SPECIAL ISSUE: THEORETICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CONTEMPORARY SYSTEM OF CHINESE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Thoughts on Innovation in Mainstream Ideology Research*

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guiding role and overcome both ideological arrogance and ideological aphasia. And third, we must be open-minded in carrying out a comparative analysis of mainstream ideologies of other countries. In exchanges with and learning from other countries, we should protect the safety of mainstream Chinese ideology and avoid both self-contained isolationism and a blind worship of foreign things. In this way, we can develop a new ideological culture that is worthy of our times.

Keywords: mainstream ideology, innovation in philosophy and social sciences, ideological safety

In the "Making Intensified Efforts to Prosper Philosophical and Social Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions" issued in September 2011, the Chinese Ministry of Education set the goal of "basically establishing a new innovation system for research in philosophy and social sciences by the year 2020." In contemporary China, innovation in mainstream ideology research is not merely related to the practical space for innovation in Chinese philosophy and social sciences, but also constitutes an important part of this innovation itself. The "mainstream ideology" under discussion here refers to the dominant ideology of a society within a particular period of time, which is usually the ideology of a ruling class. Centering around this ideology are some peripheral ideologies, including political views, academic schools of thought, value orientations, ways of thinking, etc. Generally, the peripheral ideologies emerge in a form that accompanies the mainstream ideology, although of course they stand as its antithesis in extreme circumstances. Clearly, to explore "innovative research in mainstream ideology" is not to abandon the resources of traditional ideology and start all over again, but to stress that mainstream ideology research should be adaptive to the changing times and environment. The innovative research in mainstream ideology includes the following three main aspects.

I. Mainstream Ideology Research Should Be Innovative in Terms of the Pattern of Civilizations, Grasp Historical Continuity and Cultural Identity, and Should Oppose Historical Nihilism and Revivalism.

The rise of a real power presupposes the rise of its culture. Only a country with huge
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mainstream ideology research. First, we must respect the historic timeline of changes in tradition with regard to research in this field, revealing the internal character of innovation in mainstream ideology in the long river of historical time; in other words, we should stress the historical continuity of ideology and the dynamic inheritance and historical development of cultural tradition. This is because cultural tradition is, to some extent, a "prefabrication" of people's social consciousness and ideology.[1]

II. We Should Adopt an Inclusive Approach to Mainstream Ideology Research, so as to Encourage Different Perspectives and Overcome Both Ideological Arrogance and Ideological Aphasia.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, mainstream Chinese ideology developed a peculiar feature or inertia due to economic, political and historical reasons. As China's reform and opening-up advances, the limitations of this "inertia" have become ever more evident: domestically, it is manifested in a condescending arrogance; and internationally, it evinces the frailty of aphasia. In order to change this situation, mainstream ideology research need to be more inclusive.

We should recognize the fact that since reform and opening up, the Chinese economy has been growing at a remarkably high speed, people's living conditions have greatly improved, and the superiority and vitality of socialism with Chinese characteristics have been brought into full play. At the same time, with the deepening of economic and social transformations, many changes have taken place in the social consciousness of people, especially that of intellectual elites and the public. With these changes, there have emerged unprecedented new contradictions, problems and dilemmas. The development of market economy has led to a pattern of diverse interests and differentiation of social strata and even classes, thus undermining the blurred and highly-overlapping situation with state ideology, party ideology and social ideology. It is true that the changes in the country's social ideology have happened at different stages or at different times since the founding of New China yet all of them are the result of the interaction between the state, market and society. It used to be thought that state ideology had complete control of social consciousness before 1978; however, a lot of fieldwork and oral history materials indicate that such control is limited, and that the influence of folk forces and traditions in grass-roots social consciousness still persists, though relatively

