

The Theoretical Origin of Adhering to People-Centeredness in Ideological and Political Education in the New Era —An Investigation Based on Marxist Classic Texts

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Abstract. The people-centeredness advocated by ideological and political education has profound Marxist theoretical origins, and its core essence is consistent with Marx and Engels' theories on human beings. Adhering to people-centeredness in ideological and political education in the new era represents the dialectical unity of logical starting point and logical destination: taking "free and conscious human beings" as the logical starting point, it requires ideological and political education to respect human subjectivity, conform to human nature and respond to public aspirations; taking the return of human essence and the all-round development of human beings as the logical destination, it requires ideological and political education to take promoting the all-round development of human beings as the fundamental goal and nurture people with advanced ideological theories. Adhering to people-centeredness in ideological and political education in the new era is the dialectical unity of core goal and fundamental goal: taking "theory persuading people" as the core educational goal, it realizes the organic integration of theory and the masses, and turns scientific theory into a material force for transforming the world; taking "the free development of all people" as the fundamental goal, it realizes the organic unity of human all-round development and social development, and highlights the value pursuit of Marxism. Adhering to people-centeredness in ideological and political education in the new era is the dialectical unity of practical path and value orientation: it gives full play to human initiative to realize the harmonious coexistence of human beings and the environment; it persists in focusing on "real individuals" to consolidate the practical foundation of ideological and political education, so that ideological and political education takes root in reality and stays close to the masses.

Keywords: Marxist anthropology, ideological and political education, people-centeredness, theoretical origin

1. Introduction

As the founders of Marxism, Marx and Engels always took "human beings" as the core of their theoretical attention. Focusing on major issues such as human essence, human emancipation and the all-round development of human beings, they left rich expositions in classic texts including

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Marx's ideological theory originated from that era and transcended that era; it is both the essence of the spirit of that era and the essence of the entire human spirit [1]." Marxist anthropology has achieved a scientific understanding of human essence from the perspective of historical materialism. It not only provides a fundamental guideline for us to grasp the laws of human existence and development, but also lays a theoretical foundation for the discipline of ideological and political education in China to uphold the people-centered value stance.

Entering the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, ideological and political education faces a more complex domestic and international environment. Externally, diverse trends of thought surge against the backdrop of great changes unseen in a century, making the struggle in the ideological field more complicated. Internally, young people in the new era have increasingly diversified demands for growth and development, which sets higher requirements for the supply adaptability and practical effectiveness of ideological and political education. Against this background, adhering to people-centeredness is not only the inheritance and development of Marxist anthropological theory, but also an inevitable choice for ideological and political education in the new era to respond to realistic challenges and achieve innovative development.

2. Logical approach: the dialectical closed loop from "free and conscious human beings" to "all-round development of human beings"

"Human beings are the subject of ideological and political education; the starting point of ideological and political education lies in people, and so does its end point [2]." In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (hereinafter referred to as the Manuscripts), Marx's assertion of "free and conscious human beings" defines the logical starting point of people-centeredness in ideological and political education; his expositions on sublating alienation and realizing the return of human essence point out the logical destination of people-centeredness. The two are dialectically unified in the whole process of ideological and political education promoting the all-round development of human beings.

2.1. Logical starting point: "free and conscious human beings" as the definition of human essence

In the Manuscripts, Marx made a pioneering exploration of human essence, pointing out that "human beings are species-beings" [3]. They can treat themselves, others and even the whole nature as objects at both practical and theoretical levels. This universal feature rooted in the nature of practice enables human beings to break through the limits of animal instinctive survival and achieve subjective mastery of themselves and the world. Marx further emphasized: "This conscious life activity directly distinguishes human life activity from that of animals. It is precisely for this reason that man is a species-being. Or rather, it is precisely because man is a species-being that he is a conscious being [3]." This statement reveals that human life activity is a practical form with conscious awareness, clear purpose and subjective will. Human beings can reflect on their own life and turn internal value pursuit into reality through objective practice. As the core definition of human essence, "free and conscious activity" is not only the fundamental sign that distinguishes human beings from animals, but also the concentrated embodiment of human subjectivity. Human beings can objectify their essential power through various practical forms such as productive labor

and spiritual creation, go beyond the limits of species instinct, and realize spiritual autonomy and all-round development.

