

The Role of the Spirit of the May Fourth Movement in Leading Youths in the New Era*

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Abstract—The May Fourth Movement is a great revolutionary movement in the history of modern China and also an important mark of youths standing on the historical stage. This thorough anti-imperialist and anti-feudal patriotic movement not only liberated Chinese people's thoughts, but also changed China's history. Under the impact of the Internet and foreign cultures, young people are vacillating in diverse ideological cultures, and their responsibilities to be undertaken in the era is in urgent need of being guided by the spirit of the May Fourth Movement. This spirit can lead youths to inherit and carry forward the patriotic spirit, democratic and scientific spirit, dedication and responsibility spirit and progressive and innovative spirit in the period of the May Fourth Movement, dare to undertake the historical mission, and realize unification between self-growth and historic development.

Keywords—the spirit of the May Fourth Movement; youths; responsibility

I. INTRODUCTION

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 has passed a hundred years, and is a landmark event in the modern and contemporary history of China. The patriotic enthusiasm of students 100 years ago was like a volcano erupted, blowing the horn of patriotism, science and democracy. They bravely fought against the Beiyang Government and the Western Powers, and became the vanguard of Chinese revolution during the period of when China was beset with difficulties both inside and outside the country. They were a team that completely fought against feudalism and imperialism, and also undertook the mission of saving China from subjugation and ensuring its survival. Youths have been closely linked to social reform since they entered the historical stage. Therefore, the May Fourth Movement is worthy of exploring the new connotation in the times that can inspire contemporary youths to struggle. On the second anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in 1921, Li Dazhao wrote: "I hope that from now on, the Movement can be granted with some new meanings on the anniversary every year." [1] In

the new era, youths need more to be guided by the spirit of the Movement and make them the newcomers of the new era undertaking the mission of striving for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

II. NEW CONNOTATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT IN THE NEW ERA

In Xi Jinping's speech on the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, he pointed out that the May Fourth Movement is "a great patriotic revolutionary movement that is completely anti-imperialist and anti-feudal, initiated by advanced young intellectuals and participated by the broad masses of the people, a great social revolutionary movement that Chinese people set off in order to save the nation from peril, defend national dignity, and unite national power, and also a great ideological enlightenment and new cultural movement that spread new ideas, new cultures and new knowledge. It instigated the ambition and confidence of Chinese people and Chinese nation to strive for rejuvenation of the nation".[2] The greatness of the spirit of the Movement mainly lies in that it broke through the shackles of the times and liberated the ideology of people at that time so that people got the consciousness and confidence of standing up. The precious spirits left by the May Fourth Movement are mainly as follows:

A. Patriotic Spirit

Patriotic spirit is the core spirit of Chinese nation. During the May Fourth Movement, progressive youths maintained a patriotic heart at the time of China's peril and a sense of mission to the country "Everyone is responsible for his country's ups and downs". They walked in the forefront of the times, shouted the slogan of "to externally fight for sovereignty and internally punish traitors" and "to abolish the Twenty-One Demands", raised a thorough anti-imperialist and anti-feudal patriotic movement, and got Marxism sprouted. Young people got their self-development closely linked to the destiny of the country and are also very eager for the liberation of Chinese nation and revival. The incomparably strong patriotic spirit demonstrated by the Movement awakened China who was like a lion having been sleeping for many years. Progressive youths' sense of being prepared for any eventualities made the aggrieved Chinese nation seeing the hope of the future. Judging from the development course of China and the development history of

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the world, the patriotic spirit of patriotism glowed in different colors in different historical periods. Every generation has its specific historical responsibility, and in contemporary times patriotic spirit is still the theme of the times. With respect to inheriting and carrying forward the spirit of the Movement, it is needed to encourage youths to insist on maintaining the unity between patriotism and socialism, enhance their theoretical identity, political identity and emotional identity to socialism with Chinese characteristics, so as to continue walking on the way of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the leading of the party, arm their minds with the socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era, transform patriotic emotions into actions, and strive to realize the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation.