and has increasingly begun to reflect the ideas of different interest groups. For instance, mainstream ideology has actually integrated the ideologies of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie and other classes or strata; in other words, by reducing itself to the expression of the value propositions held by a complex of groups, Chinese mainstream ideology has assimilated different ideologies ranging from that of the ruling party—the Chinese Communist Party— to the non-ruling democratic parties and from the new social stratum of freelancers to the ideological divisions in what used to be a single social stratum. In the peasantry stratum, for instance, peasants living in the developed coastal areas of southeastern China will have different interest appeals from those living in poverty-stricken areas in the central and western areas, and from those migrant workers in urban areas. These different appeals have led to different ideologies in terms of value propositions. Different ideologies are no longer in binary opposition or pure confrontation. Rather, they have a competitive ideological opposition alongside a differentiated ideological tolerance of one another, which fully demonstrates the diversity and multiplicity of the range of different ideological subjects. In terms of the question of "How is it expressed?," we no longer regard ideology as a state apparatus, as was done in the past, but subdivide it into conceptualized ideology, institutionalized ideology and psychosocial ideology. In terms of content, ideology can be classified into value ideals, theories, and policy claims, as shown below.

Subjective forms of ideology	Manifestations of ideology	Content of ideology
Social (civil) ideology	Conceptualized ideology	Value ideals
Ideology of political party	Institutionalized ideology	Theories
State ideology	Socio-psychosocial ideology	Policy claims

As Professor Han Yuan has pointed out, "Ideology is a social consciousness rooted in a background of specific interests; the ideological subject is also the interest subject behind it. In accordance with the fact that the interest entity represents a given ideology which progresses from clarity to expansion, we can subdivide ideologies at different stages of a country's modern development, in terms of their subject, into social (civil) ideologies, ideologies of political parties, and state ideology."[6] In view of that fact that Chinese society and its ideology have gone through fundamental changes, mainstream ideology needs to be more tolerant and open-minded, more inclusive and respectful towards other ideologies, overcoming its inveterate arrogance, if it is to continue its "dominant" role as a guide to core values for the mass of the people and as a leading spiritual force in Chinese society. In order to effectively

other ideologies, absorbing and learning what is rational and beneficial in them and constantly developing and improving its own theory, so that it can become a true social consensus and an spiritual prop for the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

In view of this pattern of diversified interests, we must differentiate and use of political authority and rational authority are prerequisites for the functioning of mainstream ideology. In this new era of peaceful and cooperative development, the functioning of China's mainstream ideology must be realized more through rational authority than through coercive political authority. To put it another way, mainstream ideology needs to improve its own theoretical thoroughness, improve the consistency of its internal self-construction, and improve its theoretical appeal and persuasiveness by constantly making use of new insights and findings from natural and social sciences and by drawing inspiration for innovation from the life and practice of the common people. In order to do this and to perfect mainstream ideology, we must, at the operative level, gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of different ideologies and the interaction among them.

As far as the subject is concerned, social (civil) ideology is largely spontaneous. It represents the initial expression of the ideas and thoughts of thinking people in civil society, and is not politically recognized and protected. However, in an era when opening up and democracy are gaining strength, the propositions accommodated in the ideologies of political parties are not just expressions of the values held by intellectual advisors or politicians; very often, they are shaped and promoted from bottom to top. That is, once a social (civil) ideology is adopted by the ruling party, it will become the ideology of a political party and the value expression of a definite interest subject. This is the first transmission of ideology between different subjects. If the political party's ideology can break through the limitations of its partisanship by balancing and integrating the interests of different interest subjects, then a second transmission will be realized in which a party ideology changes to a state ideology. These transmissions will not only increase the efficacy of ideology but also enhance the sustainability and vitality of innovation. They can defend and support the "dominance" of mainstream ideology.

