth. Thus, it is an important part for the construction of new courses to put the historical resources of the Third Front Construction that are rich in ideological and political connotations into curriculum practice.

### **3.1 “Panzhihua spirit” is the source of “Third Front spirit”**

The Third Front Construction gestated the Third Front spirit, which was the national spirit formed in the construction practice of new China and was the inheritance and

development of the red blood. The importance of Panzhihua's position in the Third Front Construction made the construction itself a typical demonstration. Therefore, Panzhihua also played an important role in demonstrating and promoting the process of refining and generating the Third Front spirit, becoming the major "original place" of the Third Front spirit. In 1984, the Panzhihua Municipal Party Committee defined for the first time that "hard work, selfless dedication, innovation, unity and cooperation, Scientific management practical spirit" were the "Panzhihua spirit". In March 2014, Panzhihua City and the Institute of Contemporary History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences jointly launched the establishment of the Third Front Construction Research Branch of the Society of National History of the People's Republic of China, which formally defined the Third Front spirit as "hard work, unity and cooperation, innovation, and selfless dedication". In October 2018, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China added the "Third Front Spirit" of 16 Chinese character as the national spirit and struggle spirit vigorously carried forward in the new era. Whether from the "repetition rate" of the formulation of "Panzhihua Spirit" to that of "Third Front Spirit", or the establishment of the Third Front Construction Research Branch actively promoted by Panzhihua, it could be seen that "Panzhihua Spirit" was the most important source and active promoter of "Third Front Spirit".

### **3.2 Oral interview on the history of Third Front Construction**

Panzhihua, as "the place most concerned by the CPC Central Committee and President Mao", is located in the mountains and valleys. A large number of builders of Third Front Construction from all over the country came there under the call of "good people going to the Third Front with good horses", turning the "barren land" into a "place of fierce struggle" and leaving a lot of construction deeds and heroic stories handed down by word of mouth. The "Third Front builders" were not only the "Third Front dedicators" who "dedicated their youth, their whole life and their descendants", but also the "Third Front witnesses" who experienced, saw and heard the Third Front Construction themselves. The "Third Front builders" were their self-identity; the "Third Front dedicators" were their value orientation; and the "Third Front witnesses" were their narrative identity. The "Third Front builders", "Third Front dedicators" and "Third Front witnesses" jointly built a lively treasure house of historical resources for the Third Front Construction. Digging out red stories from them, enriching the narrative subject of the Third Front Construction history, and reproducing the multi-dimensional "historical scene" of the Third Front Construction of the People's Republic of China from the perspective of oral history is the "only way" for ideological and political courses to become lively.

### **3.3 Survey of industrial heritage of Third Front Construction**

The central government invested a large amount of manpower, financial and material resources in Panzhihua, so with Panzhihua Iron and Steel Plant as the core, a large number of factories, mines, bridges and other productive industrial equipment as well

as living facilities in neighborhoods, along with a complete set of mines, metallurgy, coal, electricity, storage and transportation, had been built, leaving rich and numerous industrial heritages of the Third Front Construction. Sichuan Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, together with Panzhihua Cultural Relics Management Institute, conducted a preliminary investigation on the industrial heritage of Panzhihua City, and defined that there were 12 industrial heritage sites of the Third Front Construction in the urban area, of which 8 cultural relics were included in the national industrial heritage protection list during the period of Third Front Construction. Industrial heritage has a distinctive imprint of the times and it bears special historical and cultural value, scientific and technological value, humanistic spirit value, artistic and aesthetics value as well as economic value. Thus, it is the guarantee of value of the construction of ideological and political courses because special “on-site experience” can increase the freshness of ideological and political courses.

### **3.4 Digging out and collating the archives and documents of Third Front Construction**

With its special strategic position and the collective concern from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Panzhihua’s construction not only had the general characteristics of the Third Front Construction, but also had some distinctive particularity. Digging out the historical archives of the Third Front Construction of Panzhihua, sorting out its context, and elaborating its scientific principles have important academic value and practical reference value for a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the Third Front Construction. Panzhihua is a new industrial city arising from the Third Front Construction, and the archives and documents about it all started from the Third Front Construction. At present, in addition to the municipal and district archives, there are rich archives of the Third Front Construction in Panzhihua Iron and Steel Group Co., Ltd., the Mining Bureau, the 19th Metallurgical Group Co., Ltd., the Electric Power Bureau, the three major hospitals and other units. Also, the relevant government departments have also compiled a large number of local historical documents of the Third Front Construction. Moreover, there are a large number of diaries, notes, receipts and other materials scattered among the people. The rich archives and documents can not only broaden the width of the teaching content of the ideological and political course and deepen it, but also can offer the original materials for the research with the theme of the Third Front Construction, and provide a literature guarantee for further improving the scientific, ideological and academic nature of the course.

## **4 Practice of the Course of “History and Culture of Third Front Construction”**

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “the construction of ideological and political courses should change to be vibrant through reform and innovation. If the teacher reads from a book and does not do anything, it is bound to discourage students

from participating and being motivated in the classroom.” [4] College students are at the most active stage of thinking and are easily receptive to new things. Using local history resources to innovate and construct new ideological and political courses can activate the endogenous vitality of ideological and political courses, so as to stimulate the enthusiasm and initiative of college students’ course participation and achieve better teaching effect.

