

The "excessive secularization" of contemporary college students in the new era: returning to the unity of rationality and value rationality in ideological and political education tools.

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Abstract

This article is based on the progress and development of the new era and the spread of instrumental rationality in the context of moral agnosticism, resulting in an excessive secularization tendency among college students in the new era. It proposes to analyze and explain the inherent logical principles through theoretical reasoning, and guide college students to establish harmonious, correct, and healthy values through the application of Marxist ideological and political education with epistemological and methodological perspectives.

Keywords

Values, instrumental rationality, value rationality, excessive secularization.

1. Secularization

The concept of secularization finds understanding in the thoughts of the renowned German sociologist Max Weber. In short, the process of the decline of religious traditions is referred to as "secularization," which is the transformation from superstitious, devout, and sacred religious notions to rational, effective, and quantifiable ones. The symbol of this transition from "pilgrimage to the mundane" is described in Weber's lecture "Science as a Vocation": "The increase of rationalization and intellectualization involves a knowledge of or belief in the potentiality of knowing anything whenever we want to know it; the principle that there are no longer any mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted." [1] As Weber states, "disenchantment of the world" symbolizes the progressive dynamic of Western culture, and the decline of traditional religion and the rise of capitalism serve as strong evidence. In Western history, after experiencing the Enlightenment and scientific-technological revolution, people increasingly sought "meaning" through rationality, as rationalization and intellectualization allow for a clearer perspective. The "clarity" of the "modern individual" is enveloped in excessive "instrumental rationality," including utilitarian orientations such as individual utility goals, costs, money, as well as quantifiable "rationalization" thoughts that revolve around the idea of "putting people first." After years of being "disenchanted," the "secularization" tendency of values among university students in contemporary "modernity" society has reached a certain level, which is precisely the problem addressed and explored in the following text.

2. "Rational Alienation" - The "excessive secularization" of college students

2.1. The new era and the new national situation give rise to the risk of "excessive secularization" among college students.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. Comrade Mao Zedong stated in the article "China's Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" that "Understanding China's national conditions is the fundamental basis for understanding all revolutionary issues." [2] The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has gathered the wisdom of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core and the entire party, making a new phased grasp of the historical process of China. The new era and the new national situation face the historic mission of comprehensively deepening reform, and industrial transformation, with the Internet economy taking the lead, which has accelerated economic development and social progress. The productivity of China's Internet economy is actively involved in the current economic development trend, the process of social informatization is continuously improving, and China's scale of "netizens" ranks first in the world (from the "China Internet Development Status Statistics Report" in March 2020). The Internet is deeply integrated with people's lives, and the "Internet economy" continuously optimizes the traditional economic model in a faster and more convenient way, gradually making China's economy data-driven and networked, which has brought vitality to the socialist market economy. Due to the convenient and open social environment, a diversified cultural and ideological pattern has quietly formed in Chinese society. It is difficult to evaluate its good, bad, beauty, and ugliness. However, cultural and ideological phenomena such as "Hallyu," "Genuine-female impersonators," and "individualism" have no qualification to represent the mainstream of China's advanced culture. Nevertheless, they have undoubtedly impacted the values of college students. The ideals and beliefs once advocated have silently changed throughout their lives. The fragmented, uncertain, and instant nature of information on social media networks influences the cognition of college students, and a slight carelessness could lead to irreversible "nihilism." Even indisputable historical facts have fallen into a state of denial and criticism. Due to the difficulty of regulating online public opinion, the rampant export of diverse cultures has led to a significant ethical and moral deficiency. The corresponding network regulations can be considered innovative, but are also full of loopholes. College students' study and life are closely connected with the Internet, and their values gradually face the risk of "excessive secularization," mainly manifested as "worshiping materialism," "utilitarianism," "self-awareness," "refined self-interest," "distorted values," and the so-called "only looking out for oneself, even if it means defying heaven and earth."

2.2. The spread of instrumental rationality in moral nihilism and the dilution of belief in core values.

Max Weber has proposed the concept of "rationality" in social action and divides values into "instrumental rationality" and "value rationality". Instrumental rationality arises from a consideration of purposes, means, and consequential factors based on complete rationality. It involves choosing the "means" or "conditions" to achieve one's rational pursuits and specific goals. Value rationality, on the other hand, arises from an unconditional belief in the intrinsic value of a particular mode of behavior. It seeks the behavior itself, regardless of whether it conforms to ethical, religious, aesthetic, or other normative considerations. [3] The core of instrumental rationality is "utility," the pursuit of utility and the investment in it to obtain the "maximum value." It believes that what is "useful" is valuable, and what is "useless" is valueless, and profit equals truth.

Contemporary college students, driven by the ideology of "self-consciousness," have de-emphasized the presence of traditional value rationality in their social actions and have become more inclined towards instrumental rationality in modern society. They have disregarded the traditional moral aspects in assessing the center of life and no longer consider whether its ultimate meaning is morally and religiously acceptable. Instead, they choose appropriate "means" for the purpose of "secularization." This typical mindset of utilitarianism or refined self-interest, on the one hand, pushes college students to strive intensely, taking a proactive approach towards issues such as education, employment, and social interactions. On the other hand, it leads to pursuing worldly success and fame by solely focusing on the pragmatic value gained through studying, neglecting the potential value that arises from learning scientific and cultural knowledge.

