

# College Students' Political Identity: Connotation, Crisis and Countermeasure

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**Abstract.** Political identity is an important manifestation of political socialization of college students, but also an important content of ideological and political education in colleges. This paper uses Marxist political theory to examine the connotation and process of political identity of college students. Thus, it explores the influence of political ecology on the political identity of college students. Focusing on the crisis of political identity, this paper discusses the effective ways to promote the political identity of college students from school education, in order to promote the ideological and political work of college students.

## 1 Introduction

At present, China is undergoing a profound transformation. As the barometer of the times, the group of college students always responds quickly and directly to the changes in Chinese social and political reformation with their sharpest and most intuitive sense of political identity. As an important subject, college students' political identity is concerned. As the most sensitive group to national transformation and social reformation, college students' political identity has become an important guarantee for national stability and social development.

## 2 Analysis of the Concept of Political Identity

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels called the sense of the working class belonging as class consciousness. By promoting to the political expression, people in the social and political relations gradually realized the acceptance of the political community, and finally completed the recognition of the nation-state. History has long shown that broad political identity is the basis of political legitimacy and political stability, while avoiding social contradictions and political instability to the greatest extent. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, has asserted that man is born as political animals. If a polity is to achieve the purpose of long-term stability, it is necessary to make the people have the willing of all parts of the polis (all classes) join and embrace, which let it exist and continue.<sup>1</sup> The reason why people are political animal is that people are born to become citizens. They expect to seek the meaning of individual existence and action in political life.

The concept of political identity expressed in the *China Encyclopedia • Politics* is that "People in a certain social life, always in a certain social contact to determine their identity. They regard themselves as party members of a political party, members of a class, a participant in a political process, or a suitor of a political belief. This phenomenon is political identity."<sup>2</sup> In the process of political life, members of society will gradually generate a sense of emotional trust, conscious ownership and subjective recognition of political system and political power. This support and recognition of the political community is the basis for the stability and development of the modern state. On the contrary, if the lack of basic political consensus, it will affect the stability of the political system and shake the legitimacy of the foundation of the rule. Through the process of political identity, the individual gains self-consciousness. People establish a connection with political life. In the process of political operation, people create a three-dimensional personal political role and complete the establishment of citizenship.

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle. *Politics* [M]. Commercial Press, 1997: 188.

<sup>2</sup> *China Encyclopedia • Politics* [M]. China Encyclopedia Press, 1992:501

### **3 Political identity of college students**

#### **3.1 The Concept of Political Identity of College Students**

In the current environment in which China is committed to perfecting democracy, contemporary political identity of college students is highlighted as an important political issue. College students are the constructors and successors of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The political identity of college students plays a vital role in the stability and development of the country. It is related to the party's long-term ruling mass base, which affects the stability of the political system and social progress.

The political identity of college students is a kind of subjective cognition of the special social group to the national political system, which embodies the recognition of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics. College students, in terms of their level of knowledge and practical experience, already have a certain understanding for the national conditions, the world situation and the people. College students can form a basic value judgments and attitudes, reflecting the concerns of country's political and social development .

#### **3.2 The Process of College Students' Political Identity**

The formation process of political identity is refers to the identity subject in incline to achieve goals in the process of its mental structure elements and the relationship between the subjective and objective factors and function way.<sup>3</sup> This sense of identity is a social attribute that does not form naturally and needs to be shaped through the acquired education. The forming process of university students' political identity includes three stages: cognition - assimilation - belief, which is connected and progressive. Cognitive process is the understanding of the political system and political ecology from college students. This information, as a foreign power, has attracted people's attention. Its range and frequency of occurrence affect people's attention. However, high intensity can also trigger feelings of resentment. College students choose which political factors to pay more attention to according to their needs and interests. Assimilation process is college students on the basis of cognition of the political system, compared with the existing concept, judgment, refactoring, to assimilate and absorb ideological theory and political reality which conformed the scope of their original cognitive. In contrast to their own cognitive dissonance, they may reconstruct their own cognition, or continue to remain skeptical after comparing judgment. The belief here refers to the integration and internalization of college students through cognition and assimilation, and the acceptance of mainstream political culture and political ecology. They gradually form their own firm political beliefs and integrate into the process of thought and practice. Political identity reflects an attitude for or against, which is a kind of political attitude and expression. It has a basis for political authority and legitimacy, and it plays a very important role in political life.