#### **4.1 Innovating the system of textbook contents and the teaching forms to make the Third Front Spirit be “close”**

In terms of innovation in the system of textbook contents, the school formed a curriculum teaching team to write and publish monographs such as “History and Culture of the Third Front Construction”, “The Light of the Third Front Construction - The Third Front Love of Heroic Panzhihua” and “Construction of Chengdu - Kunming Railway” as textbooks, making a series of achievements with Panzhihua as the core, which covers the history of the Third Front Construction all over China. Take “The Light of the Third Front Construction” as an example, which respectively describes and summarizes its background, construction achievements, character stories, spiritual formation, industrial heritage, etc. Compared with the existing ideological and political courses that are theoretical, abstract and boring, the new textbook combines storytelling, ideology and knowledge, presenting the history and culture of Panzhihua's Third Front Construction in a comprehensive and vivid way. In terms of teaching, the school has integrated such courses of humanistic quality as “History and Culture of the Third Front Construction” and “The Light of the Third Front Construction” into the ideological and political course system, and made them be optional courses for students inside and outside the school. More than 6,000 students on campus have taken the course and more than 5,000 students outside the university have taken the course since the courses start and last for 4 years. On the basis of the traditional online and offline teaching mode, the school invested funds to develop the first VR virtual simulation experience teaching project with the theme of Third Front Construction in China. On the whole, it built a new mode of integrated construction with museums and digital libraries, using modern educational technology to empower high-quality resources and integrating the “Third Front spirit” into the whole process of education and teaching.

Because the school constructs ideological and political courses through the vivid local history, students show obvious closeness to the courses, so that their enthusiasm and initiative of learning are stimulated, and the quality of education and teaching is ensured. For example, the course, “The Achievement of the Third Front Construction and the Inheritance of the Third Front Spirit”, won the first prize in the national teaching competition for colleges and universities, “The Integration of the Third Front Spirit into the Ideological and Political Education of Schools” was listed as a high-quality project of ideological and political work of colleges and universities in Sichuan Province in 2020, and “The Deep Integration of the Third Front Spirit into the Education System, Cultivating Practical and Innovative Applied Talents Rooted in the Grassroots, Serving the West” won the Grand Prize of Higher Education Teaching

Achievement of Sichuan Province in 2021. “Third Front Construction History and Culture” won the first prize of Sichuan Province’s ideological and political demonstration course. Taking the Third Front Construction as the background and combining the strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative, “Situation and Policy Education” won the first prize in the 2022 Sichuan Teaching Competition. In terms of textbooks, “The Light of Third Front Construction” was selected for the National Main Publishing Book Award.

#### **4.2 Innovating the form of the thematic practice to make ideological and political courses be “active”**

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that “ideological and political courses should not only be taught in the classroom, but also in social life”. [5] During the construction of the Third Front, in the historical context of “preparing for war and famine”, the majority of Third Front builders participated in national defense, science and technology, industry, transportation, education and other work, which had a profound impact on the economic and social development of the Third Front areas. As the witnesses of the Third Front Construction of the times, their experiences and contributions to the country deserve careful recording, especially their cognition, interpretation and response motivation to the political mobilization at that time, which has distinct characteristics of the times and youth groups. Unlike the traditional thematic practice of “going straight to the scene”, we organized field surveys for sample collection and selection, and conducted targeted oral interviews with representative figures on the construction of the Third Front, so practicing the ideological and political courses “should also be taught in social life”. At present, we have completed nearly 100 oral interviews on the Third Front Construction, and completed the transcription of more than 2 million words of oral history, which is currently being organized for publication. Liu Mian, who participated in the oral history interview, said that he thought the Third Front Construction was just words and figures in books previously, but after the oral history interview, he realized that it was no longer a historical name, but a spiritual purification trip where we could listen to history and witness the spirit, as well as a moving journey to precipitate our thoughts and inherit the spirit of our ancestors. Through systematic interviews on their life history, career, enterprise development, cultural life, material supply, worker-peasant relationship, or inviting those who experienced the Third Front Construction into the classroom, college students can “return to the historical scene” and the teaching effect of “sympathy for understanding” can be achieved, so as to construct the identity of new-age college students in the country, community and family, and inspire them to shoulder the responsibility of the times under the current complex international situation.

#### **4.3 Enriching extracurricular teaching resources to make ideological and political courses “alive”**

In December 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in an important speech at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Univer-

sities that the construction of ideological and political courses should “change according to the matter, advance according to the time, and become new according to the situation” [6]. Because of its typicality in the national strategy, Third Front Construction in Panzhihua has become a vivid carrier for college students to understand the industrial history and construction history of China, and it is a vivid case of “concrete and micro” integrated into the education of “four histories”. In order to make good use of the important resources of ideological and political courses, the school and relevant local government departments have jointly built active teaching resources such as the teaching practice bases, including China Third Front Construction Museum, Panzhihua Iron and Steel Production Line, underground operation of Mining Bureau, iron mining base of mining company, as well as the patriotism education base, and created the teaching points with the theme of Third Front Construction like the one called “How Steel is Made” and so on, and jointly applied for patriotism bases at all levels.

