

Theoretical Education: The Core Engine of the Reform of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

As the core course for higher education institutions to implement the fundamental task of fostering character and civic virtue, ideological and political theory courses (hereinafter referred to as "ideological and political courses") are the main channel and main position to spread Marxism, and the soul course to realize the connotative development of higher education. In order to make the ideological and political courses "into the brain, the ears, and the heart", in the process of teaching and reform of the ideological and political courses, the theoretical education must be strengthened to convince people by reasoning, increase academic rationality, and pursue theoretical thoroughness.

Keywords: *Theoretical education, ideological and political courses, teaching reform, core engine*

1. INTRODUCTION

Engels once said: "If a nation wants to stand on the peak of science, it cannot be without theoretical thinking for a moment"[1]. Therefore, it is an obligatory responsibility of teachers of ideological and political theory to train qualified socialist builders and reliable successors with the logical power of theory. Moreover, it is the basic direction of the reform and innovation of ideological and political courses. This article mainly analyzes the importance of strengthening theoretical education in ideological and political courses in higher education institutions from the three levels of "why should be reasonable", "what kind of reasons should be valued" and "how to be reasonable".

2. WHY SHOULD THEORETICAL EDUCATION BE STRENGTHENED IN THE TEACHING OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL COURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS?

2.1. Analysis from the Dimension of Academic Rationality

Marx said in the introduction to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: "Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter" [2]. Practice has repeatedly proved that whoever can better

grasp the use of theoretical thinking can seize the high ground of thinking, be brave in pioneering and innovating, and grasp the laws of science, and ultimately win success. Without theoretical thinking, it will be difficult to keep pace with the times, to innovate and rise in great vigor, and to achieve a qualitative leap. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle once defined a human being as a rational animal. It can be seen that reason constitutes the fundamental behavior that makes people human beings. The theoretical thoroughness comes from people's revealing and grasping of nature, society, and the nature of human beings. Thorough theories not only have scientificity and the truthfulness, but also have the significance of methodology and value guidance, being able to explaining history and reality, and guiding practice. Teachers of ideological and political theory should be good at using the basic principles, basic methods, and value orientation of Marxism to explain history, analyze reality, and guide practice, and guide university students to deepen their understanding of the scientificity, truthfulness and partialness of Marxism. If there is no gripping theory, the truthfulness and scientificity of Marxism are a kind of arbitrariness. As some scholars have pointed out, "Ideological and political courses are not purely political preaching or political propaganda. It has its own subject affiliation and academic rationality support, which shall use academics to value politics, and use truth, logic, and laws to uphold the ideal of communism, the belief in socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the confidence to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation [3]. For example, in the face of neoliberals who believe that human beings are isolated atomically "rational" people, everyone only needs to think about themselves and conduct profit analysis from their own perspectives, and the whole world will become better. For this selfish value, we can refute it from the perspective of academic

rationality. Marx told us: "The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations"[4]. If teachers of ideological and political theory do not have a thorough grasp of this theory and cannot use Marxist theory to analyze and explain, it is easy to lead the failure of grasping the essence of ideology of university students, failing to achieve the educational purpose of fostering character and civic virtue of ideological and political courses.

2.2. Analysis from the Reality Dimension

Nowadays, China is in a critical period of peaceful rise and national rejuvenation. From the perspective of the international situation, the world today is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century: the increasingly intensified strategic game between great powers, the in-depth adjustment of international pattern and international order, and the Chinese nation's approaching of the center of the world stage. From the perspective of the domestic situation, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the Chinese nation is at the historical intersection of realizing the "Two Centenary" goals. There are vague theoretical understanding and even extreme thoughts among university students in the era when they are facing the complicated international and domestic situations and the complicated information. For example, university students have the doubts: Marxism has been in existence for 170 years. The death-knell of capitalism predicted by it has not sounded. Does it mean that it is outmoded? Do the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of Communism in East Europe mean that Marxism has failed? Arguments such as "It will take China 300 years of being a colony before it can become Hong Kong" are widely discussed. Some students even asked, "Does the emphasis on adhering to Jinping XI's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era mean a return to despotism or a departure from the idea of Marxism that the people are the subject?"

