

On Evolution of the Chinese College students' Value Concept in New Period¹

DE L'EVOLUTION DE LA CONCEPTION DE VALEUR DES ETUDIANTS CHINOIS DANS UNE NOUVELLE PERIODE

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Abstract: The Chinese Society changed greatly in the past twenty years. As one of the most sensitive groups, the Chinese college students are also changing their value concept according to the society, which is displayed in turn: authority vanished and self awakened; impulsion of reform and self disappointed; selfness of value tendency and pragmatism of value standard; concept multiplicity and reality, concrete. Economic development, cultural thoughts, educational reform and growing of Chinese college students are main factors impacting of Chinese college students' value concept development. Three basic relationships must be disposed of in their value education: self and society, ideal and reality, spirit and material.

Key words: reform and open, Chinese college students, value concept, evolution

Résumé: La société chinoise a connu des changements importants dans les vingt dernières années. En tant qu'un des groupes les plus sensibles, les étudiants changent leur conception de valeur suivant la société, qui est présentée alternativement : l'autorité disparaît et la conscience de soi se réveille ; l'impulsion de la réforme et la déception de soi-même ; la tendance de valeur d'égoïsme et le standard de valeur de pragmatisme ; le concept de multiplicité et la réalité concrète. Le développement économique, les pensées culturelles, la réforme éducative et l'augmentation du nombre des étudiants sont les facteurs principaux qui influencent le développement de leur conception de valeur. Trois relations fondamentales doivent être présentes dans leur éducation de valeur : le soi-même et la société ; l'idéal et la réalité ; le spirituel et le matériel.

Mots-Clés: réforme et ouverture ; étudiants chinois, conception de valeur, évolution

Value concept is a concept system about relationship among values, it is practitioners' recognition to the importance of objects according to their own demands. In this system, value concept on life, that is outlook on life, play the leading role, which is the basic opinion people hold of their status, goal of life, meaning of life and relationship among society, community and other people. Shortly speaking, it is what people live for, how they live and how they live meaningfully. Since reform and open, China has stepped into new historical period, from discussion on "Truth standard" to "Three advantages", from planned economy to market economy,

from "encouraging the rich first to help the poor" to constructing well-to-do and harmony society, Chinese society has changed sharply. As a kind of social consciousness, the reflection of social being, value concept is sure to be different because of social changes. With Chinese college students facing the mountain of books and the sea of knowledge and society changing with each passing day, the important problems, such as evolution that students' value concept is experiencing, the characteristic of evolution and factors affecting evolution and so on, should be solved not only by students themselves and higher schools but also by the

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whole society.

THE TRACE OF EVOLUTION OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS' VALUE CONCEPT

1. EARLY 1980S: AUTHORITY VANISHED AND SELF AWAKENED

In 1978, the discussion on "Truth Criterion" set people's thought free completely, which negated a authoritative truth standard and at the same time proclaim the beginning of rebuilding of new generation's value concept. With reform and open ,China went into a fresh historical period. Pushed by ideological emancipation campaign, aware of sharp gap in economic and material development between our country and advanced ones, Chinese college students started to think deeply. In this period, the characteristics of their value concept were as follows: (1) subject's consciousness awakened. LaoSanJie graduates left campus, younger graduates from high schools occupied the central stage of colleges. Extricating themselves from cult of the individual and absolute worship, students rethought about value of life. But because of self-awareness growing from absolute society standard or "Altruism" and the spreading of " Individualism" from French existentialism philosopher J.P.Sartre, the development of students' value concept stepped into a turbulent period. "Why the road of life becomes more and more narrow", a letter from reader Panxiao published in China Youth Weekly in 1980, arose the discussion about outlook on life all over the country. In 1982, the discussion on whether it is sensible that college student Zhanghua died for saving an old peasant also urged the youth to considering value of life from all aspects. Chinese college students' self-awareness was being awakened. The thoughts of self-design, self-selection, self-striving were popular on campus. (2) rejuvenating China, longing for becoming useful person.. with self- awareness strengthened, seeing the gap, as era elite, Chinese college students were aware of historical tasks and heavy responsibilities. Especially, when our athletes won more and more gold and silver medals on the sports ground in the world, students' sense of pride and responsibility for rejuvenating China arose spontaneously. On March 3rd 1984, when Chinese man-volleyball team obtained the champion in Asia, students of Peking University took the lead in shouting the slogan "Be United, Achieve China's Rejuvenation". After entrance examination to university was resumed in 1977, an upsurge of getting knowledge was set off. LaoSanJie graduates worked very hard, and the youth in the new generation adapted themselves to this trend, confirming LaoSanJie graduates' feelings of letting time slip by without accomplishing anything, no longer believing authority and worshipping blindly. They looked for self, yearning for being useful persons to contribute to the development of our country by reading. This

period of time, what Chinese college students read were all-embracing, from Marxism-Leninism to scar literature, from works on patriotism to academic books and periodical. Till 1984 and 1985, the libraries in the universities were still very crowded.