This theory requires ideological and political education in the new era to return to human nature and highlight its people-oriented attribute. On the one hand, we should fully respect the subjective status of the educated, break away from the path dependence of "one-way indoctrination" and "passive acceptance", integrate the stimulation of subjective initiative into the whole education process, guide them to consciously recognize their own essential power, shake off the negative influence of alienation factors, and achieve spiritual autonomy. On the other hand, we should accurately respond to the ideological needs and spiritual growth demands of the educated, respect the cognitive differences and development characteristics of different individuals, encourage them to achieve self-development through independent practice, and make ideological and political education truly an important path to promote the objectification of human essential power and the free and all-round development of human beings.

2.2. Logical destination: the return of human essence and all-round development

If "human beings as free and conscious existences" is the logical starting point for ideological and political education to uphold the people-centered value stance, then actively sublating alienation and finally realizing the return of human essence and the free and all-round development of human beings are the logical destination of ideological and political education adhering to people-centeredness. Marx's classic exposition on communism in the Manuscripts profoundly clarifies the internal connection between "the positive sublation of private property" and the return of human essence, and reveals the practical path and ultimate goal of human beings returning to a social existence that conforms to human nature.

Marx clearly pointed out in the Manuscripts: "Communism is the positive sublation of private property, that is, human self-alienation, and therefore the real appropriation of human essence through and for man [3]." True communism does not simply pursue the possession of material things, but takes the thorough emancipation and all-round development of human beings as its core goal. In communist society, alienated labor is completely sublated; people are no longer bound by labor products and can fully demonstrate their essential power in objective labor. Labor shakes off the attribute of being a survival tool, rises to the primary need of human beings, and becomes the core path to realize self-worth and confirm subjectivity. As a social practice serving the lofty ideal of communism, Marxist ideological and political education takes promoting the thorough emancipation and free and all-round development of human beings as its fundamental value purpose, guiding people to break free from the shackles of alienation and become subjective beings that fully display their essential power. This requires ideological and political education in the new era to stick to the core position of people-centeredness, and persist in arming people with scientific theories, guiding people with correct ideas, shaping people with noble spirits and cultivating people with fine cultures.

The dialectical unity of logical starting point and logical destination forms a complete logical closed loop for ideological and political education in the new era to adhere to people-centeredness. "Free and conscious human beings" defines the starting point of ideological and political education, requiring it to respect human essence and human subjectivity. The return of human essence and the all-round development of human beings define the foothold of ideological and political education, requiring it to take promoting the all-round development of human beings as the fundamental goal. In specific educational practice, in terms of value guidance, we should guide the educated to establish a scientific world outlook, outlook on life and values, consciously get rid of the survival

limitation "based on dependence on things", overcome the negative impact of alienation thoughts such as capital logic and utilitarianism, and pursue a rich spiritual world and elevated ideological realm. In terms of quality cultivation, we should adhere to the education orientation of "promoting moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education in an all-round way", promote the coordinated development of the educated in all aspects, and foster socialist builders with ideals, morality, culture and discipline, as well as young people of the new era who can shoulder the great mission of national rejuvenation. In terms of practical transformation, we should guide the educated to integrate the "small self" of personal development into the "big self" of social development and national progress, consciously devote themselves to the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the struggle for the lofty ideal of communism, improve their subjective world while transforming the objective world, and finally achieve the value goal of the return of human essence and free and all-round development.

3. Goal orientation: the dual coupling of "theory persuading people" and "the free development of all people"

"Ideological and political education should take people-centeredness as its highest value orientation [4]." The goal orientation of adhering to people-centeredness in ideological and political education in the new era is reflected in two levels: the core educational goal and the fundamental goal. Marx and Engels' expositions on the function of theory and human development in classic texts such as *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *The Communist Manifesto* anchor a people-centered value coordinate for it from the perspective of historical materialism.

