

# Reflections on the Internal Contradictions and Motivation in Cultivating Collectivist Values among Graduate Students

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**Abstract:** As high-level professionals, graduate students are the "main force" in technological innovation and knowledge creation. The cultivation of their collectivist values is crucial for social development and technological progress. The unique attributes of the graduate student population lead to unique contradictions and dynamics in the development of their collectivist values. Firstly, it is essential to guide graduate students to align with the principle of prioritizing collective interests. Secondly, it is important to encourage rational thinking and knowledge among graduate student groups while also stimulating their emotional intuition and perceptual knowledge. Thirdly, efforts should be made to establish a structural atmosphere of "horizontal collectivism" to balance the emphasis on group collaboration with the individuality that graduate students often value.

**Keywords:** Graduate students; Collectivism; Values cultivation; Internal contradictions; Dynamics

## 1. Introduction

Collectivism is a crucial element of the spiritual heritage of the Chinese nation and a fundamental value system of the Chinese people. Graduate students, as high-level professionals, play a key role in technological innovation and knowledge creation. Therefore, fostering their collectivist values is essential for social development and technological advancement. In the midst of significant global changes, it is imperative to provide accurate and strong guidance to graduate students in navigating their relationship with the collective. Our analysis starts by exploring the prominent characteristics and tendencies displayed by the graduate student community.

Firstly, the spirit of innovation is a fundamental requirement for graduate students in academic research. Experts have pointed out that among the elements of research capability, innovation ranks foremost and far ahead. Secondly, the pursuit of truth is the overarching goal throughout the academic journey of graduate students. Having undergone various stages of learning in the past, graduate students have accumulated relatively rich life experiences and academic knowledge, forming relatively stable worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. Years of academic training have also shaped their critical thinking. Academic research is a process of seeking truth through criticism and dialectics. Lastly, subjectivity or individual pursuit serves as the internal driving force for graduate students in knowledge production activities. "The internal cause is the fundamental and leading of the change of things, and the enhancement of the research subjectivity of academic graduate students is the internal power source of their innovative spirit and creativity." [1] These characteristics, to a certain extent, constrain the development of collectivist values among graduate students. Therefore, this article aims to explore the contradictions and dynamics inherent in the development of collectivist values among graduate students and elaborates on our thoughts on this issue.

## 2. The Contradiction and Motivation between the Normative and Restrictive Nature of Collectivist Values and the Spirit of Innovation

In academic innovation, knowledge creation, and other learning activities, graduate students gradually develop a mindset and spiritual quality that embraces the willingness to challenge existing logical rules and explore new possibilities. This mindset is in contradiction with collectivist values that emphasize restricting collective behavior through universal rules.

### ***2.1. Collectivist Values are Founded upon A Stable System of Rules***

The principle of collectivism is the fundamental requirement for managing the diverse interests between individuals and the collective. It provides individuals with guidelines for action and imposes expectations on their behavior. Moreover, the concept of collectivism as a principle has evolved over time, demonstrating a "hierarchical" nature, which introduces varying levels of collectivist expectations for individuals. The highest level demands selfless contributions and wholehearted service to the people. The second level sets a universal standard, requiring individuals to prioritize collective interests over personal ones. The third level establishes a basic standard, prompting individuals to consider the bigger picture.

Scientific research differs from collective action in general. Although the organizations of graduate students are also engaged in collective action due to the convergence of academic interests, this particular collective represents the most important social relationship in the graduate school stage. However, such collective action is premised on individuals fully exerting their innovative spirit and producing innovative outcomes.[2] At the same time, due to the varying contributions of each member to research activities, authoritative roles will inevitably emerge within the group. Within the pre-established rules of the collective, the authority within the organization will lead members in conducting coordinated actions in accordance with their own style. As an individual within the collective, adhering to rules or obeying authority is generally seen as an identification with the collective rules. The higher level of integration should be the internalization of collective rules by individuals into their own order, and by extension, the identification of collectivist values - obeying rules and maintaining order.

### ***2.2. The Unique Innovative Spirit of Graduate Students Fosters within Them a Habitual Mindset that is Adept at Questioning***

The essence of the innovative spirit lies in the novelty and uniqueness of ideas, enabling individuals to solve problems in unconventional ways. It is a crucial quality that graduate students must possess for academic innovation and knowledge production. Conducting original research and achieving innovative results often involves breaking through existing human cognition, essentially challenging established logic and breaking existing rules, which is the primary task and goal of graduate studies.[3]

The spirit of innovation first presents an extended feature, that is, the germination of academic innovation is based on the existing knowledge products of the discipline or related disciplines as the cognitive basis and theoretical source, and on this basis, the existing knowledge is developed in a broader or deeper way. Secondly, breakthroughs in academic innovation also reveal the leapfrogging nature of the innovative spirit. When graduate students encounter phenomena that cannot be resolved or adequately explained by existing knowledge in their research work, finding solutions may require a complete departure from the current knowledge framework and cognitive logic. The establishment of such academic aspirations inherently embodies the leapfrogging nature of the innovative spirit. Graduate students' subsequent work is not about filling gaps or explaining existing theories but rather addressing real-world contradictions and dilemmas, breaking through existing theoretical doctrines or mindsets. It is evident that graduate students need to apply their innovative spirit in scientific research, and the academic innovations driven by this spirit are manifestations of questioning existing understandings, challenging widely accepted knowledge systems, and even breaking established rules.

