

Research on the Strategies for Integrating Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies" into the Teaching of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies" is one of the important components in the philosophical system, containing the core connotations regarding human existence, human nature and human liberation. Especially the issue of human liberation has always been the central thread running through the theoretical and practical research of Marxism, which provides an important theoretical basis for further understanding the development process of human society. Ideological and political courses in colleges and universities shoulder the important responsibility of educating people and are the key places for implementing the task of "fostering virtue through education". Therefore, the paper examines Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies" and its relevance in the context of ideological and political courses in Chinese colleges and universities. It focuses on core connotations such as human existence, nature, and liberation, linking them to modern teaching practices, so as to continuously provide reference and guidance for the education model of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities.

Keywords

Marx, Thoughts on Human Studies, Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

1. Introduction

Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies" achieved theoretical transcendence in the process of denying Hegel's "Absolute Spirit" and rationally criticizing Feuerbach's "Thoughts on Humanism". It can be said to be a scientific ideological system

formed on the basis of inheriting and criticizing the philosophy of the Young Hegelians and Feuerbach's "Thoughts on Humanism", which laid a scientific theoretical foundation for the systematic elaboration of the theory of human development and the historical materialism in *The German Ideology* co-authored by Marx and Engels, and completely broke the traditional one-sided understanding of human nature. The "Theory of Human Development" in Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies" reflects a crucial orientation for educating people. "General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: 'In ancient and modern times, each country in China and abroad has cultivated people according to its own political requirements, and world-class universities have grown up in serving the development of their own countries. The purpose of socialist education in China is to train socialist builders and successors'. Only by doing a good job in ideological and political education in colleges and universities can we continuously cultivate new people who devote themselves to the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era" (Chen, 2024).

Therefore, giving full play to the combined force of the theory of "Thoughts on Human Studies" and deeply exploring its internal value and practical path will provide important guiding value for improving the teaching level of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities in the new era and the modern talent cultivation mechanism.

2. The Core Connotations of Marx's "Thoughts on Human Studies"

2.1. Theory of Human Existence: Real Individuals

Marx and Engels criticized the abstract concepts of "man of idea" by Hegel and "man of nature" by Feuerbach, and emphasized the need to explore the essence of man from a realistic perspective, thereby realizing the transformation from the traditional "abstract man" to "real individuals" and revealing the laws of human existence and development. In *The German Ideology*, Marx pointed out that "real individuals" are the basic form of human existence, being living individuals who are under certain material production conditions and capable of engaging in material production; they are people restricted by natural laws, social relations, and historical conditions. First of all, "real individuals" are natural entities, that is, physical human beings. Marx believed that as entities in nature, human beings are the material basis for the physical survival of human life, a part of nature, and are subject to natural laws just like animals and plants. Nature exists prior to human beings and is original; human beings, as "sensuous and physical human beings," are the product of the long-term evolution of nature, exist depending on nature, and need to constantly exchange materials with nature to survive. Secondly, "real individuals" are social entities, that is, conscious human beings. Practice is the basis for the unity of nature and human society, and labor practice is the basis for the formation and development of human consciousness. Moreover, "real individuals" gradually form the material shell of consciousness—"language" (He,

2024) during the process of socialized labor practice and continuously stimulate the formation of consciousness. It can be said that it is precisely due to labor practice that the material world is divided into nature and human society, making an essential difference between human beings and animals. In addition, “real individuals” are historical entities, that is, developing human beings. Since human beings are the subject of history and the creator of history, Engels once pointed out: “The world is not a collection of established things, but a collection of processes.” And as one of the components of the material world, “real individuals” also inevitably include individuals who have developed in the past.

2.2. Theory of Human Nature: The Unity of Practicality and Sociality

In Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Marx pointed out that “man is the highest essence of man”, further criticized the illusory attribution of human nature by religion, and achieved a transcendence over the one-sided understanding of human nature in traditional philosophy. Then, in Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and Theses on Feuerbach, he expounded the concepts of human real nature and human species-essence. Firstly, Marx pointed out that “the real nature of man is not an abstract concept existing in isolation. In its reality, it is the sum total of all social relations”. The understanding of human real nature cannot be separated from the consideration based on real life and social relations. Once separated from them, one cannot truly understand human nature. Man always engages in material production under certain social relations. In the continuous process of labor practice, various social relations will be formed. Therefore, there is no such thing as a purely isolated person in human society. Meanwhile, when people engage in material production practice, they will also be restricted by historical conditions. All their practical activities must conform to social and historical conditions. Social practical activities that do not conform to social and historical conditions will end in failure. Secondly, on the basis of inheriting and criticizing the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx regarded free and conscious practical activities as human species-essence, further proving that man is an entity capable of carrying out conscious practical activities. Human species-essence is the fundamental difference between human beings and other animals. It takes practical activities as the core, and such practical activities contain two aspects of stipulations, namely “consciousness” and “freedom”, which fully reflect the explicit characteristics of human initiative and sociality.