3.1. Core goal: realizing "theory persuading people" through the thoroughness of theory

Marx once put forward the classic proposition in *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons; material force can only be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it persuades people, and it persuades people as soon as it is thorough [3]." This assertion clarifies the dialectical unity between theory and the masses, and between theory and practice. The reality of theory is rooted in mass practice, and mass practice requires the guidance of scientific theory. The dialectical interaction between the two sets the core goal of "theory persuading people" for ideological and political education in the new era, which is an inherent requirement of the people-centered value stance.

The key to realizing "theory persuading people" lies in "the thoroughness of theory", which includes two dimensions. On the one hand, the thoroughness of theory is embodied in its truthfulness. A scientific theory must conform to objective reality, reflect objective laws, correctly explain the world and guide practice. The fundamental reason why Marxism can grip the masses lies in its character of truth. It scientifically reveals the law of human social development and reflects the fundamental interests of the proletariat and the broad masses of the people. To adhere to people-centeredness, ideological and political education in the new era must take Marxism as the guide, continuously promote the sinicization, adaptation to the times and popularization of Marxism, ensure the scientific nature of educational content, and persuade and guide the masses with scientific theories. On the other hand, the thoroughness of theory is embodied in its pertinence. A scientific theory must be able to grasp the root of problems, respond to people's concerns and solve the practical problems they face. The key to Marxist theory guiding the workers' movement is that it grasps the fundamental issue of the working class's emancipation and responds to the vital interests

of the masses. Ideological and political education in the new era must be based on social reality, pay attention to people's interests, address their ideological confusion, combine theoretical education with real life, and solve practical problems with theory, so that the masses can truly feel the power of theory and thus consciously accept and identify with it.

The ultimate direction of "theory persuading people" is to enable theory to grip the masses, complete the transformation from spiritual force to material force, and make scientific theory an ideological weapon and practical guide for the masses to understand and transform the world. This goal regulates the people-oriented attribute of ideological and political education in the new era. It requires taking "theory persuading people" as the core educational goal throughout. By enhancing the thoroughness of theory, we guide the masses to form value recognition and practical consciousness of scientific theory, promote theoretical achievements to be internalized into people's cognitive framework and behavioral norms, and externalized into practical actions to change the objective world, fully giving play to the functions of ideological and political education in theoretical guidance, ideological cohesion and value shaping.

3.2. Fundamental goal: realizing "the free development of all people" in promoting social progress

If "theory persuading people" is the educational goal of ideological and political education adhering to people-centeredness in the new era, then "the free development of all people" is its fundamental goal. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels clearly put forward the goal of "the free development of all people" based on their vision of communist society, pointing out the fundamental direction for ideological and political education in the new era to adhere to people-centeredness.

Marx and Engels stated in *The Communist Manifesto* that communist society is an "association of free individuals", in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" [3]. This exposition profoundly clarifies the core value pursuit of communist society, and also defines the fundamental goal of "the free development of all people" for Marxist ideological and political education. The free development of human beings is the realistic manifestation of human species essence, the core of the all-round development of human beings, and also the fundamental feature that distinguishes communist society from all previous social forms. As an important practical activity serving the cause of communism, ideological and political education must always take "the free development of all people" as the fundamental goal throughout the whole education process, and carry out educational activities centered on promoting people's free development.

"The free development of all people" is not only the ultimate value purpose of Marxist ideological and political education, but also the fundamental value orientation of human social development. The free and all-round development of human beings and social development are dialectically unified. As the subject of historical activities, human beings' free and all-round development is the fundamental driving force for the improvement of social productive forces and the transformation of social relations. Social development is essentially a historical process in which human practical ability and social relations keep expanding. At the same time, the material, spiritual and institutional achievements of social development provide realistic conditions for people's free and all-round development. This dialectical relationship requires ideological and political education in the new era to uphold the core position of people-centeredness, and grasp the direction of education in the organic unity of individual development and social progress. We should not only take promoting people's free and all-round development as the fundamental goal, fully respect the subjectivity and individual differences of the educated, and create conditions for their personality development and ability improvement. We should also strengthen value guidance, help the educated

realize their own free and all-round development in the practice of promoting social progress, and finally achieve the mutual reinforcement of individual value realization and social development.