The key to balancing the contradiction and motivation between rules and innovation is to guide graduate students to recognize the principles and norms of collectivism from the root and help them understand that collectivism is essential for showcasing individual distinctive personality and fostering an innovative spirit. When managing graduate students, it is crucial to embody the concept of "freedom within constraints." "Constraints" refer to rules that must be followed as common requirements, while "freedom" signifies free and individualized development within these rules[4]. Similar to a basketball game where players have different roles (e.g., team core, long-range shooter, powerful center) that are vital to the team, all performances and contributions must adhere to the game rules. The framework of collectivist rules is designed with collective interests in mind and does not suppress dissenting opinions that may disrupt "harmony" in the pursuit of "absolute equality" among members. Instead, it encourages individuals to express innovative ideas or work with unconventional methods, which can promote the exercise of the innovative spirit.

Institutions such as schools should respect the subjectivity of students, create a more relaxed internal atmosphere as much as possible, encourage individual development, and provide better conditions for graduate students' scientific research innovation and personality development. Students, on the other

hand, must always remember the common requirements as graduate students and uphold the rule-based bottom line to maintain collective harmony and stability. From the perspective of fostering graduate students' innovative capabilities, when the collective puts forward innovative demands and goals, individual members will more actively mobilize their innovative spirit to contribute to the organization's achievements or advantages. The collective innovation needs could be research targets for project teams, outcomes required for discipline construction, or critical technological demands that impact national technological development. To ensure the realization of collective goals, stable rules provide the most basic behavioral guidelines for collective activities and lay the foundation for individuals to harness their creativity and collaborate with their teams to tackle research problems.

### **3. The Contradiction and Motivation between the Intuitive Habits of Collectivism Values and the Postgraduate's Pursuit of Truth**

The development of collectivist values necessitates the emotional intuitions arising from individual experiences in specific events. These intuitions not only provide impetus for individuals' value systems to grow but also offer a certain degree of directional guidance in making value decisions and judgments. However, the postgraduate community, through their gradual cultivation of the spirit of seeking truth in academic research, has come to rely less on personal emotional intuitions. This signifies that the unique rational and critical thinking patterns of postgraduates do not fully align with the intuitive habits embedded in collectivist values. While this discrepancy creates a contradiction between the two, it also mutually fuels their respective dynamics.

#### ***3.1. Collectivist Values Involve the Intuitive Processing of Feelings or Emotions in Their Development***

On the one hand, collectivist values, as a form of emotional cognition, involve the intuitive processing of feelings or emotions in their development. As collectivist values evolve, this path of intuitive processing solidifies into intuitive habits or thought patterns. Educators play a crucial role in nurturing these values by creating specific environments, atmospheres, and scenarios that infuse the educational content of collectivist values into various educational carriers such as situations and activities. Through emotional elicitation and persuasion, educators subtly enrich postgraduates' perceptual understanding of collectivist values, ultimately awakening their collective emotions and stimulating their internal motivations. The primary methods include personality influence, environmental nurturing, and artistic influence.

##### **■ Personality Influence**

Educators inspire postgraduates by demonstrating behaviors such as assuming collective responsibilities, striving for the collective good, and safeguarding collective interests. Instead of relying solely on logic, demands, or restrictions, educators instill collectivist values through their own actions.

##### **■ Environmental Nurturing**

The living environment subtly shapes postgraduates' collectivist values. Cultural and institutional environments in schools convey the idea that collective interests should take precedence, and individuals demonstrate their value through contributions to the collective. These environments stimulate postgraduates' internal drive to cultivate collectivist values.

##### **■ Artistic Influence**

Art, as a powerful expression of human wisdom, is vivid and profound, nurturing the soul, inspiring intellect, and providing a rich source of inspiration. Through musical, visual, dance, and cinematic art forms, educators create an aesthetic culture that touches the hearts and beliefs of students, fostering the development of their collective values.

Marxism acknowledges that both rational and irrational factors contribute to the development of human cognition, with irrational factors playing a role in motivating, controlling, and driving this process. Lenin also noted, "Without human emotions, there has never been and can never be the pursuit of truth." [5] Therefore, the habits formed by intuitive consciousness, as a form of irrationality, often depend on external forces to awaken and stimulate individuals' emotional attachment to collectivist values.