Middle 1980s to early 1990s: impulsion of reform and self disappointed

In middle and late 1980s, reform and open further developing, because of new system replacing the old one and intense strike following, Chinese socialist commodity economy which just appeared fell into difficult situation, such as price skyrocketing, inflation and contradiction between supply and demand enlarged etc. This period Chinese college students' value concept is showed as follows: (1) impulse to reform society strengthened. As the outstanding persons of abilities, Chinese college students thought themselves born to be reformers, who payed close attention to many social problems, especially to corruption and reform on political system. Parts of them showed great interest in political democracy and separation of powers. Students' sense to take part in social construction increased constantly, and they even involved into students' movement taking place in 1985,1986 and early 1987. At the end of 1987, a college student named "Langlang" wrote to China Youth Weekly crying out "What's wrong with us". For a short while, a sad feeling that family matters, national affairs and international affairs have nothing to do with me penetrated whole campus. But since He Shang was brought out in1988, discussion about politics and democracy salon appeared at some higher schools again. Political plurality, meritocracy, economic private ownership and new authoritarianism had been fresh topics. Students' will to participate was expanded, thoughts were shaken and tendency to dissent spread quickly, which caused disturbance happened on June 4th 1989, when Chinese college students' impulse to rebuild society had reached the peak. (2) self-loss and being cynical. After the political conflict settled, as impulse and passion were frustrated by social experience, pessimistic feeling and sense of loss increased quickly. Some of students couldn't find the belief to support their lives, so they idled away and be cynical to reality and future. Their willing to be useful was weakened, the thought "it is no use studying" spread fast on campus. The number of those who wasted time on gambling, dancing and having love affairs was growing. (3) attaching importance to pragmatism and interests. With the growing of commodity economy, there was the tendency to pay attention to functions and benefits in young people's value concept. Chinese college students turned to pragmatism because they were disappointed with social phenomena that knowledge was less valuable than before and brain workers could earn less than those who took up physical labor. To them, it is less and less attractive to seek for self-value by working and studying. The goal of their value concept was short-period, professional ideal had been transformed to seize money and opt in accordance with their own will. Zeal for

establishing business and going abroad ran high.

Middle and late 1990s: selfness of value tendency and pragmatism of value standard

In 1992, Dengxiaoping gave lectures when he went on a tour of inspection in the south of China, and establishing socialist market economic system was put forward in the fourteenth national congress meeting of the Communist Party of China, economy in our country grew at high speed again. After political conflict settled, social political environment and direction of public opinion had been turned thoroughly. Under education and direction, Chinese college students' value concept broke away from self-loss. As the result of economic system reform, the enclosure of college campus broke over night, before graduates' jobs were planned, but now they had to be selected, of course they could make their own choice too. Higher schools came closer to the society. In this period, it was the most actual ideal for students to obtain good job, seek for success in work and happy life. The topic "study first or earn money first" was carried on China Campus and China Youth Daily in 1993, which brought heated arguments. This period of time, the focuses of students' value concept were: upholding self, participating actively, studying knowledge, being useful and famous person, doing business on campus, and enjoying life. The atmosphere to be practical filled the air of whole campus. Selfness of value tendency and pragmatism of value standard was real portrait of students' value concept.

Late 1990s till now: concept multiplicity and reality, concrete

Entering late 1990s, Chinese colleges went on changing greatly. A series of reform on policies of higher education were made, particularly educational charge regulation established. Colleges began to expand the scale of enrolling new students in 1999, higher education has been turned from elite's education to masses' education, and the target of educating Chinese college students has also been changed from "high-grade expert" to "common laborer with special knowledge". In addition to most of these students are only child born after reform and open, the features of their value concept are as follows: (1) self-center tendency. The survey about value trend toward people, matters and objects in their outlook on life shows there is obvious self-center tendency. No matter toward people, matters or public welfare activities, put achieving self-value in first place. (2) concept multiplicity. In the modern society, students' value standard becomes more and more plural. Under the prerequisite of emphasizing independence, their value tendency is of reality and individual character, for instance, they chat on line and can endure some radical actions. Because of the stress of hunting jobs becoming heavier, many graduates continue studying as postgraduates or study abroad by taking GRE or TOEFL examination or establish their own businesses. The means of achieving value is various. (3) cherishing rationality, ignoring perception, tending toward reality

