

Enlightenment of *Tao Te Ching* to the Ideal and Conviction Education of College Students in the New Era

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Abstract

Ideals and convictions are the beacon. General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an important speech at the fifth group study session held by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, stressing that “it is necessary to use the thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era to cultivate soul and educate people, strengthen education about core socialist values, as well as guide students to develop firm ideals and convictions, follow the instructions and path of the Party, and devote themselves to the nation and the people” (Li Haitao, 2013). Persistent hard work of new generations is required to realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Only when the young generation has ideals and a sense of responsibility can the Chinese nation be promising. Based on the cultural wisdom from *Tao Te Ching*, the paper discusses the guiding significance of the philosophy in *Tao Te Ching* to college ideological and political work in the new era in terms of the cognitive education, emotional education and will education of ideals and convictions.

Keywords: ideal and conviction education, traditional culture, new era

1. Historical Values of *Tao Te Ching*

Tao Te Ching, the essence of Chinese traditional culture, is a masterpiece of Laozi, a great thinker during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period. It covers a variety of subjects, including philosophy, politics, ethics and pedagogy, demonstrating the essence of Chinese culture. Even though *Tao Te Ching* presents the world views and outlooks on life of ancient Chinese people, instead of traditional thought, it has developed and been endowed with new era significance over historical periods.

2. Main Ideas of *Tao Te Ching*

2.1 Embracing Simplicity

“Embracing simplicity (bao pu)” (Laozi, 2021) stems from the 19th chapter of *Tao Te Ching* — “manifest plainness, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, and hold few desires”. “Bao” means “keep”, and “pu” originally referred to log and later extended its meaning to “nature”, that is, the original nature state of people. Therefore, “bao pu” means to return to the original face, namely simplicity and truth, for people to correctly recognize and keep the self.

Self-cognition generally refers to the awareness of both oneself and his/her relationship with others, as well as the unity of self-awareness and self-treatment (Li Yanxia, 2016), including the cognition of their own personality, abilities, hobbies, values, physical and mental changes in social activities and their relationship with surroundings. It should be noted that the definition of “pu” is not invariable but varies with social periods and the understanding of scholars. In general, we should comply with the law of natural and social development as well as the principle of moderation while always staying true to the original self.

2.2 Wordless Teaching

“Wordless teaching” comes from the sentence that “there are few in the world who attain to wordless teaching and the advantage arising from non-action”. “Wordless teaching” does not mean to “let oneself go without any education”, but to teach with “something” that can be accepted by ordinary people (Li Luxi, 2015), that is, not to deliberately educate with words and avoid obscure homilies but conform to the law of natural science. It aims to realize education without words in a natural manner without any homily trace. Laozi believed that moral education should be carried out unconsciously, and disapproved constrained education, even less compulsory education. He argued that we should follow the physical and mental laws of the educated, and never ignore laws or mechanically inculcate the people with unpractical theories and methods, which will only trigger their numbness and even rejection instead of fundamental recognition. In terms of student education, it is necessary to proceed from the reality, give full play to the subjective initiative of students, and motivate them to think and reflect for self-improvement.

2.3 The Highest Good Is Like Water

In terms of morality, Laozi drew an analogy between water and human, and presented the idea that “the highest good is like water”, quoted from the sentence that “the highest good is like water; the virtue of water is to keep everything running without holding to everything and to dwell in where people abominate, so it is close to Tao”. Water benefits everything in the world but never contends its own contribution, and loves to stay in humble places hated by everyone else, so it is the closest to “Tao”. The shape of water is unfixed, round

or square, and water can moisten everything. Therefore, Laozi compared the inclusiveness of water with the noble and selfless character of human, and believed that a man of virtue should be self-forgetful and altruistic as water. The highest good is like water, which demonstrates that Laozi advocated external and internal cultivation without disputes or resentment, and that the character of water symbolizes the highest realm of morality.

3. Enlightenment of the Philosophy in *Tao Te Ching* to the Ideal and Conviction Education of College Students in the New Era

3.1 Promoting Cognition by “Embracing Simplicity”

Student education based on the philosophy of “embracing simplicity” is to guide students to know the self, accept the self, choose from complexity, and pursue inner enrichment. We should pay attention to the self-conceit, inferiority, and interpersonal pressure of students resulted from their different levels of intelligence and family conditions, and offer psychological counseling and occupational guidance to relieve their anxiety of studies, employment and interpersonal relationship, and further guide them to recognize themselves, stay true to the original self, learn to love and give love in the materialistic society.

