



On Social Mentality: Chinese Anxiety

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Abstract

Social mentality presents the “barometer” of change and development of a society. Special historical background and practical reasons contributed to , among our citizens, the social mentality of anxiety, an unbalanced one, the essential reason for which is the surpass of conflict between human inner needs and social reality over human adaptive ability. The way of people choosing to balance this kind of social mentality is both-sided, so are the affects arising from it, which, on one hand, can offer social development unremitting motivation and creativity, and on the other hand, can generate negative social moods featuring suit following, mind losing and social rules ignoring. More efforts, therefore, should be made to develop social productive forces, better social supportive systems, enhance positive side of “anxiety” mentality, be more sensible of mildening social mentality construction to deal with unbalanced social mentality.

Key words: Chinese; Anxiety; Social mentality

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Internationally, the Chinese people are considered more than anxious. For instance, they honk the horn constantly when there is a car jam; they are crazy to refresh the page when network speed is a bit slower;

they just cut in line when the line-up begins to be slow. But why are they so anxious? Indeed, all such historic events as the adventurism in the fifth counter campaign against “encirclement and suppression” and the theory of quick victory during the Anti-Japanese War, the quick wins and instant gratification existed in the period of socialist transformation and “great leap forward” for sound and faster economy have powerfully shown that the mentality of “anxiety” in our country is of a great long time. Although these mistakes are close related to the wrong ideological guidance, they still reflect the Chinese mentality of “anxiety” to a deeper degree. This kind of mentality is unbalanced, causing a great loss in history. However, it can generate some positive influence under certain conditions. A deep analysis of its causes and a dialectical view of its influences, learning from experience, fostering strengths and circumventing weaknesses, will be of great significance for our country’s development and stability during the critical period of socialist construction with Chinese characteristics.

1. THE REASON WHY THE CHINESE PEOPLE ARE SO “ANXIOUS”

Social mentality is essentially a kind of social awareness happening in a low-level, unsystematic, non-qualitative and spontaneous way. It entails universality and stability and can be categorized as positive and negative or unbalanced and balanced, which two categories are not necessarily related. Here “anxiety” is a social mentality of unbalance and several reasons for its existence in our country are demonstrated as follows.

1.1 Conflict Between Inner Needs and Social Reality as the Fundamental Reason

Materialist dialectics view contradiction as the essential reason for change and development in the the physical world. Contradiction exists in the whole process of emergence, change, development and extinction of

things. Likewise, the emergency of “anxiety” is due to the conflict between demands of social mentality and social reality. When the latter caters to the former which is like the inner needs of social members, it will come to a balanced stage of social mentality. If, however, the latter cannot, it is necessary to determine whether social members can adapt the gap. If they can, the social mentality is still in balance. But if the gap goes beyond human adaptive ability, it would be out of balance. To sum up, one of reasons why the mentality of “anxiety” appears is that the conflict between Chinese increasing material and spiritual needs and our poor social reality exceeds human adaptive ability. For this reason, compared to the general unbalanced social mentality, the mentality of “anxiety” features human eagerness and immediacy for meeting their needs.

1.2 Historical Background Reinforcing Chinese Social Mentality of “Anxiety”

On one hand, having suffered miserable poverty and disaster over the turbulent century, the Chinese people have made an eager attempt to establish a stable and abundant life. Specifically, since the first Opium War in 1840, the Chinese people have undergone a history of over a hundred years during which they were terribly enslaved and tortured by foreign powers. This experience waked up the close-minded and arrogant countrymen and engraved in their heart a solid belief that “lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attack”. Unfortunately, even after New China was founded, people were still living in great poverty and misery because of the Great Famine of three years. This bitter history did not end until the policy of reform and opening up was carried out. From then, the strong wish to lead a better life full of stability and property has been urging all Chinese people to keep fighting for the future without any stop.

On the other hand, since the first Opium War, the Chinese people have gradually recognized powerful military forces, perfect social system, abundant life and peaceful living environment in the western countries. And also this recognition has shaken our national reverence as a “Celestial Empire” formed through the past thousands of years so much that the Chinese people with rooted thought of “face” are awfully anxious for finding a way to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and stand rock-firm in the world. On account of the urgent of “overtaking the West” in the shortest time, however, countrymen hastily sped up socialist transformation, like the Great Leap Forward Movement and People’s Commune Movement featuring mind losing and suit following, which caused serious losses that even today we cannot remedy, combined with the complete failure in the Great Cultural Revolution. All these mistakes left us more backwardness from the West and thus, in turn, Chinese people are increasingly anxious for their future.