and concrete. Fast growing of science and technology and quick rhythm of social lives inactivate Chinese college students' deep thought about philosophy on life. It is more attractive to choose a specialty in great demand, hunt for a good job and set up comfortable home. At present, many students spend much money on mobile phones, computers and costume with famous brand. Cosy life brought by materials and high-technology products make students more realistic. Students are eager to get certificates in many fields such as English, Chinese, computer and even driving licence in order to work in popular fields on labor market. (4) being indifferent in politics. Since reform and open, political movements are fewer and fewer, Chinese college students pay more attention to economy than politics. Though the return of HongKong and Macao made them proud of the power of the Chinese nation, it is suggested by survey that students concern more about economic reform and challenges China faces joining into WTO. In politics, they attach much importance to corruption.

THE FEATURES OF EVOLUTION OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS' VALUE CONCEPT

2. VALUE SUBJECT

Value subject is "who" will judge the importance of objects and whether they meet demands or not. Any value concept is formed and structured progressively in the course of subject itself experience in the society, which involves the questions such as "whose value concept it is" and "whose value activities they are". In the new generation the features of evolution of value subject are as follows: (1) self-awareness from awakened to abstract to concrete. Chinese college students in 1980s thought over value on life critically, whose self-awareness is awakened. Chinese college students witnessing various conflicts emerged in the process of reform and open, with spreading of liberalism introduced from western countries, their self-awareness was swollen sharply. They called themselves reformers and devoted into reform. After 1990s, economy in China soaring again, students' value tendency turn to practicalities, they can judge their own social status and functions correctly. Self-awareness change to concrete once more. (2) society standard tending to individual standard. Early 1980s, although Chinese college students rethought about social realities, whose self-awareness was awakened, from main stream, society standard still played the leading role in value concept. Individual standard was in the embryonic stage. Chinese college students worked according to social demand and governmental arrangement. Commodity economy developing, lacking of right direction to utilitarianism, some students stressed self, meanwhile, collectivism was doubted and self-center started to shoot. The idea to obey

the society was ignored. Till 1990s, the trend of thought becomes more and more powerful with the great change of society and higher education.

The goal of value

The goal of value is the target of significance considered, decided and pursued by subjects, which involves the question "what people act for". The features of evolution of goal are as follows since reform and open: (1) basic point turned to objectivity from subjectivity. The goal of value should be fixed on certain basis. Confronting gap between China and developed countries and maladies exposed during reform and open, Chinese college students brought their tradition as intellectuals back to life. They took responsibility for achieving China's rejuvenation, participated in reform and regarded national affairs as their own tasks. It directly resulted in self-loss that they tried to restructure society taking subjective assumption as foundation. Entering 1990s, economic and political reform were pushed further, great change on campus, especially the turning of Chinese college students' status caused the basis of students' goal of value coming contact with their own conditions and social surroundings more closely. (2) goal tendency tending to be utilitarian, practical and short-period. Nowadays, in the face of knowledge and money, duty and interests, contribution and exaction, Chinese college students tend to choose the latter. After 1990s, because of further growing of reform and open, practical value tendency standard reset up by them lead to their goal more utilitarian, real and short-period, which has been proved by great mass fervor on specialties such as economics, marketing, computer, teacher education and IT business.

The means of value

The means of value is the methods and ways subject takes to achieve the goal of value, which involves the question "how to act". The means of value can guarantee value concept to be realized. Since reform and open, the features of means of value are as follows: (1) from singleness to multiplicity. Along with the resumption of entrance examination to university and enthusiasm about study, Chinese college students jump into the sea of knowledge to explore self-value. At that time, graduates' jobs were arranged by the country. In pace of reform of social structure, development of market economy and opening of the door of China, huge market provides students with all kinds of ways to realize self-value. Their means of value shifts from only depending on study to various shapes. As the group with high artistic appreciation, Chinese college students can easily adapt to historical changes. Some researchers suggest that the multiplicity of means of value is revealed through such actions that Chinese college students go to schools of a higher grade, or go abroad to seek fortune, or concentrate on political affairs to obtain fame and status, or establish their own business, or respond to the call of our country to devote into construction of frontier region. (2)

evaluation plural and main stream positive. Chinese college students ought to compare and assess means of value at time of making choice. Means of value varies each day, in the wake of which students' evaluation tendency toward form of struggling is plural. Although Chinese college students do their best to look for balance between contribution and benefit, the main stream of evaluation tendency is positive. Most of them support evaluation standard based on society and community. Meanwhile they value self-effort, self-struggle and individual competence. However meeting with frustration, they prefer to making a compromise between struggle and present situation.