B. Democratic and Scientific Spirit

The democratic and scientific spirit during the Movement was a patriotic behavior for pushing down the feudalism and saving the country as stimulated by the double blows such as the more than two thousand years of intrinsic feudalism restriction and the extortion of Western Powers. Democracy is opposite to authoritarianism, and was called for in the times. Taking the awakening of democratic consciousness as fresh blood, Chinese people began a complete anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle, inspiring and developing the democratic spirit. Democracy and science, namely "Mr. De" and "Mr. Sci" was an anti-feudalism and anti-authoritarianism banner. Young intellectuals at that time advocated democracy against dictatorship, promoted atheism, criticized feudal superstitions, and hoped to break through the confinement from the fatuous feudalism. Advocating democracy was to oppose the oppression of feudal autocracy on people; promoting science was to oppose the tendency of feudal superstition. The Movement criticized old thinking and old rituals, and advocated creating a new world. It was very rare and commendable under the social conditions of that time. Democratic and scientific spirit removed the ideological obstacles for the awakening of Chinese nation's consciousness and opened the way going forward. Because what the times lack will be called by people, democracy and science are the tireless pursuit of the youths. For the sake of enduring development of Chinese nation, people always maintain the right to shout. Today, with the steady development of socialism, the democratic politics and scientific development in China have far exceeded the expectations of the May Fourth Movement. The spirit of the Movement will be continuously passed down today. Democratic and scientific spirit encourages people to understand and participate in the national democracy, and strive to undertake national mission. Scientific spirit becomes particularly important in today's complex international environment. Without support of science, a country will lag behind.

C. Dedication and Responsibility Spirit

This spirit is always the core of the spirit of the Movement. In order to overthrow the old world, countless revolutionary martyrs sacrificed, they explored advanced theories and devote themselves to the revolution of saving the country with the patriotic enthusiasm. This spirit was

always continued in the revolutionary process. In the speech on the 100 anniversary meeting of the May Fourth Movement, General Secretary Xi Jinping said that Mao Zedong was 28 years old when the First Conference of the CPC was convened, Zhou Enlai was 23 years old when he joined the Chinese Communist Party, and Deng Xiaoping was 18 when he joined the Chinese Communist Youth League. [2] It is precisely because when they are young they have had strong patriotism, dedicated to create a revolutionary cause of China. Nowadays people live in a peaceful era. They don't have to sacrifice themselves like the revolutionary martyrs, but the spirit of dedication can't be lost and has new connotations in the new era. People must be brave and willing to make dedication and undertake responsibilities, learn from advanced model figures, and work hard. Youths should dedicate their youth time to the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and depict a new image of contemporary youth by practical actions.

D. Progressive and Innovative Spirit

It is not difficult to see from the development course of the Movement that the innovative spirit is also very prominent. Mr. Sun Yat-sen once commented: "Since the May Fourth Movement raised by students in Peking University, the general patriotic youths are all preparing for reformation in the future with innovative ideas." [2] The reformation mentioned here is the so-called innovation. In the 20th century, people were eager to create a scientific and democratic era, and to create a new life, new society, and new world. For the old thinking in the past, innovation was a bold breakthrough. It not only challenged the feudal thought that had dominated China for more than two thousand years but also was used by progressive youths to lead Chinese people to accept new thought and new ideas. The anti-feudalism action, the promotion of atheism, and the new cultural movement at that time all embodied the spirit of innovation. Innovation is the source of all progress. Standing at the peak of the tide of the times, young people should strive to be innovative, take initiative to make innovation, seek for change, new things and practice. Only in this way can the socialism with Chinese characteristics be more revitalized and powerful.

III. NEW CHALLENGES FOR CONTEMPORARY YOUTHS IN THE NEW ERA

Now China is undergoing a period of great reform and development; its politics, culture, economy, and people's lives are undergoing tremendous changes. Young people's ideological concepts are also changing, especially in their spiritual world. As a group of people, youths shoulder the historical mission of enriching and strengthening China, revitalizing Chinese nation and seeking for people's happiness. As the backbone of the future society, young people's responsibilities in society appear quite important, and also attracted attention from all sectors of the society. People's awareness of responsibility in the era is related to the development of China in the future. The spirit of the Movement also provides an inexhaustible spiritual treasure for the awareness construction.

A. *It Is in Urgent Need of Enhancing Youths' Awareness of Responsibility*

The essence of human beings is the sum of all social relations, and they may encounter many choices in work and life. Dedication and responsibility are entangled in different choices; making choice on the role in the society becomes lifelong issue of a person. China is now in the best period of development. In the past construction reforms in China, there were many people who dedicated themselves to the development of the country. In contrast, the responsibility of contemporary young people is still far from sufficient. This point is precisely reflected in many social hotspot events such as the event of people forcibly occupying seats on high-speed rail, and the event of passengers beating bus driver. People's ideas and abilities cannot be fully exerted in practice, showing a phenomenon of "strong in will but weak in power" typed responsibility assumption. As a reserve force of China, compared with the past, the current status of people afraid of being heavy work and duties is caused by their strong self-consciousness; the current people are easier to focus on own interest and ignore the collective interests. With the rapid development of economy, the increase of employment pressure, and the opening of ideology, most people focus on seeking their own interests, and individual consciousness is more concerned by young people than collective consciousness. Such a social environment is a challenge in urgent need of being concerned by people.