1.3 Social Reality Pressing Chinese Into “Anxiety”

Firstly, the Chinese people suffer great pressures from the increasing crisis of safety and confidence. For one thing, that the Chinese people live under the condition of price inflation, soaring house price, employment difficulties and expensive expenditure for educational and medical treatment associated with unperfect social security system contributes a lot to Chinese social mentality of “anxiety” on account that they feel very unsure for their future. For the other, such problems as food security, corruption and industry monopolies break social fairness and justice and foster serious crisis of confidence, consuming our self-esteem to strive for the future. According to a research in the degree of social trust carried out in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou by blue papers group of social mentality, these three cities scored solely 62.9 in total at the baseline of trust, namely, the underscore of low-level confidence. Afraid of their rights to enjoy such legitimate interests as education, employment, medical and old-age care and housing being violated and deprived, people no longer believe in the fairness doctrine that advocates “working hard to get rich, distribution according to performance and a paid return”, but instead, tend to take the shortcut of using connections and doing business outside the normal and approved channels. Naturally, they pessimistically feel anxious for their own future development.

Secondly, high-tech products have raised a life of rapid pace. In *The German Ideology*, Marx pointed out that social activities have been immobilized and the product polymerization in ourselves turns to a material force that controls us but not in our control, leading failures in our dreams and plans. In the wake of reform and opening up, we rush into an era, information-based, networked, electronic and industrialized, in which we enjoy the scene of high-tech products boosting, airplanes and high-railway with increasing speed, internet dramatically being developed, roads keeping expanding and electronic products updating rapidly. All these superficially better our life with more convenience but indeed often make us in great troubles when the airplane is behind schedule, the high-railway makes accidents, when we keep refreshing a network page, when the broader the road is, the more congested the traffic will be. Under this condition, the experience of enjoying the convenience in the high-speed life makes it almost impossible to slow down for the Chinese people.

Social mentality, the “barometer” of social development, presents a panoramic view of all social aspects including politics, economics, culture and society. For this social mentality of “anxiety” in our country, it has developed for a long time and has deep embedded into our life, profoundly influencing our way of thinking and choice of behavior.

2. A DIALECTICAL VIEW OF THE INFLUENCE OF “ANXIETY” AS SOCIAL MENTALITY

As an unbalanced social mentality, “anxiety” is neutral in nature, which roots in the failure in demands. The motive to keep balanced rising from the conflict between demands and reality influences the way of how we think and how we behave, and it is true of its influence; that is to say, if we take a positive and legitimate way to balance the conflict, we would receive positive results and vice versa.

2.1 Positive Influence

2.1.1 The Social Mentality of “Anxiety” as the Remitting Motivation for Socialist Construction With Chinese Characteristics

The essence of “anxiety” resides in the failure in human inner needs which drive people to keep heading on. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the satisfaction of one need would spontaneously generate another one, which would bring constant conflict between inner needs and social reality. Therefore, as long as the Chinese people are pursuing their inner needs in a positive and legitimate way, they, as the subject for the socialist construction with Chinese characteristics, are promoting that great cause. It is like the course of one’s dream realization in which he makes unswerving exerts to overcome the conflict and finally succeed. If we all hold this solemn belief, a strong “China Dream” will be converged for all Chinese people and it is also the fundamental force to advance the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

2.1.2 The Social Mentality of “Anxiety” As the Remitting Creativity for Socialist Construction With Chinese Characteristics

The course to realize one’s inner needs is one saturated with innovation. Metaphorically, to cross a river, some choose swimming, some use rafts, some build bridges while others take planes. Whatever they choose will significantly contributes to the development of social innovation. Moreover, relative to general unbalanced social mentality, “anxiety” entails more eagerness and immediacy to fulfill inner needs. Based on this point, it will encourage people to think how to develop faster and better and to make more achievements within less time in which human innovation would spring up successively.

2.2 Negative Influence

2.2.1 Negative Moods Generated by the Social Mentality of “Anxiety”

Huang Xiting, a distinguished psychologist in our country, says:

needs are the basis of emotions. Whether the needs are fulfilled determines whether the emotion arising from it is positive or not. And whatever cannot meet the needs or even might impede the needs would lead to negative emotions. It is true of the social mentality of anxiety.

Faced with the great conflict between the hinders of social reality and the unfulfilled inner needs, people are more easier to become pessimistic, angry, dysphoric, annoyed and even rebellious. As we know, it takes a long period of enormous human, physical and financial resources to reach a target. And so it is natural for people to become distressed, desperate and even indignant when they fail to achieve what they want after great efforts and costs. Moreover, people are more likely to impute their failures to the social unfair phenomena, deepening their rebellion emotion which, if spread widely, would causes a rang of social emotions and even social mass incidents.

2.2.2 Mind Losing and Suit Following Generated by the Social Mentality of “Anxiety”

People of “anxiety” are often inclined to breed a blind faith in experiences and to lose independent thinking. But if we intend to be innovated, we need pay much more than the sole direct experience. In this process, unfortunately, to hastily achieve their goals, people always become impatient for independent thinking under the guideline that all set out based on reality and blindly follow the successful cases, leaving a scene of thousands of people scrambling for one thing. Nowadays, the advantages of network’s ability of coping with problems in a faster and more convenient way cater to the youth’s immediate needs for problem-solving. For instance, young people have developed a habit that when they get something to be tackled, they directly go for Baidu rather than through their own thinking. But if this situation goes on, the youth, as the dominant force for the development of our country, would progressively lose the ability of independent thinking. Consequently, our national fate would be very worrying, let alone the ability of innovation.