#### **4 The Two - way Influence of Political Ecology on College Students' Political Identity**

In the survey data of the ideological and political education development report of Chinese college students in 2016, the university students have a high sense of identity in many aspects such as Chinese political road and theory, political party recognition and political trust. For example: 91.3% of the surveyed college students are proud of being a member of the Chinese nation. 88.3% of the students agree that "to achieve national renaissance must adhere to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics." 88.4% of college students agree that "there is no new China without the Communist Party." 77.6% of college students expressed willingness to join the Communist Party of China, who is motivated by joining the party.<sup>4</sup> From the above findings can be seen, at present, China's college students generally have a firm political stance, a positive political attitude, a strong

<sup>3</sup> Xue Zhongguo. Comments on the Theory of Psychological Mechanism of Foreign Political Identity [J] . Social Science Front, 2009.09

<sup>4</sup> Report on the development of Ideological and political education of Chinese college students 2016, Construction project of philosophy and social science development report of Ministry of Education, Task group on the development of Ideological and political education for Chinese students

sense of political participation. But the data also shows that there are still some students have a political identity crisis. Although the proportion is not large, but this is still a part of group that not to be underestimated.

College students are diligent in thinking and creative. Their views have the spirit of independence and rational criticism, and their opinions often cause significant repercussions in society. College students are two opposing sides of the attitude and tendency of national political ecology: identity consensus and identity crisis. Political ecology is a theory and method of using ecological theory to observe and study social political phenomena. It refers to the environment and state of political operation between political actors in a certain political system and the interaction between political actors and political environment.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4.1 Consensus of College Students' Political Identity**

In contemporary China, political identity must contain the recognition of the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist system and path with Chinese characteristics. After decades of reform and construction, China has basically formed a good political and ecological environment.

In recent years, with the continuous development and improvement of China's political system, the overall national strength and international status have been significantly promoted, and the university students have been more accepting of the political system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Especially in the face of national unity and national security is threatened, such as the Japanese government to the diaoyu islands to "nationalization" process, Taiwan's political independence, South Korea deployed Thad missile system, college students are showing strong protest, as well as the basic rational patriotic enthusiasm and the behavior.

China has made remarkable achievements in the past nearly 40 years since reform and opening up. Especially, the reform of China's economic system, the rise of social democracy, the growth of social forces and the acceleration of globalization have promoted the perfection of China's political system. As a beneficiary of national development, college students have a supportive and positive attitude toward the political system and party leadership. The sixth plenary session of the 18th central committee of the communist party of China (CPC) was firmly committed to promoting the political ecology of clean air. It marked the party's recognition of its own construction to a new height. The outstanding achievements of the party's anti-corruption efforts have enhanced the trust of young students in the Chinese communist party.

Only by forming a high recognition of the political system, contemporary college students can sincerely support the leadership of the communist party of China and unswervingly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. They will have a firm confidence in the future of the country and take the initiative to carry out the task of innovation and enterprise in the times, and establish a strong sense of mission and responsibility. Political identity, therefore, ties college students to the fate of the nation.

