

A Comparative Study on National Security Education in Private Universities in China and Abroad

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Abstract

National security serves as the cornerstone of national rejuvenation and the fundamental basis for national stability. As the backbone of the country's future development, college students' national security awareness and comprehensive literacy are directly related to the long-term stability of the country and the great cause of national rejuvenation. As an important part of China's higher education system, private universities undertake the task of educating a large number of young students and shoulder an irreplaceable mission in national security education. At present, national security education in private universities in China is still confronted with practical dilemmas including insufficient attention, weak teaching staff, fragmented curriculum system, monotonous teaching methods, and inadequate practical education, which can hardly meet the inherent requirements of national security education under the Overall National Security Outlook in the New Era. By sorting out the institutional design, curriculum system, teaching mode and guarantee mechanism of national security education in private universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and other countries, this paper summarizes their mature experience and practical implications. Combined with the actual conditions and student characteristics of private universities in China, this paper puts forward implementation paths to optimize national security education, so as to provide theoretical reference and practical experience for promoting the high-quality development of national security education in private universities and building a comprehensive, whole-process and all-dimensional education pattern.

Keywords

Private universities in China; private universities abroad; national security education; international comparison; education path.

1. Introduction

National security refers to the state in which national sovereignty, political power, unity, territorial integrity, people's well-being, sustainable economic and social development and other major national interests are relatively free from danger and internal and external threats, as well as the ability to maintain a sustainable security state. Covering politics, military, economy, culture, science and technology, cyberspace, ecology, resources and other fields, national security is an important part of national governance in the new era and the fundamental premise of people's happy life (Li, 2022). As the backbone of youth, college students are the builders and successors of the country in the future. Their national security awareness, legal concept and sense of responsibility directly affect the implementation effect of national security strategy and the long-term development potential of the country.

With the popularization of higher education in China, private universities have become an indispensable part of the higher education system. According to the China Statistical Yearbook 2022, private universities account for an important proportion in terms of quantity and student

enrollment, becoming a critical platform for talent cultivation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). As of June 2025, there are 829 private colleges and universities in China, accounting for 28.40% of the total. Among them, 417 are private undergraduate institutions, with more than 10.52 million students, accounting for 27.04% of the total number of higher education students in China, which means one out of every four college students is studying in a private university (Ministry of Education, 2025). This reality fully shows that the effectiveness of national security education in private universities is directly related to the popularization of the Overall National Security Outlook among young people, the improvement of national security literacy of all people, and the construction of national security talent team.

However, restricted by school-running orientation, resource conditions, management mechanism and other factors, most private universities tend to “focus on professional skills while neglecting ideological literacy” and “emphasize employment orientation while ignoring value guidance”. National security education is generally marginalized, fragmented and formalized, with prominent problems such as insufficient attention, scattered courses, single method, weak faculty, lack of practice and simple evaluation, which are difficult to meet the requirements of education in the new era. Against this background, a systematic international comparative study on national security education in private universities, drawing on the mature experience of foreign private universities in legal protection, curriculum construction, collaborative education and social participation, is of great theoretical value and practical significance to solve the practical dilemmas and improve the education quality in private universities in China.

2. Strategic Value of Strengthening National Security Education in Private Universities in the New Era

2.1. Practical Need to Safeguard National Security and Social Stability

At present, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, with increasingly fierce international competition, intertwined traditional and non-traditional security threats, and acute and complex struggles in the ideological field. Security challenges such as cyber infiltration, cultural erosion, intelligence espionage and financial risks are on the rise. College students are active in thinking, broad in information access and relatively insufficient in social experience, so they are vulnerable to wrong ideologies and false information. With a large number of students, wide distribution and diverse ideologies, private universities need to strengthen national security education to guide students to establish a correct outlook on national security, enhance risk prevention awareness and legal concepts, so as to effectively build a youth line of defense for national security and maintain campus and social stability (Zhao & An, 2025).