2.3. Theory of Human Liberation: The Unity of Freedom and All-Round Development

“Human liberation” is the noble ideal that Marx dedicated his whole life to striving for. It is a liberation movement that unifies human freedom and all-round development. In Marx’s view, “Real individuals’ are people in certain social and historical conditions and are deeply influenced by material production and social structures, for what individuals are like depends on the material conditions under

which they produce” (Ma & Wang, 2018). This further indicates that the destination of human liberation is the liberation based on “real individuals” through the comprehensive possession and enjoyment of human nature, thus stipulating that the connotation of human liberation contains multiple dimensions. Human liberation is a comprehensive and long-term process. It requires liberation not only at the material level but also at the spiritual level by getting rid of shackles, and it contains three implications, namely “liberation from nature, social liberation and self-liberation”, which is also the liberation that unifies human freedom and all-round development. Firstly, free labor is an inherent practical activity of human beings. Under the capitalist system, labor has become an alien force that in turn controls people’s survival and development, making human labor no longer autonomous but an activity that devastates life. Therefore, Marx believed that it is necessary to further eliminate the phenomenon of labor alienation from the perspective of the social division of labor and return to the essential attributes of labor, so as to achieve the liberation of people at the material level and realize people’s liberation from nature and society. Secondly, “human self-liberation” is a liberation movement to eliminate the alienation of human consciousness. Human social practical activities are purposeful and planned activities and are conscious activities. In the old bourgeois society, the ruling class further controlled people’s thoughts through religious activities and became the decisive force dominating people’s ideological consciousness. Therefore, in order to further achieve self-liberation, it is necessary to start from getting rid of the shackles of traditional concepts and gradually become the masters of self-consciousness.

3. The Value Orientation of Integrating Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” into the Teaching of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

3.1. Cultivating Critical Thinking among Young Students and Establishing Humanistic Values

Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” contains distinct viewpoints of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, especially in the viewpoints of “Theory of Human Existence” and “Theory of Human Nature”. Firstly, Marx believed that it was a rather one-sided view to understand “real individuals” merely from the perspective of “abstract, sensuous and physical individuals”. He emphasized that the understanding of “real individuals” should also be considered from the aspects of personal social relations and historical perspectives, and that issues should be viewed from a comprehensive and developmental perspective. Therefore, fully introducing Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” into the teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities will not only help young students cultivate dialectical thinking, but also assist them in forming critical thinking and improve their ability to think about problems in multiple dimensions. Secondly, regarding the understanding of “human nature”, starting from the perspectives of practice and historical materialism, Marx expounded that labor is the funda-

mental factor that distinguishes human beings from animals and is the basis for the existence and development of human society. And then he put forward the concept that “human nature” is “social entities and historical entities”. The “humanistic” values not only focus on the free and all-round development of human beings but also emphasize the harmonious unity of individuals and society. Therefore, through in-depth study of Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies”, it can further trigger young students’ thinking on “humanism”, help them establish humanistic values, make them consciously connect personal development with social development, and through social practice activities, cultivate their own sense of social responsibility and mission, so as to continuously realize the harmonious unity of human beings, nature and society.