In terms of the manifestations of mainstream ideology, there exists an interlocking cause-and-effect relationship among the conceptual, institutional and psychosocial forms of ideology. "Conceptual ideology is the 'design' for institutional ideology, while the latter serves as a 'switch' for psychosocial ideology. Psychosocial ideology is the drive for actions. Thus ideology extends from the conceptual form to the institutional form, and further to the psychosocial one, finally gaining a triple identity and completing a cycle of ideological movement. Only then can ideology achieve a stable, effective and mature position."[7] Clearly, the functioning of ideology is a systemic process, in which professional theorists and political leaders, while drawing spiritual or psychological inspirations from people's social life,

7 ` Han Yuan, "Investigating the Model of Ideological Development: China's Strategic Orientation in the Construction of Mainstream Ideology."

express the values of that ideology in the form of ideas and concepts, offering a rational criticism and an ideal vision for social and political construction. Once it is recognized and accepted by the ruling class or party, a particular theory may become the blueprint for institutionalized ideology. It is only when an institutionalized ideology is assimilated in a subtle and imperceptible way that there can be a transformation of ideological values, so that it becomes the ideology of the common people. In this process, institutionalized ideology functions as a "switch." But more importantly, mainstream ideology cannot act as a spiritual driver and value guide for the action of the masses until it becomes a set of guidelines for such actions and is proven in practice. In a word, to innovate studies of mainstream ideology, we must reject the sense of superiority held by the ruling class or party, and give up self-proclaimed "ideological improvement." We need to make every effort to preserve socialist core values and the Chinese nation's cultural characteristics amid the tides of history, using more open-minded and inclusive ideas and methods to provide further impetus to the dynamic and effective functioning of mainstream ideology.

III. Open-mindedness Is Necessary for Conducting Comparative Analyses of Mainstream Ideologies of Other Countries.

In exchanges with and learning from other countries, we must defend the safety of China's mainstream ideology. In ideological studies, we need to overcome both the tendency to self-imposed isolation and that of having a blind faith in things foreign. The issue of national modernization was first proposed in China at the turn of the 20th century, but it was in the late 20th century that the country really started the modernization process. During this historical period, the Chinese society experienced tortuous and drastic changes. One of the most fundamental changes was that China advanced from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country to a socialist one. The reform and opening-up policy and the establishment of the socialist market economy enabled China to launch its modernization, and brought China into the course of world history. As the researcher Cao Tianyu has pointed out, at the global level, "Globalization is both a *fait accompli* and a trend of development. Whether we acknowledge it or not, it is affecting the historical course of the world, undoubtedly, that of China."[8] As is well-known, human history before the 15th century was one of monologue, i.e. the countries of the world knew little of each other's economies and cultures. From the 15th century, starting with the Great Geographical Discoveries, world history began to enter the age of dialogue from the age of monologue." The most significant characteristic of such dialogue is that economic and cultural development are realized and sustained at the global level, rather than within the boundaries of a country or a people. Different national or regional economies and cultures permeate one another and are interdependent. In the past we could live our lives in

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8 ` Cao Tianyu, ed., *Modernization, Globalization, and the Chinese Road*, p. 1.

our wonted inertia, without caring about how Americans, French, Germans or Japanese lived, but today we have to learn about the lives of people in other countries. We cannot simply imitate another culture's way of life, but we should not ignore something commensurable beneath the cultural differences.

Right now, China has entered the course of world history. From Mao Zedong era's ideology of resistance, in which the two power blocs confronted, to the strategic low-profile modernization drive based on the "shelving disputes" policy of the Deng Xiaoping era, and further to the ongoing cultural contests in which state ideology is a form of soft power, the fact that ideological contests are a form of competition between states has never changed. But one thing should be noted: China's sudden economic rise after centuries of weakness and backwardness sets off its "political immaturity." In other words, China may be economically powerful now, yet it remains spiritually underdeveloped. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, due to some conflicts of interests, the Western bloc is still reluctant to acknowledge China's socialist mode of development, despite its economic rise in the world. China's values and ideas have not yet been established worldwide and its cultural soft power has not received due recognition. Therefore, it is difficult at the moment to make the China's voice heard. In other words, China's mainstream ideology is much less influential than Western mainstream ideologies, which claim themselves as universal values. In the competition between ideologies, we are in deficit. There is an asymmetry between this situation and the ideological support needed by a great nation, especially one that is rising. Faced with the "bucket effect" or limiting factor of our relatively weak position in such ideological competition, a position arising from this unbalanced development, it is very easy for simple-minded nationalism to be kindled such that xenophobia or arrogance replace the criticism and reform that are lacking in internal ideological construction. Blind rejection of everything foreign is fueled in the name of national strategic interests, with an indiscriminate rejection of everything foreign. This will not help solve the problem, but will render us even more passive. Our standpoint should be that Chinese researchers, with an open-minded attitude, should conduct an extensive comparative study of mainstream ideologies of other countries. In so doing, they should defend the safety of China's mainstream ideology and oppose all kinds of isolationism and blind pursuit of foreign things.