B. *It Is Needed to Enhance the Unity of Knowledge and Action*

While cultivating strong ideological awareness, it is also needed to put it into practice. Studying the spirit of the May Fourth Movement is to turn it into ideological weapon, and to better inherit the essence of it to transform the world. The unity of knowing and action is not only the requirement to carry forward the spirit of the May Fourth Movement, but also the fundamental purpose of learning all knowledge. Now people's emphasis on theoretical knowledge makes the corresponding action weakened; many young people become the giants of speech and the dwarf of action. "Empty talk may harm a country, but hard work may make a country strong", Chinese nation's standing up, getting rich and strong, is precisely a success obtained by virtue of the unity of knowledge and action. The un-synchronization of knowledge and action is likely to get theory out of touch with reality, and make it difficult to make innovation in thinking. Practice helps to promote people's understanding of knowledge, and knowledge can also broaden the channels of practice. Youths should consciously link their personal pursuits to the future of the country and turn their strong patriotism into patriotic action.

C. *It Is Still Needed to Affirm the Ideals and Beliefs*

The "Spirit of the May Fourth Movement" bred by the May Fourth Movement leads the development of young people in the new era. Youths are like the vibrant sun at eight or nine o'clock and are the hope of a nation's future. Without affirmed ideals and beliefs, a person would be like un-rooted tree on the verge of collapse, even if he achieves higher achievements. For this reason, many people have forgotten

the initial aims and only lust for material comforts, harmed themselves and their families and broken the image of the party and the government in the hearts of people. This spirit is like a sword hanging overhead, inspired young people not to lose their way and deviate from the fixed route. Whether young people in the new era have firm ideals and beliefs may directly affect the future development direction of China. It is necessary to lay a solid foundation, seek for scientific truth, dare to face the social reality and get self-progress organically integrated with the social trend. [4]

IV. THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT OF THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT TO LEAD YOUTHS ASSUMING THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

The spirit of the May Fourth Movement can be adopted to lead youths to shape the consciousness of responsibility in the era to make the spirit shine a new glory in the new journey. In the course of a hundred years of development, it broke through the barriers of time and space, and resonated in the hearts of young people from generation to generation. Youth should make in-depth exploration of the spirit, dare to assume the historical mission, and achieve the unity of self-development and historical development. In Xi Jinping's speech on the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, he pointed out: "young people of the new era of China should undertake the responsibilities of the era. The era calls for assuming responsibilities, and national rejuvenation is the responsibility of youths. Mr. Lu Xun once said, 'youths are full of vitality. When meeting forest, they can turn it into flat land; when meeting wilderness, they can plant trees on it; when meeting desert, they can dig out the wells'. In the new journey of realizing the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation, Chinese people are in urgent need of cultivating the spirit of responsibility assumption in facing major challenges, resisting major risks, overcoming major obstacles, and resolving major contradictions. As long as young people are brave to shoulder heavy burdens, overcome difficulties, and resist risk bravely, can socialism with Chinese characteristics become full of vitality, stamina and hope". [2] Hence, in order to better inherit the spirit of the Movement and to be a pioneer in the times, youths must take the initiative to shape the awareness of assuming responsibilities of the times with the spirit of the May Fourth Movement.

A. *Carrying Forward the Patriotic Sentiments and Being Brave to Shoulder the Heavy Responsibilities of the Times*

As the only longest civilization that has never been interrupted, Chinese civilization is mainly because Chinese people have always held highly the banner of patriotism. Many people have no fear of even sacrificing their own lives in order to safeguard the fundamental interests of the country. The May Fourth Movement broken out 100 years ago is a great patriotic revolutionary movement that is completely anti-imperialist and anti-feudal, initiated by advanced young intellectuals and participated by the broad masses of the people. Patriotism is the core content of the spirit of the Movement. Each generation has its own baton. Under the call of patriotism, youths in different periods actively and