2.2.3 Social Rules Ignoring Generated by the Social Mentality of “Anxiety”

Social mentality is generally demonstrated in three forms: value-orientation mentality, thinking mentality and behavior pattern mentality. Provided that the social mentality of “anxiety” can help to fulfill inner needs, we consider it positive, right and useful value orientation and otherwise negative, wrong and useless one. In the negative sense, people are easier to seek quick success and instant benefits by hook or by crook and to further behave violently breaking social stability, disregard of social rules and morality and laws with putting heir own interests first. “Chinese style of crossing the road”, a term referring that large crowds of people tend to cross roads in disobedience of red lights, is a forceful ironic proof for Chinese apathetic collective awareness of social rules and also indicates the Chinese social mentality of “anxiety”.

Therefore, it can be generated from all discussed above that the social mentality of “anxiety” is both-sided. It is

necessary for us to take a dialectical view of it during the particular period of socialist construction with Chinese characteristics.

3. HOW TO COPE WITH THE SOCIAL MENTALITY OF “ANXIETY”?

3.1 Developing the Productive Force

Since the unbalanced social mentality roots in the conflict between inner needs and social reality, it is imperative to meet people’s material and cultural needs, which is exactly the essential needs of socialism. Consequently, during the socialist construction with Chinese characteristics, we must adhere to the principle of developing social productive forces with economic base as our central task, a precondition for material guarantee to meet the needs. Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the distribution system and pay great attention to even distribution. Because meeting people’s needs is not only a question of “making a cake”, but also a question of “dividing the cake”. In addition, extensive efforts should be made to concern immediate needs of people and their livelihood. At the same time, we should take differential measures to meet people’s needs because their essence of being hierarchical.

3.2 Adhering to the Principle of Seeking Truth From Facts

The social mentality of “anxiety” easily render people susceptible to experience and life of high-speed pace. So we must set off from the status quo, adhere to seeking truth from facts, abide by the law of development of things. All these are also served as the essential premise and theoretical base for the success of socialist construction with Chinese characteristics.

Firstly, instead of the blind faith in experience, we should make bold changes and innovations based on the law of practice. The experience of the building of developed countries and the successful results we have achieved since the policy of reform and opening up solely serves as a reference to current cause because of changing times and different conditions of nation and people in each country. But we can make innovation in theory and practice based on the combination of successful foreign and domestic experience and our status quo rather than suit following.

Secondly, we cannot riot in the life of high-speed pace. It is known that economic base determine super structure. Since the reform and opening up, persistent in putting economic construction as our center task pursuing rapid and sound development, we focus on the speed of economic growth but overlook its quality. It is true that quantity will turn into quality. But to the exclusion of that, restructure of all economic factors can also promote the

revolution of economic development. Importance should be attached to the effective unification of economic benefits, ecological benefits and social benefits in the process of transformation of development pattern. Moreover, to prevent irretrievable damage to society and ecology, it is of great significance to resolutely eradicate seeking quick success and instant benefits by hook and by crook.

3.3 Improving Social Supportive System and Preventing Social Negative Mood

The socialist construction with Chinese characteristics demands a stable social environment to the exclusion of negative mood. One of the forceful ways to erase the mood is to improve social supportive system and offer more channels for public complaints. Given that the unbalanced social mentality is closely related to human adaptive ability, the negative mood, if supported by the public and released promptly, would not bring seriously terrible results. In our country, however, the majority of supports are confined to the circle of traditional social relationship of family, friends or fellow-villagers while our government, working department and the local office scarcely ever serve any help in this aspect. Therefore, to effectively guarantee social stability, it is urgent for the social supportive system to offer much more ways of helping people release pressure and distress. This would also provide a more state and healthier environment for the socialist construction with Chinese characteristics.

3.4 Reinforcing the Positive Influence of “Anxiety” Through Reward and Punishment System

The social mentality of “anxiety” entails huge innovation potentials. The key to take advantage of its positive influence lies in a systematic guideline combining rewards and punishments, material supports, encouragement policies, ethical guidances and legal restraints, thus providing various ways for people to realize their innovation. Specifically, the government should initiatively provide funds, related equipment and technical supports for people with favorable innovation projects. Secondly, people should be politically encouraged to reach their own goals through legal channels. Free legal consultation and aid should also be offered in case of committing infringement for lack of knowledge of laws. In addition, those innovations against laws and morality must be given sever punishments and denouncements. The combination of rewards and punishments would reinforce people’s legal awareness effectively.

3.5 Publicizing Reasonable and Placid Social Mentality

The socialist construction with Chinese characteristics demands reasonable social mentalities rather than

“anxiety”. Culturally, social mentality, as the highest level of culture, forms a synthetical system together with concept culture, system culture and material culture. These four levels of culture are related to each other while the relation between mentality culture and concept culture is the most obvious. The ongoing publicizing and reinforcing new concepts would strike people’s intrinsic perceptions and make them accept or refuse the new ones. Thus, advocacy of reasonable and placid social mentality would gradually impede, degenerate and finally replace the social mentality of “anxiety”, which is also viewed as the ultimate method to eliminate Chinese “anxiety”.

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