The social practice activities with the theme of the Third Front Construction let the course teaching go out of the classroom, which not only made the teaching form “alive”, but also achieved good practical results. It won 12 national and provincial awards (times), and was publicized and reported by many media, such as China Education Daily, which had a good educational effect and positive social impact. For example, the summer social practice activities of “Investigation of History and Culture of the Third Front Construction of the People’s Republic of China” in 2019 and the “Achievements of the Third Front Construction and Modernization Development in Southwest Minority Areas” in the summer of 2022 won the national title of “Excellent Practice Teaching Team”, and achieved fruitful practical results, which played a great role in guiding students’ education. Through the construction of the social practice base of the course, “History and Culture of the Third Front Construction”, and the practical teaching base of the ideological and political theory courses, and the establishment of the research team of the Third Front Construction to carry out thematic practical research activities, the ideological and political courses for college students has become vivid and attractive. At the same time, through the investigation of industrial heritage, college students enhanced their understanding of the history of the Third Front Construction and their sense of responsibility to protect industrial heritage.

#### **4.4 Expanding the channels of teaching and scientific research to make the ideological and political course be “profound”**

The “14th Five-Year National Archives Development Plan” points out that “we should give full play to the unique role of archives in serving national governance, passing on the tradition of revolution, constructing national memory, exchanging civilizations and learning from each other”. [7] University is an important cradle for cultivating successors of socialist modernization, and it is undoubtedly an important mission to make use of Third Front Construction archives to carry out “four histories” education, historical research, industrial heritage protection as well as historical and cultural heritage inheritance. To this end, we organized teachers and students to carry



out the project, social research and graduation thesis design of the Third Front Construction from the aspects of historical data collation, spiritual research, heritage protection, cultural creativity, urban transformation, etc. According to statistics, there are more than 200 (articles) achievements, among which more than 50 teaching and research projects have been established by teachers, 6 textbooks, books and popular books have been published, and more than 30 papers of various kinds have been published. In addition, the school have supported more than 20 special research projects for students, and guided more than 200 graduation theses (designs) related to the Third Front Construction. Also, students have published more than 50 related papers, creative arts and literary works. By organizing the collection and research of the Third Front archival documents by teachers and students, the team used the Third Front Construction archives to widely carry out educational activities on core socialist values among students, which brought into play the nurturing function of archival documents in cultivating and practicing core socialist values, and deepened college students' further knowledge of the history of the Third Front Construction. At the same time, through the collection and collation of the historical documents of the Third Front Construction, the college students not only understand the Third Front Construction and the local history of Panzhihua, but also enhance their interest in academic research and reserve their academic research ability for further study.

## 5 Conclusion

Panzhihua's unique historical resources of the Third Front Construction can "combine its historical heritage, regional culture, and the requirements of the times to create its own city spirit, establish an image externally, and gather people internally" [8], but also avoid homogenization in the course construction of ideological and political courses, thus enhancing the vividness and affinity of ideological and political courses. The course of "History and Culture of Third Front Construction" is not simply an increase in the number of traditional "4+1" (or 5+1) ideological and political course system. It is an important goal and value of putting ideological and political courses into practice to integrate the history and culture of Third Front Construction into the practice of ideological and political course construction, and make use of local historical resources to expand and deepen the contents of ideological and political courses to achieve better educational and teaching effects.

## References

1. The "4+1" model refers to five courses, including "Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism", "Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", "Outline of Modern Chinese History", "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Basic Knowledge of Law" and "Situation and Policy". In 2019, the Ministry of Education required to set up the course of "Introduction to Xi Jinping's Thought of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" in the "Introduction to Mao Zedong's Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Character-

- istics”, which was first implemented in the key Marxist colleges in the whole country in September 2022. Therefore, the original “4+1” course changed to be “5+1” course system.
2. Notice of the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Ministry of Education on Printing and Distributing the Implementation Plan for Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era, Dec. 18, 2020.
  3. Zhang Yang. Research on the Third Front Construction and the “Four Histories” [J]. Journal of the Party School of the CPC Yunnan Provincial Committee, 2021 (02).
  4. Xi Jinping’s speech at a symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory courses in schools, March 18, 2019. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1728144665414864494&wfr=spider&for=pc>
  5. Three Directions to Tell "Great Ideological and Political Course" in the New Era, China Youth Daily, August 30, 2021. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1709468489801146101&wfr=spider&for=pc>
  6. Change According to the Situation, Advance According to the Times, Innovate According to the Situation, and Adopt New Thinking Methods--the theoretical character and ideological approach embodied in General Secretary Xi Jinping's "July 26, 2017" important speech.
  7. General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Archives", June 8, 2021, National Archives Administration of China. Government.cn [www.saac.gov.cn](http://www.saac.gov.cn)
  8. Xi Jinping's speech at the City Work Conference of the Central Committee on Dec. 20, 2015.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