#### **4.2 Crisis of College Students' Political Identity**

At present, China is in the period of political development and social transformation, and many social problems have aroused the crisis of political identity of college students. For example, the gap between rich and poor brought about by social development is too large. Supervision checks and balances are not perfect, which have all reduced the college students' trust of the party and the government, and even made them pessimistic. However, history has long proved that only the Communist Party can save China, and China must only take the socialist road. Students should rationally look at these inevitable problems in the transition period. The shortcomings of market economy and the lack of the political system should not be the reason why college students are suspicious of system and route. College students should establish a strong sense of values and mature political consciousness, rationally look at the dislocation and deviation in the change, and try to improve their political sense of identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Xiong Guangqing. How to create a good political ecology [J]. *Exploration and Contention*, 2015.08

In the context of political pluralism, the incessant impact of various ideas and social trends makes college students lack the deep thinking and exploration of the problems of political theory. It is mainly embodied in political participation not positive or political apathy, and even political belief is shaken. At present, the development of social innovation is fast, people's consciousness and concept progress have lag. And the lack of synchronization of theory and system construction causes students to have doubts about political identity. In an age of relative political stability and rapid economic growth, some students gave up the pursuit of lofty ideals, and the choice of political leanings was utilitarian and practical, and sought to maximize personal interests. The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics that we have taken is unprecedented, and can only be felt across the river. Appears unavoidably in the process of the system construction and legal system is not sound, the lagging behind of using some authority position to seek personal gain, cause the decrease of public trust. Above all make the college students' political identity crisis. In the era of new media information dissemination, college students can accept the collision of various cultures and ideologies without obstacles on the open web platform. Negative information can be spread rapidly and widely by new media, fragmented reading leads to incomplete or no objective information and dissatisfaction is amplified by incontinence. This undoubtedly impairs the influence and intensity of mainstream culture communication, and weakens college students' authoritative recognition of dominant consciousness.

In the process of reforming the political system, more fairness, justice and democracy have always been the tendency to build a good political ecology, and political reform and social development have always been a long and complicated project.

### **5 The Countermeasures to Improve the Political Identity of College Students**

In the past, we explored the two-way influence of political ecology on the political identity of college students. The negative factors in the course of political operation were the direct source of college students' identity of crisis. It is always the most direct and effective way to resolve the crisis by setting up scientific belief, correct values and firm belief.

Xi Jinping in the National College ideological and political work conference in 2016 pointed out that student should be educated and guided to set up the lofty ideal of communism and the common ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Students should consciously pursue the ideal of the individual to integrate into the national and national undertakings, and brave to be the pioneer in the forefront of the times.

School education is not the main channel to influence the formation of college students' political identity, but this does not hinder and scientific theory, it is still spread political beliefs affect the main media of the college students' political identity. But this does not prevent it from spreading political beliefs and scientific theories, and influencing the political identity of college students. It has special significance to promote the promotion of college students' political identity. Based on the analysis of the current university students' political identity process and combine the factors that cause them identify crisis, this paper attempts to explore the path and countermeasures of enhancing their political identity.

#### **5.1 Guide College Students to Understand the National Conditions**

To the national identity, there are different levels and states, such as national and regional identity, belonging to a lower level of emotional identity; the understanding and recognition of national system and national interest belong to the higher level of cognition. If it is merely emotional identification, or compulsory identification, it can easily lead to nationalism. In order to cultivate the rational thought and behavior of college students, we must pass the effective school education and popularize scientific cognition. We should try to deepen students' cognition of Marxism scientific belief and socialist road selection. College students should deeply understand the development goals and hardships of the political system. It is possible to take a mature and rational view of the limiting factors in the development process, and promote the political identity of college

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<sup>6</sup> Speech at Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities of Xi Jinping , 2016.12.07

students from the emotional level to the cognitive level.