### ***3.2. The Unique Spirit of Seeking Truth among Postgraduates Shapes Their Highly Rational and Critical Way of Thinking***

On the other hand, the unique spirit of seeking truth that characterizes the postgraduate community has shaped their highly rational and critical way of thinking.

The academic research conducted by postgraduates is a practical endeavor that delves into, reveals, and explains the essential nature and developmental laws of nature and human society based on the regularity of objective facts. The spirit of seeking truth drives the advancement of scientific activities. "Without believing that our theoretical constructs can grasp reality, without believing in the inherent harmony of our world, there can be no science. This belief is, and always will be, the fundamental driving force behind all scientific creations," as Marx observed. He further noted, "Science is the science of experimentation; science consists in the rational organization of perceptual materials." [6]

The spirit of seeking truth necessitates the application of rational methods to overcome subjective assumptions and guesses, accurately reflecting objective reality, continually exploring the essence and origins of things, and grasping the objective laws governing their development. This involves two primary aspects:

#### **■ Seeking Truth in the Research Process**

Postgraduates must employ abstract and logical thinking in their scientific endeavors, adhering to rationality and basing their work on objective reality. They should trace the roots and inquire into the essence of their research topics, rigorously and meticulously arguing their findings. They must oppose dogmatism, blind obedience, and fallacy to achieve their goals.

#### **■ Seeking Truth in the Research Results**

Postgraduates must treat their research outcomes objectively and fairly, discarding falsehoods and retaining the truth. They should overcome impulsive and utilitarian academic attitudes, refraining from falsifying data, misreporting, or distorting research conclusions. They must respect facts, defend the truth, and ensure that their scientific findings can withstand the test of time and practical scrutiny.

Balancing the contradiction and motivation between the spirit of seeking truth and intuitive habits necessitates a greater emphasis on rationality and rational cognition within the postgraduate community, while simultaneously harnessing the power of collectivist values to stimulate their emotional intuition and awaken their perceptual understanding. These two aspects, though seemingly contradictory, actually form a unique driving force that promotes the development of collectivist values among postgraduates amidst their conflict.

Firstly, the postgraduate community, under the influence of external environments, social relationships, critical events, and other factors, will inevitably develop various emotions towards the collective, such as a sense of belonging, identity, fulfillment, support, or loneliness. These emotions often manifest in perceptual forms, and the spirit of seeking truth encourages postgraduates to complement their emotional intuitions with rational judgments. By delving into the essence and laws behind phenomena, postgraduates gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of collectivism, instinctively prioritizing collective interests in their decision-making and judgments. Additionally, the spirit of seeking truth helps correct individual biases, resolve negative emotional experiences, and empower postgraduates to transcend the superficial and limited nature of perceptual understanding through their subjective initiative, achieving a sublimation from perceptual to rational cognition.

Secondly, the intuitive habits associated with collectivist values enable postgraduates to transcend the limitations of their cognitive abilities. Rational cognition, primarily derived from logical thinking, is abstract and indirect. In contrast, the emotional intuitions triggered by collectivist values enhance postgraduates' concrete understanding of abstract concepts such as the collective and collectivism. This deepens their comprehension and identification with related knowledge and theories, enabling their rational understanding to better guide practice. [7]

### **4. The Contradiction and Motivation between the Group Collaboration Awareness of Collectivist Values and the Independent Spirit of Postgraduates**

Collectivist values represent the synergy of the collective will among its members and constitute the most universal value pursuit for collective members. However, graduate students, with their heightened sense of self-awareness, place greater emphasis on expressing their own individual will and showcasing

their personalities. Consequently, there exists a need to balance the contradiction and motivation between the group collaboration awareness inherent in collectivist values and the personal expression of graduate students.

#### ***4.1. Collectivist Values Emphasize the Expression of Collective Synergy and Will***

On the one hand, collectivist values emphasize the expression of collective synergy and will. Collectivism serves as the fundamental principle for regulating the interests between individuals and between individuals and the collective. It imposes requirements on individual behavior from the perspective of collective morality. When individual interests conflict with those of the collective, individuals are encouraged to cultivate a sense of the greater good, forsaking the "self" for the "greater self" of the collective. As Marx stated in *The German Ideology*, "Only in the community is individual freedom possible." Therefore, collective collaboration is an inevitable aspect of being a socially-attuned individual. China's concept of a "Community of Common Destiny for All Mankind" underscores a synergistic relationship where "you are in me, and I am in you", reflecting a "grand collective consciousness" that transcends national, racial, geographical, and bloodline boundaries. More importantly, it dispels the misconception that collectivism is a stereotypical attribute exclusive to socialist societies. By placing the overall interests of humanity above those of individual nations and fostering collaboration among countries to address global issues, it fully demonstrates China's responsibility as a major power.