Targeted at the speeches such as "despotism" and "core" in public opinion, we can quote Engels's article of On Authority in 1872, which summarized the experience and lessons of the failure of the Paris Commune, and scientifically expounded the inevitability of authority, especially the great significance for proletarian parties, and emphasized "Without authority, there can be no concerted action...on the one hand, a certain authority, no matter how delegated, and, on the other hand, a certain subordination, are things which, independently of all social organization, are imposed upon us together with the material conditions under which we produce and make products circulate."[5]. Xiaoping DENG pointed out, "Any collective leadership must have a core, and leadership without a core is unreliable. The core of the first generation of leadership is Chairman Mao. Since Chairman Mao was the core of leadership, the 'Cultural Revolution' did not bring down the Communist Party. The second generation of leadership is actually the core of me. Since we have this core, even if

there were changes of two leaders, they did not affect the leadership of our party which has always been stable"[6]. From the perspective of reality, in the face of severe international and domestic challenges and major opportunities, our party must take charge of the "four-great" projects, and must strengthen the centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, especially must establish and maintain a stable core of leadership with strong cohesion, appeal and mobilization where the fundamental interests of the party and the country lie.

It can be seen that if teachers of ideological and political theory have no support of academic rationality, it is difficult for them to gain insight into the profound nature behind the changes in the world pattern. If they do not thoroughly understand the historical laws, the theoretical truths and dialectical logic behind the great principles, they will not make ends meet or even can do nothing to help when dealing with the complicated social thoughts. Only by allowing students to deeply understand and master the basic principles of Marxism can they understand the laws of human social development and Chinese social development, and consciously fight against various non-Marxist trends of thought, thereby establishing the ideals and beliefs of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

2.3. Analysis from the Dimension of the Reform and Innovation of the Teaching of Ideological and Political Courses

Ideological and political courses in higher education institutions are the kindling that spreads Marxist theory and the main battlefield that safeguards national ideological security; teachers of ideological and political theory in higher education institutions are the main force to research, expound, and publicize the latest achievements of Marxist theory and train qualified builders and successors of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In order to foster character and civic virtue in ideological and political courses, the rational regulations of human beings must be followed firstly. Only on the basis of value reasons can students truly recognize the content of the courses and be convinced by the logic of ideological and political courses themselves.

From the perspective of the name of the course, compared with the ideological and political courses in middle schools, the ideological and political theory courses in higher education institutions have two more characters of "theory". The academic rationality is the unique background of ideological and political courses in higher education institutions. The essential attributes, the nature of the courses, and the training goals of ideological and political courses in higher education institutions and the socialist direction of running schools require us to value theories. Therefore, the core content of the ideological and political courses in higher education institutions is theoretical narration, telling the basic principles of classic Marxism and the latest theoretical achievements of the

Sinicization of Marxism, providing theoretical support for the ideals and beliefs of contemporary university students. Teachers should highlight the theoretical color of ideological and political courses, guide university students to think about problems from a theoretical perspective, improve their theoretical literacy, and lay the foundation and pave the way for them to strengthen theoretical thinking and reach the peak of science. In his speech on March 18, General Secretary Jinping XI put forward the "eight unities", the first of which is to "adhere to the unity of political consciousness and academic rationality"[7]. This requires teachers of ideological and political theory to master basic theories well, thoroughly understand the teaching content, and adhere to the unity of science and belief based on the original study and learning of classic works, show the charm of theory, and make the ideological and political courses more colorful to enable students systematically master the ideology and methodology of Marxism, the historical process and theoretical achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism, and China's modern and contemporary historical development and historical experience. Based on this, teachers should train students' political awareness, political orientation, and enhance their moral quality and legal spirit, and guide them to make correct value judgments and value choices, and recognize and practice core socialist values.

Practice has shown that the more profound foundation of Marxist theory of the teachers of ideological and political theory in higher education institutions, the more skillful the theoretical discourse, the more clearly can they present the rigorous logic behind the political judgment, and the more effective can they respond to the students' theoretical and practical puzzles, the more freely can they transform from the textbook language to the teaching language, thus finally convincing people with reason and strengthening students' political identity. On the contrary, they can only copy everything indiscriminately and transplant mechanically and repeat what the book says, which is difficult to go "into the brain, the ears, and the heart". Therefore, if the teaching of ideological and political courses wants to achieve practical results, it must "convince people by reasoning", strive for clear thinking, and increase the depth of theory.

3. WHAT THEORETICAL EDUCATION SHOULD BE USED FOR THE TEACHING OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL COURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS?

Ideological and political courses in higher education institutions are a discipline with high academics, strong theoretical property and high practical value. If teachers in the classroom only repeat what the book says, there will inevitably be the problem of low head-up rate of university students in class, thus affecting the teaching effect of ideological and political courses. However, in the investigation and survey, many university students said

that they are really not disinterested in theory. If the theory can have rigorous logic and rich levels, and can inspire their perception of life or society, and enrich their humanistic quality, it will definitely be welcomed by university students. What exactly does "theory" in the ideological and political theory courses mean? General Secretary Jinping XI mentioned in his speech at the ceremony commemorating the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx, "In the history of human thought, in the aspect of scientificity, truthfulness, influence, and dissemination, no ideological theory can reach the height of Marxism, and no theory can have such a huge impact on the world like Marxism. The most valuable and influential spiritual wealth that Marx left us is the scientific theory named after him - Marxism. This theory is like a magnificent sunrise, illuminating the way for human beings to explore historical laws and seek for self-liberation." It is believed that "theory" mainly refers to Marxism and the innovative achievements of the Sinicization of Marxist theory in China.