Nowadays, the development of science and information technology provides great convenience for China's mainstream ideology research, but it also poses a challenge to them. By convenience, we mean that Chinese researchers can gain a better understanding of the forefront theoretical construction and practice of other countries in terms of mainstream ideology; by challenge, we mean that the researchers should consciously conquer some isolationist practices of the past, especially the kind of empty ideological framework that cannot stand the test of practice. To this end, Chinese researchers should carry out an in-depth study into mainstream ideologies of other countries, including those developed countries represented by the United States, the former Soviet Union and Eastern European

bloc represented by Russia, the countries and regions in the sphere of Confucian culture represented by Singapore, the late-developing modern countries represented by Japan, and the Eastern Asian socialist countries represented by Vietnam and North Korea. In analyzing and evaluating these ideologies, researchers should be alert to biased thinking in the form of simplistic criticism or blind imitation, and should avoid stereotypes and preconceptions; otherwise, the real basis for dialogues will be lost.

Secondly, the comparative study of mainstream ideology should be deepened. This involves recognizing the historical context from which different ideologies have emerged, not just from a political perspective but also from a cultural one, in order to more fully grasp their special characteristics. If we do not "know others" we cannot fully "know ourselves." The sociologist Fei Xiaotong provided insights into methodological innovation in studies of mainstream ideology when he wrote of "cultural consciousness," "cultural consciousness only means that those living in a particular culture have a clear knowledge of their culture, knowing its origin, its formation, its characteristics and the direction of its development; it does not imply 'cultural regression,' nor does it suggest 'restoring the past,' or propose 'wholesale Westernization' or 'totally becoming the other.' Instead, this self-knowledge functions to strengthen autonomous capacity for cultural transformation and to establish an autonomous position for making cultural choices when adapting to a new era and a new environment. Cultural consciousness is an arduous process. Only on the basis of a good understanding both of our own culture and other cultures can we establish our own place in the multicultural world. Then, through self-conscious adaptation, along with other cultures, we can draw on the advantages of each culture to jointly establish a basic order recognized by all and a set of principles that different cultures can abide by in peaceful coexistence and joint development."[9]

Finally, establishing a more sophisticated and competitive mainstream ideological system is at the core of innovating mainstream ideology research. This is not just a matter of theory and concepts, but methods and practice; it is not just essential to enhancing our cultural soft power, but also of strategic importance to the promotion of the competitiveness of our ideology at the international level. There are various causes for the lack of competitiveness of Chinese mainstream ideology in the international community, including the objective differences between China and the developed West in terms of understanding of and research in mainstream ideologies, as well as problems with the content, production, marketing and management of Chinese mainstream ideology. In the new historical era, studies of China's mainstream ideology will change from extensiveness to intensiveness and from plane to three-dimensionality. In examining the experiences and lessons of other countries' mainstream ideologies, we should particularly study the universal and regular issues in them. Indeed, "For one thing, cultural-ideological problems cannot be solved with coercive administrative measures. And for the other, developing right ideas and overcoming wrong ones can only be done through debates, criticisms and arguments. Criticism is supposed to be dialectical, rather

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9 ` Fei Xiaotong, "Reflections, Dialogues and the Consciousness of Culture."

than dogmatic and metaphysical."[10] Only in this way can we establish a scientific, vital and influential mainstream ideology and bring into play its dominant role.

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