#### ***4.2. Graduate Students Tend to Emphasize the Expression of Their Individuality***

However, objectively speaking, graduate students tend to place greater emphasis on expressing their individuality and self-subjectivity. As highly educated and sophisticated individuals, contemporary graduate students possess a stronger sense of self-subjectivity and individualism due to their mature thinking, abundant knowledge base, and exposure to various external social ideologies. This manifests in their independent mindset, decentralized organizational behavior, and feelings of loneliness and superiority in psychological activities. Marx noted in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "[8]Man does not merely reproduce himself in his consciousness: he actively and realistically reproduces himself, and in so doing he intuitively himself in the world he has created." This suggests that the spirit of self-subjectivity is not merely a figment of one's imagination but rather a product of practical experience and an individual's self-awareness. Essentially, self-subjectivity refers to an individual's evolving understanding and awareness of their personality traits, beliefs, emotions, values, and behavioral patterns throughout their growth.

The current cohort of graduate students primarily comprises individuals born in the 1990s, mid-1990s, and 2000s. They have been exposed to a wider range of novel experiences and values, particularly influenced by social ideologies such as neoliberalism, fostering more individualized value pursuits and autonomous learning styles. In terms of graduate students themselves, after undergoing rigorous academic training and independent life experiences, they have accumulated substantial knowledge and personal experiences, gradually forming stable worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. Furthermore, the inherent diversity within this group, encompassing different types, age groups, specialties, academic levels, and learning styles, not only equips them with the ability to think and solve problems independently but also stimulates their inherent self-subjectivity. This manifests in three primary aspects:

- Independent Consciousness in Thought and Belief

Pursuing graduate and doctoral studies is challenging, requiring self-regulation, self-discipline, and self-motivation. The solitude and dedication inherent in academic pursuits foster a strong sense of independence among these students.

- Decentralized Organizational Behavior

The social circle of graduate students is often limited to their academic departments, and their willingness to participate in class meetings or other collective activities is often low.

- Psychological Feelings of Loneliness and Superiority

Graduate students, especially doctoral candidates, occupy the pinnacle of the academic hierarchy, fostering a sense of superiority and high expectations for themselves. However, they also face immense academic and employment pressures, coupled with a lack of emotional outlets, leading to feelings of loneliness.

To balance the conflict and motivation between individuality and a sense of group collaboration, one can attempt to establish a structural atmosphere of "horizontal collectivism" that embodies mutual respect, shared resources, and joint decision-making. [9]The relationship between collectivist values and postgraduate self-subjectivity is one of mutual support, promotion, and complementarity, rather than complete opposition. Graduate students can only fully express their self-subjectivity within a collective. On the one hand, the collective provides the conditions for graduate students to express their self-subjectivity. On the other hand, the expression of their self-subjectivity can also drive the development of the collective. As social individuals, graduate students cannot exist in isolation from society, and thus their expression of self-subjectivity occurs within the context of social collective collaboration.

From an ideological perspective, Chinese graduate students, as highly educated intellectuals nurtured by traditional Chinese culture, fully understand and ideologically identify with the "collective consciousness" and "overall situation awareness" advocated by socialist core values. In terms of social life, although the organizations that graduate students participate in are limited to small groups such as their supervisor's research group, group meetings, laboratories, and classmates in common classes, they are still constantly interacting with others and inevitably become integrated into these small collectives to play their individual roles. From a psychological perspective, if graduate students were to exist in isolation from the collective and society, the sense of superiority derived from comparison with others would cease to exist. Therefore, the collective atmosphere under the "horizontal collectivism" structure is more in line with the psychological acceptance patterns of the graduate student population. In essence, the attainment of personal values sought by graduate students is intricately linked to the communal sphere, just as the advancement of the collective necessitates the drive of individual self-awareness.[10] The collective entity comprises a variety of individuals, and it is only through the complete expression of their unique self-awareness that the collective can advance and evolve effectively.

## 5. Conclusions

In this article, we analyze the contradiction and motivation between postgraduate students' collectivist values and innovation spirit, pursuit of truth and independence spirit, and draw the conclusion that the educator or manager needs to guide graduate students to identify the principle of collective interest, unify the individual reason with the collective feeling, and wave the group coordination consciousness. Education, science, technology, and talent serve as the foundational and strategic cornerstones of China's modernization efforts. Graduate students in contemporary China are urged to consistently uphold communal values, further champion the ethos of innovation, pursuit of truth, and self-awareness, and endeavor to contribute their expertise towards the nation's progress in science, education, talent development, and socialist modernization.

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