3.2. Strengthening the Effectiveness of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities and Enhancing the Humanistic Care in Education

“Ideological and political education in colleges and universities has been given a more important mission in the context of the new era. It is necessary to take the establishment of moral character as the fundamental task of education and to solve the basic problem of ‘what kind of people are being trained and how to train them’ by for whom is the establishment of moral character and the cultivation of human beings.” (Yang, 2024). Ideological and political courses in colleges and universities are the key courses for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and shoulder the important responsibility of “cultivating talents for the Party and the country”. The educational purpose of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities is to further cultivate high-quality and high-caliber talents for the Party and the country on the basis of fully respecting the individual differences of young students. Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” emphasizes human subjectivity and development, and regards human development as the core goal of social development. This means that ideological and political courses in colleges and universities should pay attention to the individual development of young students, make educational activities more humanistic, and thus provide a clearer direction for the teaching and educating model. Therefore, introducing Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” into the concept of personalized education can effectively enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities in educating people. Ideological and political courses in colleges and universities are the value guidance and direction guarantee of personalized education. In the classroom, introducing the core socialist values into teaching materials helps young students lay a solid foundation in forming correct ideological, political and moral concepts and other key aspects, ensuring that they can always be positively influenced by the mainstream social ideology in the process of realizing personalized education for young students. “Ideological and political courses in colleges and universities should focus on personalized education. Each student has different interests, characteristics

and potentials. Therefore, individual differences of students should be fully considered in curriculum setting and content design. By introducing personalized teaching methods, diverse needs of students can be met, students can be encouraged to give play to their own advantages and specialties, and the all-round development of individuals can be promoted” (Dang, 2024). This personalized teaching method fully meets the appeal of individual differences of each young student, which not only reflects the theory of human nature in Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies”, but also reflects the humanistic care in educating people through ideological and political courses.

3.3. Strengthening the Education of Communist Ideals and Beliefs and Cultivating Successors for the Cause of a Modern Powerful Country

“General Secretary Xi has made it clear: “The ideological and political curriculum should solve the problem of students’ ideal and belief, this important exposition provides the guiding direction for the development of the ideological and political curriculum in colleges and universities, and also lays the theoretical foundation for the development of the ideological and political curriculum education activities.” (Wei, 2023). Ideological and political courses in colleges and universities are the key places for the education of young students’ ideals and beliefs. Integrating Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” into the ideological and political classrooms in colleges and universities helps to cultivate lofty ideals and beliefs among young students and further cultivate builders and successors of the communist cause who can shoulder the great responsibilities of the times. First of all, communist ideals and beliefs contain noble moral pursuits and value orientations and can provide strong spiritual motivation for young students. The worldviews, outlooks on life and values of young students are in the “jointing-booting stage”. Conducting education on communist ideals and beliefs to further establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life and values is an essential part of the teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. “In college ideological and political education, the ideals we talk about, on the one hand, refer to the legitimate ideal pursuits and beliefs of individual college students, and on the other hand, and more importantly, refer to the common ideal of our society, that is, the communist ideal that has always been advocated” (Zhu & Yu, 2012). Personal ideals and the great communist ideal are closely related and mutually reinforcing. Secondly, Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” discussed that the essence of man, in its reality, is the sum total of all social relations, and individual practical activities are always carried out under certain social and historical conditions. By adjusting social relations, the harmonious development of individuals and society can be effectively achieved. Young students, as the main force in the construction of a modern powerful country, through thinking about the essence of man, are encouraged to pay more attention to social relations issues and actively participate in social practice activities, which is conducive to cultivating their

sense of social responsibility and making them fully realize that personal growth and social development are an inseparable relationship. In short, by strengthening the ideals and beliefs of young students to further form correct worldviews, outlooks on life and values, to ensure that there are successors to socialism, and thus continuously cultivate successors for the construction of a modern powerful country.

4. Research on the Strategies of Integrating Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies” into the Teaching of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities

4.1. Taking “Real Individuals” as the Starting Point and Giving Play to the Initiative Role of Students

The definition of “real individuals” in Marx’s “Thoughts on Human Studies”, that is, people are always engaged in material production activities under certain social and historical conditions, provides a reference value to some extent for the precise teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. “The ideological and political quality, moral cultivation, humanistic accomplishment and knowledge reserve of ideological and political course teachers are directly related to the effect of fostering virtue through education in ideological and political courses. For this reason, General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forward the twelve-character basic requirements of ‘cultivating virtue and improving professional skills’, ‘casting souls and educating people’ and ‘upholding integrity and making innovations’ for ideological and political course teachers in the new era. In the teaching practice of ideological and political courses, the vast majority of ideological and political course teachers can have the conscious mission of casting souls and educating people and can firmly shoulder the glorious responsibility of leading social trends and promoting positive social energy” (Yan, 2022), which further reflects that the comprehensive quality of educators is directly related to the effect of fostering virtue through education in ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. Therefore, in the teaching practice of ideological and political courses, educators need to take “real individuals” as the starting point, start from the personal perspective of young students, base themselves on the current situation, seek truth from facts, and through the actual material conditions and the individualized needs of the educated, further realize the changes in the teaching strategies of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. Secondly, the main objects of education in ideological and political courses in colleges and universities are young students. In the teaching practice process, the initiative of young students should be fully mobilized, and more platforms for them to show themselves should be provided so that the main role of young students in education can be fully demonstrated. Meanwhile, educators also need to pay attention to the richness of teaching contents and methods. Based on the cultivation of individualized education for real young students, they should continuously enrich teaching contents and teaching methods, and truly pay attention to