As such, we should first enhance the discourse power of network education. Growing up in the media era, post-00s college students receive messy information in multiple ways. Due to inadequate experience and immature values, they tend to be instigated by unhealthy trends of thought on the Internet, which may get their values off track despite their enthusiasm. College counselors should seize this pain point of education, make efforts to build online education platforms, publish outstanding and exemplary deeds, organize online competitions and activities, improve the participation enthusiasm of students, set up counselor columns, create Weibo super topics for the corresponding college, tweet on topics interesting students for extensive discussion and the spreading of positive, healthy values so as to promote students to further understand the essentials of the core socialist value system and build a solid cultural foundation of ideals and convictions.

Although teaching resources are available online in the Internet age, classroom teaching remains the main approach for college students to

acquire knowledge. Hence, we can help students master certain skills for self-analysis, self-stabilization and self-improvement by enriching the course setting and optimizing the course structure. The courses should be classified in accordance with the characters of students of different grades and majors, and should guide students to explore and delve into their personality traits, interests and characters, to accept and understand diversity, to face their own emotions, motivations and desires, and to reflect on and correct their behaviour, as well as develop their rational recognition and scientific belief towards the universal truth of Marxism, and make them fully aware of and confident about the socialist path, theory, system and culture with Chinese characteristics.

3.2 Enhancing Emotions with "Wordless Teaching"

Currently, ideological and political education in China still pay too much attention to moralization and the regulation of students, which leads to the function of ideological and political education on human development being misunderstood as "the promotion of individual socialization". Moreover, as a result of spoon-feeding homily, some students are weak in independent thinking and creativity, which indicates an unsatisfactory effect of ideological and political guidance. Hence, it is necessary to stimulate the enthusiasm of students for life and study by improving affinity and recessive education.

To improve education affinity, we must stimulate positive emotional experience of students and trigger emotional resonance during student education management. Counselors, closest to college students, should first set an example in morality and study, attract students with their personality charm, use understandable and likeable words in education and guidance, simplify redundant processes and procedures in daily management, and solve practical problems for students. Only with affinity can they be reliable for students who will get closer to them and pour out their troubles. As a result, students can be motivated to become the main force to fulfill the second Centenary Goal.

At the same time, we should focus on the guiding role of recessive ideological and political education, enrich campus culture and create favorable situations. Though abundant, college activities are entertainment-oriented, so

a series of targeted activities, such as red film dubbing contests and red dance drama competitions should be organized to enhance the atmosphere of education and guidance, and allow students to experience the strong spirit of the Party when it led Chinese people to forge ahead for victory and continuous achievements, so that the students will also establish lofty ideals and the common ideal.

3.3 Sharpening the Will with "the Highest Good Like Water"

The main channel and battle position of the ideological and political education course should be emphasized for will building. We should innovative the education mode in combination with current politics, respond to students with thorough theoretical analysis to make truths clear, change the evaluation mode, give full play to the role of students as educational subjects in study, and enhance their sense of learning engagement, thus cultivating knowledgeable, selfless students with profound knowledge.

Secondly, we should strengthen social practice by leading students to visit revolutionary base areas and memorials for Anti-Japanese War by means of research, volunteer services and other activities to help them retrace the revolutionary road and learn about the history of revolutionary struggles of the Party, as well as cultivate their dogged perseverance and the courage to overcome all difficulties in the process. We should encourage students to take an active part in various practical activities to promote both individual socialization and individuation, help them understand the meaning of life in caring for others and making contributions to society, sharpen their will when they are serving the people, develop their sense of responsibility and capacity to overcome difficulties and solve problems, and inspire their resolve and perseverance to be the socialism successor.

4. Conclusion

Now ideological and political work has new requirements in face of different student subjects and the new era, which requires relevant workers to be more skilled in education management, lay emphasis on the process and make good use of methods in ideal and conviction education, and guide students to transform their patriotism and the cognition of building a powerful China into the resolve of

faithfully following the Party and the practical action of serving the people wholeheartedly. Students should realize the goal of growth through diligent study and solid work while also developing their sense of responsibility and courage for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the happiness of the Chinese people. Ideological and political education in the new era guided by the philosophy in *Tao Te Ching* not only inherits traditional Chinese culture, but also contributes to the cultivation of new generations with ideals, the sense of responsibility and abilities. In this way, the goal of guiding ideals and convictions can be fulfilled.

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