

# The Review and Prospect of Marx and Engels' Educational Thought Research in China

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**Abstract:** The study of Marx and Engels' educational thought has experienced different stages in China, different stages show different characteristics, and has made some progress in the aspects of "human nature", "all-round development of human beings", "the combination of education and productive labor", "the relationship between education and various social phenomena", and "the thought of moral education". Looking forward to the future, the study of Marx and Engels' educational thought in China should be further carried out: the depth of text research, the strengthening of academic research, the emphasis of method research and the deepening of cross-research.

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## 1 The Course of the Research of Marx and Engels' Educational Thought

### 1.1 Phase 1 (1949-1977)

The study of Marx and Engels' educational thought in China started earlier but matured later. As early as the early 20th century, some Chinese students studying in Japan took the lead in understanding Marxism and were deeply influenced by this ideological system. In the 1930s, Mr. Yang Xianjiang, a famous Chinese educator and Marxist educational theorist, took materialism as the research basis in

his New Education Outline to analyze the dialectical relationship between society and education.

Between the founding of the New China and the Reform and Opening-up, the domestic study on the education thought of Marx and Engels was relatively scarce. There was only one book elaborating on the education thought of Marx and Engels while other related research was mainly scattered in the domestic research of Marxist educators' education thought and lacked the study on the education thought of Marx and Engels themselves.

### 1.2 Phase 2 (1978-1986)

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, the ideological and theoretical circles corrected the research direction of Marx and Engels' educational thought, and embodied the following characteristics:

First, The study of Marx and Engels' educational thought began to rise. The first National Conference on Educational Science Planning was held in March 1979. China established the "Marxist Educational Thought Research Society of the Chinese Educational Society" on May 12 of the same year. And one after another in normal colleges and universities established the Marxist educational theory research room. The study of Marx and Engels' educational thought began to rise.

Second, the research focused on the overall development of human beings and the combination of education and productive labor. The researcher's research on Marx and Engels' educational thought involves all aspects during this period. However, it mainly focused on the overall development of

human beings and the combination of education and productive labor. The researchers mainly discussed their connotation, conditions, spiritual essence and guiding role in Chinese education.

Third, the main research methods were introduction research and preliminary text research. The National Society of Marxist Educational Thought compiled a book entitled "Collection of Essays on Marxist Educational Thought" which explained the educational thought of the all-round development of human beings and the educational thought of the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1980. The Education Research Association of the Chinese Institute of Education has compiled the book Learning Marx's Educational Thought to Commemorate the Centenary of Marx's Death<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 1.3 Phase 3 (1987-2000)

The National Research Society of Marxist Educational Thought held its third annual meeting with the theme of "Marxism and China's Educational Reform" in Leshan, Sichuan on November 19-24, 1987. Marked by this meeting, the study of Marx and Engels' educational thought in our country has begun a new stage, which embodied the following characteristics:

First, the research content began to refine, closely combined with the reality of China. The researchers mainly studied the guiding significance of Marx and Engels' educational thought in terms of educational purpose, modern educational reform, adult education, quality education in colleges and universities.

Second, the research method began to carry on the historical research. This stage was more diverse than the previous stage of research methods, in addition to the introduction of research, text research, but also began to do historical research, and focused on the reflection of Marx and Engels' educational ideas.

Third, the research field had been broadened to open up the scope of application of Marx and Engels' educational thought. Previous researches were more about the introduction of Marx and Engels' educational thought, and this stage began to study the scope of application of Marx and Engels' educational thought in various fields.

Fourth, this stage began to study the sinicization of Marx and Engels' educational thought. Some researchers systematically studied the inheritance and development of Marx's educational thought by

Chinese Marxist educational thinkers such as Yang Xianjiang, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Nanxiang and Zhang Wentian. Some researchers made a comprehensive study on the Sinicization of Marxist educational thought from the aspects of basic category, historical model, development process, cultural source, double line structure, functional system, contemporary and so on<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 1.4 Phase 4 (2001-present)

In 2001, Chen Zhe published Marx's "All-Round Development of Human Beings" and the Development Trend of Quality Education in the Journal of Wuhan Institute of Education.<sup>[3]</sup> As a sign, the study of Marx and Engels' educational thought in China entered a new stage, which embodied the following characteristics:

First, the research content extensively covered Marx and Engels' educational thought, and the human thought research was most prosperous. This stage was more comprehensive than the previous research, and carried on the detailed excavation to Marx and Engels' educational thought. This stage was mainly about the overall development of human beings and the nature of human research.

Second, research was carried out in a multidisciplinary field of vision. The researchers in this stage can study Marx and Engels' educational thought with specific subject vision, including philosophy,<sup>[4]</sup> pedagogy,<sup>[5]</sup> human science, ecology, sociology and so on.

Third, researchers paid attention to the comparative study between Marx and Engels' educational thought and other educational thought. There had been studies on the comparison of Marx and Rousseau's thought of children's education, Marcuse's thought of aesthetic education and so on.