3.1. Value the Classic Marxist-Leninist Principles

Classical Marxist writers respect the people and their great practice, respect the objective laws of social development and all civilization achievements created by human beings, and apply dialectical materialism and historical materialism to understand and change the world. Therefore, Marxism is everlasting in the face of the challenges of various theories and the tests of practice. These basic standpoints and basic methods are the magic key to achieve the "theoretical thoroughness" of ideological and political courses.

On May 4, 2018, General Secretary Jinping XI pointed out in his important speech to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx: "Marxism is a scientific theory that creatively reveals the laws of the development of human society. Marxism is a theory of the people that has firstly created the ideological system for people to realize their own liberation. Marxism is a theory of practice that guides the people's action to change the world. And Marxism is an open theory that constantly develops and always stands at the forefront of the times. Adhering to the guidance of Marxism and comprehensively spreading Marxism in higher education institutions are the main tasks of the teaching of ideological and political courses in higher education institutions in the new era, which are also the truth to be explained in the teaching of ideological and political courses in higher education institutions.

Implement the standpoints, viewpoints and methods of Marxism in teaching, and apply solid foundation of Marxist theory to analyze and research the specific problems in the revolution, construction and reform of China, and use theoretical thinking to conduct theoretical summary based on practice to form major theoretical achievements that guide practice. Through the reading of classics, strong evidence can be provided for the

theoretical analysis in the classroom, which can also provide a solid guarantee for the in-depth study after class. Through lots of arguments and relevant theories in terms of argumentation, classics have the characteristics of scientificity and logicity theoretically. For example, if we introduce the reading of classics during the teaching of the course of Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism, we can enable students to have a resonance towards the classroom knowledge through the knowledge system and the intrinsic relationship of the discipline, thus improving the actual effect of the teaching of ideological and political courses and improving the explanatory power of theory. Noticeably, the learning and application of classics, especially the learning and application of the basic standpoints, viewpoints and methods of Marxism, and the mastering of its way of thinking is an important way to improve the quality of theoretical thinking.

3.2. Value the Innovative Theoretical Achievements of the Party

It is not difficult for us to see that the scientificity and the vitality of Marxism are most prominently showed in the process of practicing socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the reform of the teaching of ideological and political courses, the excitement in any forms cannot substitute the fundamental position of content and theory. This requires teachers to organically integrate the lasted research achievements in relevant fields into the teaching process to facilitate the academic credentials of the ideological and political courses in higher education institutions. The Communist Party of China has led the Chinese people to always adhere to and develop Marxism in the process of revolution, construction and reform, combine the basic principles of Marxism with the reality of China, and constantly sinicize Marxism, and has successively formed theoretical achievements such as Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Important Theory of "Three Represents", the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, realizing the great leap of the Chinese nation from "standing up" to "getting rich" to "becoming strong". The teaching of ideological and political courses in higher education institutions aims to enable students to comprehend the truthfulness of Marxism and the theoretical achievements of its Sinicization, and enable them to deeply recognize the truthfulness of Marxism and the theory of its Sinicization through the achievements and practice of China's development.

For example, in the process that the Communist Party of China led the Chinese people to conduct the turbulent revolution, they had encountered hardships and setbacks. However, it is the Communist Party of China represented by Zedong MAO who objected to the dogmatism and bookishness of Marxism and combined Marxism with the specific practice of Chinese revolution, came down to earth that embarked on the revolutionary path using rural

areas to encircle the cities and seizing state power with military force and won the victory of the new-democratic revolution. Just as Xiaoping DENG said, "Marx and Lenin never said to use rural areas to encircle the cities. This principle was still unavailable in the world then. However, Comrade Zedong MAO pointed out the specific road of revolution according to the specific conditions in China, led the people to establish revolutionary bases in areas where the enemy's control was weak, and finally seized the state power using rural areas to encircle the cities"[8]. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, under the leadership of General Secretary Jinping XI, we have entered the new era of the socialist modernization, taken Marxism as a powerful ideological weapon to know the world, grasp the laws, pursue the truth, and transform the world in the lively practice of hard work, and formed the latest achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism -- Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as well as the Scientific Ideology and Methodology, providing a powerful ideological weapon for the promotion of the new development of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

4. HOW TO ADHERE TO THEORETICAL EDUCATION IN THE TEACHING OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL COURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS?