## **5.2 Advocate Mainstream Ideology Vigorously, and Publicize the Scientific Theory of Marxism in China**

Marx believed that ideology is the necessary sublimation of the material life process associated with the material premise.<sup>7</sup> The social mainstream ideology is a dominant ideology in a certain period, which maintains the normal operation of social and political power. With the advent of the era of market economy, people have become more liberal and democratic. The traditional one-way infusion of education has no longer adapted to the needs of modern people. We should expand communication channels and strengthen communication among members. At the same time of promoting the theory of localization of Marxism in China, it is necessary to put more attention on the trend of people's interest and social life hotspot in order to gain political consensus. Since the 18th CPC national congress, the CPC central committee has put forward a series of major theoretical achievements on practical issues, such as, four comprehensive strategic thoughts, five development concepts, the promotion of the new normal of social and economic development, and the supply-side structural reform. The construction of theory cannot be separated from the problem consciousness, but also conforms to the direction of the trend of The Times. The identity of the theory should help to establish the common ideal, but also reflect the value and interests of the people. University student political identity education should start from students' reality. On the basis of deep understanding from the causes of college students' identity crisis, college students are encouraged to join in maintaining the current political system.

## **5.3 From "Ideological and Political Courses" to "Curriculum Integrated of Ideological and Political Education", and Constantly Optimize and Improve the Teaching System**

Using the main channel of classroom teaching, make all kinds of curriculum and ideological and political theory course peer to peer. To break the dilemma of islanding on ideological and political courses, let every course and every teacher take on the responsibility of educating. Make the ideological and political work throughout the whole process of education and teaching, realizing the whole process of educating people and educating people in all aspects. The lack of political knowledge and theory is the main reason why some students are indifferent to political emotion and lack of political participation. It is also an important aspect of identity crisis. To stimulate students' interest in theoretical knowledge and political life, they should not only change the traditional teaching mode of ideological education, but also integrate politics education into the whole teaching process. To give each course the ideological and political function, make students understand the content of political system from all angles, familiar with social rules and political operation mechanism. Especially through specialized courses, students are able to integrate their own development and national social development. They have promoted the process of democratization of the country by enhancing the level of political identity and political participation.

## **5.4 Based on the Cultural Construction of the University, Enhance the Political Recognition Effect of Social Practice**

The unity of knowledge and practice is the realistic demand and ultimate foothold of university students' political identity. Colleges and universities should excavate education resources inside and outside the university to build a practical platform for connecting schools and society. We will effectively use new media and other technical means to carry out campus cultural activities with various forms and styles, as well as various social practice activities, and strengthen the appeal of the times of education of ideological and political course. Colleges and universities should give full play to the role of social practice and translate the political identity of college students into specific political behaviors. The knowledge of political theory of college students is translated into concrete practice. By entering into the society and obtaining the direct feeling of the political ecology, the university students truly understand the implementation of the national political system. It can

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Volume 3 [M]. People Press, 1960:30

weaken the original one-sided and isolated understanding, integrate and reconstruct the political cognition, enhance the road confidence of college students, and effectively improve college students' ability to analyze and solve practical problems.

### **5.5 To Build a Team of University Faculty with Good Virtue of Teacher's Ethic**

First of all, to strengthening university students' political identity education, we need a team of preachers who understand deeply and believe in theory. University teachers should be the first to accept education, strive to become the communicator of advanced ideological culture, and take the responsibility of guiding the healthy growth of college students better and faster. With the need of the society for the interdisciplinary talents, colleges and universities should train teachers, including teachers' moral education, political faith education, professional knowledge and scientific research ability. The university teachers' team should be beaten into the education workers with high comprehensive quality. In the new media era, teachers and students are equal in information. Teachers should exert the advantages of multimedia teaching to attract students, and help students improve their ability to distinguish information and enhance their political sensitivity. In addition, university teachers should accurately grasp the thoughts and psychological dynamics of contemporary college students, and try to guide college students to establish a correct outlook on life and world view.

History and reality have shown that the destiny of a government or a political party ultimately depends on the public attitude for or against. Therefore, in order to consolidate the ruling authority, the Communist Party of China must build a perfect political system and standard political behavior. She actively guides and exerts the positive function of ideology. And then she can win the support of the overwhelming majority of the people and obtain political approval.

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