2.2. Internal Requirement to Fulfill the Fundamental Task of Strengthen Moral Education and Cultivate People

Strengthening moral education and cultivating people is the fundamental task of higher education. National security education is an important part of ideological and political education and a key link of value guidance and literacy cultivation. Private universities, sharing the same educational mission as public ones, must integrate national security education into the whole process of talent cultivation, guide students to strengthen national identity, national pride and social responsibility, firm ideals and beliefs, and consciously safeguard national interests. Strengthening national security education is conducive to promoting the all-round development of students and cultivating a new generation of reliable and high-quality talents.

2.3. Important Path to Improve Education Quality and School-running Level

National security education is not only an important part of ideological and political education, but also a key starting point to improve students' comprehensive quality, employment competitiveness and social adaptability. Systematic national security education can effectively improve students' legal awareness, confidentiality awareness, cyber security literacy and risk response ability, and promote them to become interdisciplinary high-quality talents. Meanwhile, improving the national security education system helps private universities perfect the education mechanism, optimize training programs, enhance connotation construction, and improve social recognition and sustainable development capacity.

2.4. Strategic Support for Cultivating Reserve Talents for National Security

National security needs a large number of young talents with firm stance, professional literacy and practical ability. Private universities cover engineering, economics, management, literature, art and other disciplines, and their graduates will enter all walks of life as important forces for social construction. Strengthening national security education and improving students' consciousness and ability to safeguard national security are conducive to delivering reliable reserve forces for various fields of national security and providing solid talent support for long-term stability (Li, Zeng & Zou, 2022).

3. Current Situation and Prominent Problems of National Security Education in Private Universities in China

3.1. Insufficient Attention and Lack of Top-level Design and Institutional Support

Most private universities are application-oriented, with resources inclined to major construction, training bases and employment. National security education is regarded as a "soft task", resulting in a situation of "valued in words but ignored in practice". There is no special leading institution or overall planning mechanism at the school level, and it is not systematically integrated into the talent training program and annual assessment system. Insufficient courses, teachers, funding and venues make it difficult to promote national security education in a normalized and standardized manner.

3.2. Fragmented Curriculum System and Outdated Teaching Content

At present, national security education in private universities generally lacks a systematic curriculum support. It is mostly carried out scattered through ideological and political courses, military theory courses and themed class meetings, and few independent compulsory or elective courses are offered. The content is fragmented and unstructured, focusing on traditional security fields while insufficiently covering non-traditional security such as science and technology, cyber, data, culture, biology and finance. Outdated in knowledge and slow in update, the content fails to keep pace with the latest laws, typical cases and international situations, resulting in strong theory but weak practicability and low student interest.

3.3. Monotonous Teaching Methods and Serious Lack of Practical Education

Classroom teaching is still dominated by the instilling mode of "teachers talk and students listen passively", lacking innovative forms such as case discussion, scenario simulation, interactive experience and online-offline mixed teaching, leading to low attractiveness and effectiveness. Practical teaching is generally missing. Most private universities have not established stable practice bases, and rarely organize visits, emergency drills, voluntary services or research activities. Students lack immersive experience and practical training, making it hard to transform theoretical knowledge into conscious action and practical ability.

3.4. Weak Teaching Staff and Insufficient Professional Competence

National security education in private universities is mostly undertaken by part-time teachers including ideological and political teachers, counselors and military teachers, who generally lack systematic professional training. They have insufficient mastery of the Overall National Security Outlook, security laws and regulations, risk prevention skills and foreign-related security knowledge, resulting in limited teaching ability. Meanwhile, limited by salary and career development, private universities struggle to introduce full-time teachers with practical experience in public security, national security, military and cyberspace, and the part-time team is unstable, hardly guaranteeing sustainable teaching quality.

3.5. Low Student Enthusiasm and Overall Weak Security Literacy

Some students hold the wrong perception that national security is “irrelevant to themselves”, regarding it as the responsibility of the government and military, and lack vigilance against security risks in daily study and life. They are weak in cyber security, personal information protection, confidentiality awareness and foreign-related security literacy, and poor in identifying false information and preventing infiltration and instigation. Coupled with dull teaching and unrealistic content, students’ participation and learning effect are low, failing to achieve the expected education goals (Cao, 2012).