courageously shouldered the responsibilities of the times. They saved the nation from danger, rescued the people from pain and nervousness, and even make unremitting efforts in the revolution, construction, and reform under the leading of the Communist Party of China. Mr. Sun Yat-sen said: "What is the biggest thing for being a man? It is just to know how to be patriotic. General Secretary Xi Jinping profoundly pointed out: "patriotism is the deepest and most enduring emotion in the world. It is the source of a person's morality and the foundation of meritorious service". In order to make something different, young people in the new era must work hard to respond to the call of the party and the state, inherit the fine tradition of patriotism, hold highly the banner of patriotism, and safeguard the unity of the country both in ideology and action. Patriotism is to get the fate of individual closely linked to the motherland without separation for any moment and always keep the motherland in mind no matter where they are. Patriotism is not abstract, can't be talked about only in words, but must be implemented in concrete practical actions. Whether in work or study, young people must do their own things well and play the role of main force and the commando team in their work and study.

B. Adhering to Marxism and Establishing Correct Values

Marxist theory can teach college students to view, analyze and solve problems with the views of contradiction, movement, development, and connection so as to help them to face life positively, not give up, bravely pursue life dreams, cherish youth time, and seize social opportunities, strive to realize the value and dream of life. In the era of economic globalization, it is quite necessary to guide youths to establish correct views of the world, life and value. Compared with the period of the May Fourth Movement, the current era has changed dramatically. Contemporary youths as socialist successors have the responsibility to study Marxism, the theoretical evolution result of Marxism in China, the main ideas of Xi Jinping's series of speeches, and the socialist core values, and strictly cultivate themselves on those basis to become socialist successors both having scientific knowledge and theoretical level. Only by upholding the guiding position of Marxism, establishing common ideal, and practicing the socialist concept of honor and disgrace can it be available to grasp the core values of contemporary youths, cultivate true socialist successors, and provide talent guarantee for constructing harmonious socialist society with Chinese characteristics and realizing Chinese dream.

C. Strengthening Innovation Drive and Continuing Leading the Development Direction

In the long history of human beings, there are many historical turning points which are all marked by innovation in an aspect. Cultivating the innovative spirit of young people is a long-term task. In order to get good results, firstly it is needed to constantly cultivate a sense of innovation; namely in the face of various unknown areas, people should have a spirit of courage and hard work, and dare to doubt the achievements made by predecessors, and look for creative point in specific research process. Secondly, it is needed to cultivate creative thinking. Youths should be cultivated in aspects of inspiration and ideas through a variety of ways to

form creative thinking and prepare for making innovative practice. Thirdly, it is needed to cultivate innovative knowledge and capabilities. Innovative knowledge is the solid foundation of innovative activities, just like water having source, wood having root and cooking having rice. Innovative ability is a practical ability to transform innovation consciousness and thinking into valuable spiritual products or material products. It is the confirmation and externalization of innovation consciousness and thinking in practice. Fourthly it is needed to cultivate a spirit of perseverance. No innovation is smooth sailing; only by taking tenacious willpower as the basis can it be possible to achieve the ultimate success. It is necessary to overcome difficulties, be not afraid of being frustrated, until success, to truly realize the value and significance of innovation.

D. Advocating Truth Seeking and Making Life Wonderful

The May Fourth Movement exalted the banner of democracy and science because of the persistent exploration and pursuit of truth, and its treatment of science with an attitude of being realistic and pragmatic. In the process of making research, young people should uphold the scientific spirit, keep in mind the general secretary Xi Jinping's emphasis "If you don't study hard, you can't add your skill; if you don't have a firm will, you can't finish your studies', in study, it is precious to be diligent, studious and persistent". In daily study and work, it is needed to start from small things and work hard to create a beautiful landscape of life. Today, with China's rapid development, young people must work hard to cultivate both professional knowledge and real skills. Youths are required to be not afraid of difficulties, take initiative to practice in grass-root level and the front line to increase their life experience. They should bravely stand on the peak of the wave of modern economy, inherit the scientific spirit of the May Fourth Movement, and keep in mind the words of General Secretary Xi Jinping while learning and making research. Other attempts to opportunistic tricks are doomed not possible to make different. [5]

V. CONCLUSION

In today's world, the competition for comprehensive national strengths becomes particularly fierce. As a new force in the new era, youths play a huge role in realizing the goal of "two hundred years" and the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation. Contemporary youths should understand their historical mission, make effort to learn professional knowledge, enhance their abilities, establish a life goal of realizing their life value and being bold to make progress, get self-growth linked with national development, improve their skills to realize the goal of "two hundred years" and the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation, lay a solid foundation for making something different in the future and finish one and another historical mission and tasks of the times.

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