Teachers of ideological and political theory in higher education institutions must constantly improve their own theoretical accomplishments. In addition to the standards of the "six-should" proposed by the General Secretary in the symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory held on March 18, the following points must be also done in the process of teaching theories.

4.1. Teachers Should Have Dialogues with Classic Texts

Comrade Jinping XI once said: "Party members should make a habit of reading Marxist theories and understanding the principles behind them, and regard this as a kind of spiritual pursuit. We should use the Marxist classics to cultivate righteousness, refine our thinking, improve our levels of understanding and guide our practice." Teachers of ideological and political theory should present the original context and original expression of the basic principles of Marxism in an original manner, use classic texts to support the scientificity and truthfulness of the basic principles of Marxism, make up for the incompleteness of general teaching materials, and guide students to learn the multi-dimensional, multi-level, multi-perspective theoretical vision and logical tension when Marx analyzed problems. In classroom teaching, the method of using classics to drive principles should be

adopted, together with the combination of the reading of classics led by teachers and the learning of classics of students.

4.2. Teachers Should Adhere to the Combination of Convincing People by Reasoning and Moving People with Emotions

Teachers should pay attention to theoretical interpretation to convince people by reasoning, and focus more on humanistic care to move people with emotions to realize the penetration of emotions when discussing that are fair and reasonable and the blending of emotions and theories. Teachers should strive to shape their emotional charm aspects such as the attentive care and sincere respect of students, the everlasting enthusiasm and single-hearted devotion of the teaching of ideological and political courses, and the noble belief of Marxism; they should be good at using the laws of emotional experience, and pay attention to the emotional process of integrating new ideas into the content of ideological and political courses to facilitate students to have a consensus on new ideas, form resonance, and put them into action and achieve the combination of "knowledge, emotion, intention, and action". They should have emotional insertion to infect students with full emotions. For example, when teaching "Huanghuagang Uprising" in the course of *Outline of Chinese Modern History*, the titles of the 72 martyrs are only rigid symbols in the textbook. However, if the teacher chooses to introduce and recite the *To My Wife* of martyr Juemin LIN with deep emotions, the students would tend to be attracted and moved since it turns out that those resolute martyrs are also people full of tenderness. Through this way of interpretation, the teacher would have helped students overcome the strangeness and boring feelings of those people and things in the past.

4.3. Teachers Should Adhere to the Principle of Integrating Theory with Practice

To achieve convincing people by reasoning, the teaching of ideological and political courses should also be closely related to the ideological reality of university students. What are the university students thinking and paying attention to? What are their ideological confusions and what are their theoretical expectations? These are the questions that teachers of ideological and political theory must grasp accurately. Good teaching effects can only be achieved through teaching students in accordance of their aptitudes and suiting the methods to the situation. Generally speaking, the theoretical concerns of university students are either major practical problems or confusions in their thinking, both of which often overlap. The teaching of ideological and political courses should take the initiative to respond to the theoretical concerns of university students, train their theoretical interests, and improve their theoretical thinking ability. For example,

how to understand the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation since modern times, how will the Chinese dream be realized? Why is the leadership of the party the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics? How to realize the comprehensive leadership of the party? What is the Chinese wisdom in the reform and opening-up, what's China's plan for the global governance? So on and so forth. These major theoretical and practical issues are both the important content of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the theoretical concerns of university students. The integrating theory with practice should be implemented through multiple links such as pre-class preparation, classroom teaching, teacher-student interaction, practical guidance, and effect evaluation. The forms of practice can be both classroom discussion, interactive Q&A, keynote speech, special debate, and social investigation and productive labor, and so on. In this way, students can be promoted to enhance their cognition of new ideas through the absorption of theoretical nutrients and the perception of practical experience.

5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of adhering to the basic standpoints and basic methods of Marxism, teachers of ideological and political theory must examine the practical foundation and practical needs of the contemporary development of Marxism with a broader perspective, adhere to the problem-oriented approach, and further promote the combination of Marxism with the specific reality of the development of contemporary China, and constantly open up a new realm for the development of Marxism in the 21st century to ensure the vitality of Marxism that keeps pace with the times. Contemporary university students should undertake the historical mission of carrying forward the undertakings of the predecessors to the future and building on past achievements. Therefore, the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics should be used unswervingly to educate university students. Teachers of ideological and political theory in higher education institutions should deepen their understanding of the basic principles of Marxism in the education and teaching practice, and use their true knowledge, true understanding, true belief and true use of Marxism to guide students to enable the constant improvement of the quality of the teaching of ideological and political courses, and to enable the courses truly become excellent ones that university students really love with lifelong benefits, thus realizing the highest value goal of fostering character and civic virtue of ideological and political courses.

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