the development of each young student, so as to demonstrate the effect of educating people in ideological and political courses.

4.2. Concentrating on the Essence of Human Beings and Highlighting Students' Practical Abilities

Marx disclosed the essence of human beings from the perspective of “practice”, which offers a teaching reference for ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. Specifically, by thoroughly grasping the essence of human beings, combining theory with practice, attaching importance to the practical skills of young students while imparting theories, and realizing a favorable interaction between theory and practice, the teaching difficulties of ideological and political courses can be continuously overcome. Firstly, as the main body responsible for spreading the knowledge of ideological and political courses, educators' own professional qualities are closely related to the educational effect of these courses. Educators need to constantly enrich their professional and digital qualities. Especially with the advent of intelligent educational technology, it has brought a brand-new perspective to the teaching of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities. Hence, only by enhancing their comprehensive qualities can educators conduct the teaching of ideological and political courses well and achieve ideological guidance for young students. Secondly, “The traditional teaching model overly relies on the teaching method and lacks a close integration with the actual needs of students and the development of modern society. The interactivity and practicality of ideological and political courses are insufficient, which cannot fully mobilize students' learning enthusiasm and affect the effectiveness of teaching” (Ji & Zhang, 2024), the practical nature of the essence of human beings dictates that ideological and political courses in colleges and universities must focus on cultivating the practical abilities of young students. Moreover, the implementation of practical activities is conducive to improving young students' problem-solving abilities and can, to some extent, stimulate their enthusiasm for learning. Due to the limitations of production conditions in the past, traditional ideological and political courses laid emphasis on theory and didn't pay much attention to theoretical practice, which consequently affected the educational effect of these courses. Therefore, currently, the teaching of ideological and political courses must break away from the traditional single-theory-based teaching approach, strive to build a bridge between theory and reality, actively guide young students to take the initiative to combine the learned theories with practice, and consciously achieve the goal of “internalizing in the mind and externalizing in actions”, so that knowledge can truly be of benefit to them.

4.3. Aiming at Human Liberation and Promoting the Free and All-Round Development of Students

The free and all-round development of human beings is the fundamental value pursuit of ideological and political education in colleges and universities. “Human development is the overall and fundamental value orientation of Marxism and the

most concentrated and concise expression of the value appeal of Marxism. Similarly, from the perspective of Marxist human studies, ideological and political education in the new era also takes the free and all-round development of human beings and the harmonious development of human beings and society as its value pursuit” (Zhang & Shi, 2024), which further highlights the advanced and unique nature of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in terms of the vision of social development and provides ideological guidance for the comprehensive liberation of human beings. First of all, the “free development” of young students includes freedom of choice and freedom of will and is the prerequisite for the complete liberation of human beings. Ideological and political classrooms in colleges and universities in the new era need to attach importance to the free development of young students, that is, respect the individual differences of students, recognize the subjectivity and independence of human beings, guide young students to understand their roles in social development, and further transform the objective and subjective worlds through practical activities to contribute to modernization. Secondly, the “all-round development” of young students includes not only the development of the physical and mental levels but also the all-round development of individuality and sociality (Marx & Engels, 1972), that is, the all-round development of “morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics and labor”. Therefore, educators of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities need to attach importance to the cultivation of “moral education, intellectual education, physical education, aesthetic education and labor education” of young student groups in the teaching process. In the classroom, they should communicate and interact more with students, understand the true inner thoughts of students, get close to students’ learning and life in a timely manner, and influence and guide students with scientific educational concepts and methods. In addition, educators should also closely center around the mission of “cultivating successors in the new era of national rejuvenation”, combining the educational concept of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities, continuously enhance young students’ sense of gain from ideological and political courses in colleges and universities, and then realize the free and all-round development of young students.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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