Marshall Berman points out that Marx wrote in "The Communist Manifesto": "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'." In his work, Berman discusses the transformation of values: "Any imaginable mode of human behavior, if economically possible, becomes morally permissible and 'valuable'; anything is possible as long as you pay for it. That is the whole meaning of modern nihilism." [4] In capitalist thought, there is a common refrain: "There are no eternal enemies or friends, only eternal interests." This naked emphasis on "absolute self-interest" undeniably serves as a catalyst for the "secularization" of society in the process of "modernization." However, excessive secularization, which tends towards extremes, leads to an excessive pursuit of material desires and disregards spiritual needs and moral standards. The so-called "extreme rational spirit," "the money-deciding doctrine," and "the pursuit of profit above all" undermine and distort the values of college students without any boundaries, resulting in an irreversible belief in nihilism.

3. "Rational Regression" - The Unity of Rationality and Value Rationality as a Tool for Ideological and Political Education.

3.1. The dialectical unity of instrumental rationality and value rationality in coordinating tools.

Max Weber proposed the concept of the "rationality" of values in his monumental work, which includes "instrumental rationality" and "value rationality". From the nature of these two "rationalities," they each have their own characteristics and play different roles, making them harmonious in their own positions. The development of human society cannot do without the contribution of instrumental rationality because it is utilitarian and efficient, and it is visible. On the other hand, value rationality is an invisible, latent, or "imaginary" existence. For a long time, people have increasingly pursued the satisfaction of material needs through instrumental rationality, disregarding and demeaning the existence of value rationality, believing that value rationality is not true rationality, and that instrumental rationality is the "truth". As a result, instrumental rationality and value rationality have become separated.

Therefore, achieving the integration and development of instrumental rationality and value rationality is particularly necessary. Marx and Engels wrote in "The Communist Manifesto": "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. [5] Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a

manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome, we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — bourgeoisie and proletariat." Realizing the free and comprehensive development of individuals is the core idea and ultimate goal of scientific socialism. It is achieved by continuously freeing and developing productive forces and promoting the free and comprehensive development of individuals, ultimately achieving the free and comprehensive development of all people. The ultimate goal of ideological and political education is to achieve the free and comprehensive development of individuals. It educates college students to achieve the unity of instrumental rationality and value rationality, not only to learn and master scientific and cultural knowledge but also to embrace noble ethical and moral values as "new era individuals." General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Youth League of China: "The fate of the youth has always been closely connected with the times. After the Opium War in 1840, China gradually became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, suffering from national humiliation, people's hardships, and the obscuring of civilization. The Chinese nation experienced unprecedented disasters. Numerous visionaries have been tirelessly seeking to save the country and the people, and a large number of young people have awakened during the 'awakening era'." In the new era, young students shoulder the historical responsibility of national rejuvenation in the face of a new "awakening era." They must not only understand and master instrumental rationality but also understand value rationality and fulfill their responsibilities to the nation. Education for young college students should instill a sense of humanity, historical consciousness, and patriotism. This is also the main task and inevitable requirement of ideological and political education guided by the basic principles of Marxism. Instrumental rationality and value rationality are contradictory but also unified. Dissecting them leads to any kind of extreme, which is not the desired outcome for providers of ideological and political education. Therefore, coordinating the unity of instrumental rationality and value rationality is necessary, comprehensive, and developmental.

3.2. Translate: Adhering to the right while innovating - integrating instrumental rationality with value rationality.

Ideological and political education, whether it is instrumental rationality or value rationality, cannot be separated from the leadership of the Party. Mao Zedong Thought has long emphasized the important position of ideological and political education. As early as the war years, the scientific judgment of the "lifeline" was put forward and it was repeatedly emphasized later that "political work is the lifeline of economic work and all other work." Ideological and political education falls within the realm of ideology. If socialist ideology fails to occupy the ideological high ground, capitalist ideology will dominate. Therefore, in this historical period, holding on to the high ground of ideology is extremely important in the tumultuous and unpredictable great transformation of the past century.

In terms of "rationality" itself, it is inherently complex, as beyond rationality, there are uncertain aspects such as emotions, ambitions, concerns, loyalty, filial piety, which are difficult to define. Regardless of instrumental rationality, value rationality, or anything else, any extreme position will lead to adverse consequences, and instrumental rationality is not exempt from this. The expansion and proliferation of instrumental rationality have their objectivity and inevitability. Therefore, recognizing instrumental rationality and integrating it with value

rationality, achieving the harmonious and unified development of the two, is necessary to adapt to the political, economic, and cultural development needs of our country. General Secretary Xi Jinping quoted Confucius in his speech at the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Youth League of China and pointed out: "Young people are extraordinary. How do we know that the future may not be even more remarkable? For the Party and the country, young people are the most worthy of care and expectation." At the beginning of the founding of New China, the great leader Comrade Mao Zedong spoke to young college students: "The world belongs to you, as well as to us; but fundamentally, it belongs to you. Young students are like the rising sun in the morning, full of vitality." The outstanding traditional Chinese culture is permeated with the cultural connotations of "thinking of righteousness when seeing profit" and "sacrificing oneself for righteousness".[6] In the face of collective interests, individuals have always obeyed the collective. What is meant by "obey" here is affirming individual interests and adopting the logic of "benefit with righteousness" that integrates benefits with righteousness. In order to cultivate "new era individuals" who have a promising future for the Party and the country, ideological and political education must correct the problem of "excessive secularization" among college students, guiding them to integrate their individual development into the collective development, achieve a dialectical unity between personal interests and national interests, and thus achieve permanent, harmonious, and sustainable development, growing into pillars who can be highly relied upon by the Party and the country.

References

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