THE FACTORS AFFECTING EVOLUTION OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS' VALUE CONCEPT

The factors affecting development of students' value concept are many-sided, including all of individual internal and external environments. Some researchers think that the factors are socialist commodity economic development, cultural thoughts introduced from other countries, functions of social system, direction of education and public opinion and growing of Chinese college students, etc. Also other researchers conclude that change of economic structure, historical reason (ten-year cultural revolution), turning of social value concept, all kinds of cultural and social trend of thought and faults of education are key factors. Summed up, main factors impacting of Chinese college students' value concept development are as follows:

Social economic development

Reform later, Chinese commodity economic development causes appearance of new value concept. Individual character is respected, and self-awareness is awakened. Market economic development offer Chinese college students many opportunities to show their abilities. Reform reconstructs patterns of beneficial distribution, upsetting former distribution regulations, which is the immediate cause resulting in change of students' value concept.

Influence of all kinds of cultural and social thoughts

Since reform and open, the gate of our country is opened, China steps toward world. Advanced science and technology in western countries are introduced into, various cultural and social trend of thought pour into as well, which impact on Chinese traditional culture. Collision between Chinese culture and western culture supplies the youth with new value system background allowing them to watch themselves and society. At the same time, western thoughts also exert a negative influence on evolution of students' value concept because there were no proper methods to control and guide culture at certain stage.

3. EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND GROWING OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

Since 1980s, several great changes happened on Chinese campus. Chinese colleges and universities were no longer ivory towers, which are opened to the society step by step, especially after higher educational charge regulations are set up, the policy of graduates looking for job is reformed and higher schools expand the scale of enrolling students. Such changes touch upon students' own interests, which are direct factors causing evolution of value concept. Besides, from LaoSanJie graduates to Chinese college students in new generation to students as only children at the present age, many elements can affect their value concept, such as their own social experience, experience in life, different social surroundings and special stage of students' psychological development, within which Chinese college students think the influence of family and individual experience in life as the most important ones. The increasing of age, views formed naturally, school education and effect of media and famous figures also take certain proportion. In comparison, to senior student value concept is impacted heavily by individual experience, to students in low grade it is impacted by family and to students in middle grade it is impacted by media.

DELIBERATION ON EVOLUTION OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS' VALUE CONCEPT

Studying the evolution of Chinese college students' value concept since reform and open, we can find out it is significant to solve several fundamental problems properly in education in order to help students form correct concept.

Self and society

Since reform and open, the evolution of Chinese students' value concept is multiple in form, but it center on self and society, and constantly tend to individual standard from society standard. So it should be admitted that this kind of change is rational. It is true that establishment of market economy means to pay attention

to personal benefits and individual subjective awareness, which isn't equal to individualism and doesn't signify throwing the society away. The relationship between individual and society is dialectical unity. Society is composed of individuals and person can only exist relying on society. The value tendency, "Altruism", is unreasonable, which ought to be discarded. But it should be kept in mind that we can't come to the other extreme to adopt individual standard. Thus, Chinese students should be educated not only to have the sense of self-independence but also to be aware that the relationship between self and society is integration of ends and means, and individual interests and value can only come true through experience in the society.

Ideal and reality

Ideal is the goals of life people working for, including desire for beautiful lives. However reality is imperfect, the conflict between ideal and reality penetrate into students' value of life. As the group of great learning living on campus, Chinese college students are good at rational thinking, but it is common that they can't see through complexities of society. Then they often impose their ideals on reality, try to remold society on impulse, or give up ideals to be cynical suffering setbacks. Particularly, now society developing at high speed, value tendency being plural, the gap among districts being broadened and communicative technology being advanced, Chinese college students should look reality in the face, evaluate themselves well and set sensible goals.

4. SPIRIT AND MATERIAL

Since reform of economic system and establishment of market economy, the conflict between spirit and material, duty and benefit is bound to emerge in Chinese college students' value concept. Back to 1980s, the argument about events of Panxiao and Zhonghua had revealed this thought. As social animals, human beings need to live and consume, that is, they have to take material gain into consideration. But mankind is different from animals, who live meaningful lives. Though it is natural that students' value concept tends to utility, on the other contrary, the deepening and development toward extremes of this trend should be stopped in time. If Chinese college students' value of life is assessed with material and money, they will lose the meaning of life and driving force of struggle.

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