3.6. Simple Evaluation Mechanism and Superficial Supervision and Assessment

Most private universities evaluate national security education mainly through class attendance, homework and simple tests, lacking process evaluation and comprehensive assessment, which cannot effectively test students’ awareness, concept, behavior and practical ability. Meanwhile, there is no supervision and evaluation mechanism for teaching quality, teacher training, activity development and fund use, leading to “emphasis on form over effectiveness” and difficulty in forming a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement.

4. Typical Models and Experience of National Security Education in Foreign Private Universities

4.1. American Private Universities: Legal Support, Curriculum Integration, Practice Orientation and Social Coordination

The United States attaches great importance to national security education and has formed a complete system guaranteed by law, dominated by universities and supported by society. A series of laws such as the National Defense Education Act, the National Security Act and U.S. Education Reform and National Security clarify the responsibilities of universities. Top private universities including Harvard, Stanford and Georgetown generally offer majors and courses such as national security, international security, cyber security and strategic studies, deeply integrating national security education into general education, professional education and daily management.

Its main features are as follows: first, systematic curriculum system covering political, military, intelligence, cyber, anti-terrorism and economic security with interdisciplinary integration and equal emphasis on theory and practice; second, developed practical teaching in deep cooperation with government, intelligence agencies, think tanks and military enterprises; third, professional teaching staff with part-time professors from government, retired military officers and industry elites; fourth, sound social coordination mechanism with joint construction by universities, government, enterprises and think tanks (Si, 2022).

4.2. British Private Universities: Civic Education as Core, Value Guidance and Normalized Infiltration

British private universities focus on civic education and national identity, integrating national security education implicitly into general courses, campus culture and student management. Universities generally offer courses such as civic education, political theory, social research and international issues, emphasizing the cultivation of the rule of law, national responsibility, public spirit and risk prevention awareness.

The experience includes: first, implicit integration without a large number of explicit “national security” courses, but infiltrating security awareness and values into philosophy, history, law and society; second, normalized safety education including mandatory training, cyber security and anti-discrimination; third, emphasis on critical thinking through discussion and case teaching; fourth, full use of social resources in cooperation with police, communities and public organizations.

4.3. Japanese Private Universities: Integration of National Defense Education and Civic Literacy with Institutionalization

Japanese private universities take national defense education, civic literacy and crisis management as the core of national security education, supported by laws such as the National Defense Education Act and the Security Council Establishment Act. Top universities such as Waseda and Keio University offer courses related to national defense, international politics, crisis management and cyber security.

Typical practices: first, institutionalized and full coverage in talent training programs; second, prominent crisis awareness focusing on emergency response, disaster prevention and cyber security; third, military-civilian integration and school-local cooperation with Self-Defense Forces, police and fire departments; fourth, deep integration with civic education emphasizing national identity and social responsibility.

4.4. Korean Private Universities: National Consciousness-led, Systematic Curriculum and Practical Training

Korean private universities focus on national consciousness, national identity, national defense security and cyber security, promoted by the government and implemented by universities under a sound legal system. Korea University and Yonsei University offer courses such as national security, unification issues, international strategy and cyber security closely aligned with national strategy.

Main features: first, promoted as a national strategy with government planning and social participation; second, complete curriculum system covering traditional and non-traditional security; third, normalized practical training with military, police and intelligence agencies; fourth, collaborative education through classrooms, culture, associations and social practice.

4.5. Implications for Private Universities in China

The mature experience of foreign private universities provides multi-dimensional implications: first, legal protection is the premise to improve the system and clarify responsibilities; second, top-level design is the key to overall planning and normalized promotion; third, curriculum construction is the core to build a systematic and up-to-date system; fourth, practical education is the focus to strengthen scenario simulation and social service; fifth, faculty construction is the support to combine full-time and part-time teachers; sixth, collaborative linkage is the guarantee to share resources among government, universities, industry and community (Zheng, 2023).