Fourth, researchers began to sort out the research on Marx and Engels' educational thought. Researchers mainly sorted out the literature on the research of Marxist educational thought, social educational thought and the research context of Marxist educational thought.

## 2 Progress in the Research of Marx and Engels' Educational Thought

### 2.1 Human Essence

Throughout the existing research, the number of

studies on the human essence is relatively small, and they mostly linked to the overall development of human beings.

The study of the human essence of Marx and Engels should serve the educational theory and practice of China. The comprehensive and profound understanding of human essence makes us realize more clearly that human survival and development are in a specific social relationship and are influenced by various social factors. The study of Marxist theory of human essence." help us to establish advanced educational ideas; choose the educational content that conforms to human essence; choose the educational method that accords with human essence ".<sup>[6]</sup> The research on this aspect is of great significance to our educational theory and practice.

## **2.2 All-Round Development of Human Being**

In the existing research, the connotation of all-round development of human beings is one of the most discussed aspects.

There are big differences in interpretation of Marx and Engels of the all-round development of human beings. To sum up, there are generally three views on this issue: First, connect Marx's alienation theory with Marx and Engels' all-round development of human beings theory. Second, take the human essence as a synthesis of social relations to investigate human development. Third, the all-round development of human beings only includes the development of intelligence and physical strength.

## **2.3 Combination of Education and Productive Labour**

Focusing on the problem of combining education with productive labor, researchers have also made extensive discussions, focused on the background, connotation and practice and development of the thought in China.

In dealing with the educational thought of combining education with productive labor, we should adhere to the Marxist stand, viewpoint and method, adhere to the universal significance and regularity in their understanding, and use this theory to study and solve the theoretical and practical problems existed in our contemporary times.

## **2.4 Relationship between Education and Social Phenomena**

Education is a special phenomenon of human society,

as long as human society exists, there is education, and education is always social.

On the investigation of the relationship between education and various social phenomena, there was little research in this area. The research was mainly to sort out the formation and development of this idea, introduce its theory, and endow it with new explanation under the background of the present era, or discuss the social function of education.

## **2.5 Moral Education**

In organizing and leading the struggle of the working class, Marx and Engels attached great importance to raising the consciousness of the working class.

Throughout the existing research, this field involves less, mainly focusing on two aspects: one is to systematically and comprehensively explain the principle of moral education in Marx and Engels; the other is to combine the moral education thought of Marx and Engels, and put forward constructive suggestions on the problems of moral education in our school.

## **3 Trends in the Research of Marx and Engels' Educational Thought**

### **3.1 In-Depth Development of Text Research**

From the current research results, most researchers have adopted the literature research method. Through extensive reference to Marx and Engels' relevant literature on education, there are a large number of repetitive studies, resulting in some views, citations and other aspects of convergence and repetition. We lack the systematic and deep ploughing of the texts of classical writers such as Marx and Engels and can not return to their original context to deeply understand and grasp their ideological connotations. Text research is no longer just to interpret the original works of Marx and Engels from the ready-made nature of Marxist classics and the truth of their thoughts, but to take the unfinished nature of Marxist classics and the problem of thought as their starting point.

### **3.2 Increasing Academic Research**

Through combing the existing literature, it can be found that the researches on Marx and Engels' educational thought mainly focused on a certain period of time, such as in order to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Marx's death, a large number

of related articles were published around 1983. In addition, the researches were always closely related to a major decision or major deeds in the field of education in China, and the researches on this aspect in other periods was relatively weakened. This is very disproportionate to the requirement of guiding educational reform and development with Marxist educational thought. We should deal with the relationship between ideology and academic nature of Marx and Engels' educational thought, and strengthen our academic consciousness and sense of mission to the study of Marx and Engels' educational thought.

### 3.3 Focus on Methodological Research

Marx and Engels made important contributions to pedagogy. First, they provided the basic principles of pedagogy construction, and more importantly, they provided the methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism to guide the observation and solution to pedagogy problems. However, this method of solving the problem has not been paid enough attention in our study of Marx and Engels' educational thought. If we stick to the traditional research content, without reflection and promotion, it is difficult to reach a new level. It is even possible to repeat the old routine of the past under the whitewash of many new nouns. Only by using Marx and Engels' value standpoint and research method to analyze the hot and difficult points of education, only by combining theory with practice and forming benign interaction, can the research of Marx and Engels' educational thought realize a qualitative leap.

### 3.4 Cross-Cutting Research Conducted in Depth

Marx and Engels' educational thought is gradually formed and systematized in the process of Marxist philosophy, scientific socialism and political economy. An important aspect of Marx and

Engels' educational thought is the formulation and implementation of the proletarian educational struggle program and the revelation and struggle of the opportunistic educational thought in the workers' movement. Moreover, the further development of Marx and Engels' educational thought is closely related to their process of creating surplus value. Therefore, our research should explore the profound educational thought from Marx and Engels' overall vision and from the height of the combination of human liberation and social development law. In the research, it is necessary to strengthen the research, expand the research field, carry on the research of philosophy, sociology, psychology, ethics, behavioral science and other interdisciplinary perspectives.

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