4. Practical transformation: the two-way unity of "giving play to human initiative" and "caring for real individuals"

Marx and Engels' systematic elaboration on the practical essence of human beings and the category of "real individuals" in classic texts such as *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology* provides practical and methodological guidance for ideological and political education in the new era to adhere to the people-centered stance. To stick to people-centeredness, ideological and political education in the new era must take practice as the fundamental foothold, and carry out education in the two-way unity of "giving play to human initiative" and "caring for real individuals".

4.1. Initiative dimension: two-way construction of human beings and environment on the basis of practice

Marx's anthropological thought is built on practice, which is fundamentally different from the abstract theory of human nature in traditional Western philosophy and has realized a paradigm revolution in anthropological theory [5]. Marx pointed out in *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice [3]." This assertion reveals the dialectical relationship between environment and human beings, clarifies that practice is the fundamental way to realize the unity of environmental change and human self-change, and provides a theoretical basis for ideological and political education in the new era to adhere to people-centeredness and give play to human initiative.

In old philosophy, neither old materialism nor idealism correctly understood the relationship between environment and education. Old materialism one-sidedly emphasized the determining role of environment on human beings, ignored human subjective initiative, and regarded people as objects passively influenced by the environment. Idealism, by contrast, one-sidedly exaggerated human subjective initiative, ignored the constraints of the environment, and regarded spiritual activities as the decisive factor. The practical philosophy founded by Marx takes practice as a bridge, unites environmental change and human self-change, breaks through the opposition between subject and object, and shifts from "interpreting the world" to "changing the world through revolutionary practice". Marx noted that "the environment is precisely changed by human beings, and the educator himself must be educated" [3]. In practice, human beings can not only understand and transform the environment, but also achieve self-improvement in the process of transforming the environment. As an important form of practice for human self-development, education is a key link connecting human development and environmental change. It can strengthen the transformation of personal growth into impetus for environmental improvement, and promote the dialectical unity of environmental change and human development on the basis of practice. The objective environment, as the premise of human activities, defines the direction and boundary of human development. Human beings, as the subject of practice, in turn act on the environment through active activities. The two construct and influence each other, unified in the historical social practice of human beings.

To implement the people-centered requirement in ideological and political education in the new era, we must grasp the dialectical relationship between human beings and the environment from the perspective of practical theory. On the basis of acknowledging the objective restriction of the

environment on the development of people's ideology and morality, we should fully stimulate the subjective initiative of the educated, guide them to actively transform the environment while understanding and adapting to it, and finally realize the mutual promotion and harmonious coexistence between people and the environment of ideological and political education through practical interaction. Specifically, first, we should cultivate the subject consciousness and practical ability of the educated, guide them to be aware of their own initiative, actively participate in ideological and political education practice, consciously resist the influence of negative environmental factors, and actively spread positive energy. Second, we should guide the educated to turn ideological progress into practical actions to improve the environment, and optimize their surrounding environment through their own efforts to create favorable conditions for the development of themselves and others. Third, we should guide the educated to realize the harmonious coexistence of human beings and the environment in educational practice, so that ideological and political education deepens continuously in the interaction between people and environment, and truly plays its core role of cultivating and shaping people.

4.2. Reality dimension: consolidating the foundation of educational practice with "real individuals"

"Education is the practice in which human beings continuously generate and realize themselves." [6] In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels clearly pointed out that the starting point of historical materialism is real individuals and their material living conditions. As the core category of Marxist anthropological theory, "real individuals" are an important practical basis for ideological and political education in the new era to adhere to people-centeredness. To stick to people-centeredness, ideological and political education in the new era must take "real individuals" as both the starting point and the foothold, deeply understand their needs and characteristics, and enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of education.