5. Countermeasures to Improve the Quality of National Security Education in Private Universities in China

5.1. Strengthen Top-level Design and Improve Institutional Support

Private universities should set up a leading group for national security education led by school leaders, coordinating academic affairs, student affairs, ideological and political education, security and publicity departments to form joint efforts. National security education should be integrated into school development planning, talent training programs and annual assessment, ensuring sufficient class hours, funding, venues and teachers. Systematic documents including implementation plans, curriculum standards and assessment methods should be formulated to promote standardized and normalized education.

5.2. Build a Systematic Curriculum System and Optimize Teaching Content

Compulsory courses such as National Security Education (no less than 1 credit) should be offered for full coverage, and elective courses including cyber security, data security, confidentiality laws, foreign-related security and emergency management should be provided to meet diversified needs. A “theory + laws + cases + skills” integrated content system should be constructed covering key fields of the Overall National Security Outlook with timely updates. Deep integration of national security education and professional education should be promoted in engineering, business, information and art majors to realize collaborative education.

5.3. Innovate Teaching Modes and Enhance Classroom Attractiveness

Case teaching, scenario simulation, group discussion, flipped classroom and mixed teaching should be promoted to replace the single lecturing mode. Information tools such as VR/AR, short videos, MOOCs and knowledge competitions should be used to create immersive and interactive classrooms. A resource library of teaching materials, videos, cases and question banks should be established for teachers and students.

5.4. Strengthen Practical Education and Improve Students’ Practical Ability

On-campus experience centers and simulation laboratories should be built for cyber attack-defense, confidentiality identification and emergency drills. Off-campus practice bases should be established with public security, national security, cyberspace, courts and red education bases for visits and voluntary services. Themed activities such as knowledge contests and speeches should be held on the National Security Education Day to create a strong atmosphere.

5.5. Enhance Faculty Construction and Improve Professional Competence

A full-time and part-time teaching team should be equipped, and training for ideological and political teachers, counselors and professional teachers should be strengthened. Experts from public security, national security, military and industry should be employed as part-time teachers. Teaching research, collective lesson preparation and incentive mechanisms should be established to stimulate teachers’ enthusiasm.

5.6. Improve Evaluation and Assessment Mechanism and Strengthen Supervision

A diversified assessment system combining process evaluation, ability test, practice performance and behavioral literacy should be built. National security education should be included in class, counselor and teacher assessment linked to awards and promotion. A tracking and feedback mechanism for students’ security literacy should be established to continuously improve education.

5.7. Promote Collaborative Education and Build an All-dimensional Pattern

School-local cooperation should be strengthened with local committees of political and legal affairs, public security and cyberspace administrations. Home-school collaboration should be promoted through parents' meetings and official accounts. New media platforms should be used to build a full-time publicity matrix, forming an atmosphere where everyone cares for and safeguards national security.

6. Conclusion

National security is the cornerstone of national rejuvenation, and the youth are the guardians and builders of national security. As an important part of China's higher education, private universities undertake the important mission of educating a large number of young students. At present, the problems of insufficient attention, scattered courses, single form, weak faculty, lack of practice and simple evaluation seriously restrict the effectiveness of national security education.

A comparative analysis of national security education models in private universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and South Korea shows that sound legal protection, systematic curriculum, professional faculty, practical teaching and diversified collaboration are the key experiences. Private universities in China should base on their own reality, adhere to problem and goal orientation, strengthen top-level design, improve institutional support, build systematic courses, innovate teaching modes, enhance practical education, strengthen faculty, perfect evaluation mechanism and promote collaborative education, so as to comprehensively improve the pertinence and effectiveness of national security education.

In the new era, private universities must earnestly fulfill their educational mission, integrate national security education into the whole process of talent cultivation, guide young students to firmly establish the Overall National Security Outlook, enhance awareness, legal concept and responsibility, and strive to grow into a new generation worthy of the important task of national rejuvenation, making contributions to safeguarding national sovereignty, security, development interests and realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

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