Before Marx, Hegel understood "real human beings" as abstract spiritual beings with self-consciousness, overemphasizing spirituality while ignoring their material and practical foundation. Although Feuerbach corrected Hegel's idealist tendency and regarded human beings as perceptual physical and natural existences, he failed to reveal the sociality and practicality of human beings and treated them as isolated and abstract individuals. Neither of them truly grasped the essence of human beings. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels gave a scientific explanation of "real individuals", clearly stating: "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their own activity [3]." Marx and Engels further pointed out that "these individuals are engaged in activity, engaged in material production, and thus active under certain material limits, premises and conditions that are not subject to their arbitrary control [3]." This shows that the "real individuals" referred to by Marx and Engels are not abstract and isolated individuals, but individuals with materiality, sociality and practicality. Compared with the "free and conscious human beings" in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, "real individuals" lay more emphasis on the "reality" of human beings, which provides direct theoretical support for ideological and political education to accurately understand the educated and improve educational pertinence. The weak pertinence and insufficient effectiveness in some previous ideological and political education practices are largely caused by being divorced from "real individuals". The understanding of the educated stayed at an abstract and idealized level, ignoring their material living conditions, social relations and actual needs, thus failing to truly touch their inner thoughts. To

adhere to people-centeredness, ideological and political education in the new era must abandon the abstract and idealized understanding of "human beings", take "real individuals" as the starting point of theoretical research and practical exploration, scientifically grasp the characteristics and needs of the educated, and consolidate the practical foundation of ideological and political education.

For ideological and political education in the new era to take "real individuals" as the starting point, the primary task is to pay attention to the realistic needs of "real individuals". We should thoroughly understand the actual needs and ideological confusion of the educated in material life, spiritual life and personal growth, and combine theoretical education with solving their practical problems. Second, we must fully examine the historical and era background of "real individuals", and make the concepts of ideological and political education concrete and close to daily life. The "real individuals" in the new era live in a critical period of national rejuvenation and face opportunities and challenges amid great changes. Ideological and political education must be based on the historical position of the new era, closely integrate with the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, combine the basic principles of Marxism and the Party's innovative theories with social reality and the daily life of the educated, and turn abstract theories into value choices and behavioral patterns that the educated follow unconsciously in daily life. Finally, we should highlight the dominant position of "real individuals" and guide them to engage in the practice of transforming the world. Marx and Engels believed that "real individuals" are not only products of history, but also creators of history. Ideological and political education in the new era should focus on cultivating the practical ability and sense of responsibility of the educated, guide them to turn correct ideological understanding into practical actions to transform the world, contribute to social development through their own practice, and at the same time deepen their understanding and recognition of scientific theories in practice, so as to achieve the unity of "knowledge, belief and practice".

5. Conclusion

Adhering to people-centeredness in ideological and political education in the new era must stick to the essence of Marxist classic theories, be based on the historical position of the new era, and continuously promote theoretical and practical innovation. This position inherits the core thread of "human emancipation" that runs through Marx and Engels' works from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* to *The Communist Manifesto*. It takes "free and conscious human beings" as the logical starting point and the return of human essence and all-round development as the logical destination, forming a complete theoretical closed loop covering the definition of human essence and the laws of human development. It is fundamentally different from the abstract theory of human nature in Western humanism, and consolidates the historical materialist foundation of the people-centered position of ideological and political education. This theoretical position has clear realistic orientation in the contemporary context. Facing the impact of diverse social trends of thought under great changes unseen in a century, the erosion of capital logic and utilitarianism on people's spiritual world, and the increasingly personalized and diversified growth demands of the educated, adhering to people-centeredness must always take "real individuals" as the foothold. We should break away from abstract theoretical preaching divorced from real life and actual needs, unify solving ideological confusion with responding to practical demands, realize value guidance on the basis of respecting individual subjectivity, and solve the long-standing problem of insufficient effectiveness such as "difficulty in striking root in people's minds" in some educational practices. In short, we should take the latest achievements of adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the times as the guide, deeply grasp the development of human essence theory, and enrich the theoretical connotation of ideological and political education. We should take "real individuals" as the starting

point, pay attention to the realistic needs of the educated, innovate educational content, methods and carriers, and improve pertinence and effectiveness. We should adhere to the practice orientation, guide the educated to turn ideological understanding into practical actions, and achieve all-round development in the practice of transforming the world. Only in this way can ideological and political education in the new era truly play its core role of cultivating, guiding and shaping people, become an important way to foster young people of the new era who can shoulder the great mission of national rejuvenation, provide strong ideological guarantee, spiritual support and talent support for realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation, and demonstrate its unique value and mission on the new journey of the new era.

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