

Moral Capital and Moral Construction in Contemporary China

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Abstract: *To promote more emphasis on real life in ethics, develop economic ethics especially moral capital theory and further promote the moral construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the high-level forum on frontier issues in ethics, which was jointly organized by the Institute of Ethics of Nanjing Normal University and the School of Marxism of Sanjiang University, was successfully held at Nanjing Normal University on July 11, 2021. The forum collected more than 50 high-quality academic papers and attracted more than 80 scholars from Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China, Nanjing Normal University and other universities. Focusing on the ethical frontier theme of “moral capital and moral construction in contemporary China”, the participating scholars conducted comprehensive and in-depth exchanges and discussions on moral capital and social development, moral capital and corporate ethics, the centennial development of applied ethics and some basic theoretical issues of ethics.*

Keywords: *Moral Capital; Moral Construction; social development*

1. Moral Capital and Social Development

As the frontier research achievement of business ethics, moral capital theory has become the most important topic of this forum. This theory is an innovative theory proposed by Professor Wang Xiaoxi of Nanjing Normal University, which has both Chinese characteristics and international influence. At this high-level forum, some scholars further discussed the moral capital theory from the perspective of moral and social development. Professor Wang Xiaoxi of Nanjing Normal University explained the proposition that “capital operation must contain moral spiritual capital” from three aspects.^[1] First, the nature of capital and moral power support each other. Whether the capital profit process is smooth or not is closely related to the moral content of labor force and products; and moral capital requires moral norms to guide and restrict money making behavior. Second, moral goals and capital goals are opposite. Moral consciousness and moral realm are consistent with material benefits and spiritual benefits that ultimately show material benefits. The morality of socialist capital is reflected in making money for social interests. Third, moral value is consistent with the goal of capital rationality. Socialist investment must conform to the ideas and values of the socialist system in order to realize the basic purpose of capital movement.

Professor Yu Dahuai of Hohai University analyzed the relationship between capital and morality and believed that capital ethics is the moral responsibility to study the mode of capital production and the proof of human relationship under the condition of capital operation.^[2] The emergence of capital has both good and evil. On the one hand, capital brings order, credit, equality and civilization; and on the other hand, it also brings surplus value, the gap between the rich and the poor. Professor Tang Jianlong of Nanjing Normal University analyzed the relationship between capital and system, and pointed out that in capitalist society, economic rationality and capitalism have become one, and the capital logic of pursuing profit maximization is their common essence. Economic rationality has certain limits, and once it exceeds the limits, it will turn into irrationality. The continuous expansion of contemporary capitalist economic rationality includes this irrational aspect while ignoring the humanistic dimension and the role of morality.

Professor Liu Lin of Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics analyzes five aspects of economic ethics from the perspective of the new era: First, the realistic foundation of the current national macroeconomic policy is a well-off society built in an all-round way; Second, properly handle the relationship between the government and the market, respect the spirit of market contract and

consolidate the credibility of the government; Third, attach importance to the construction of corporate moral responsibility and build an entrepreneurial spirit with Chinese characteristics; Fourth, pay attention to labor ethics and distributive justice, and build harmonious labor relations; Fifth, establish a people-centered concept of economic and ethical development and do a good job in basic and comprehensive livelihood projects.^[3]

2. Moral Capital and Corporate Ethics

Enterprise is a meso-subject of social and economic activities. It is the key proof point and key application place of moral capital theory. Some scholars apply the theory of moral capital to the construction of corporate ethics. On the one hand, they call for moral constraints on enterprise activities, on the other hand, they advocate providing moral capital for enterprise development. Professor Zhu Jinrui of Henan University of Economics and Law believes that the research on corporate ethics in the new era should focus on four aspects: first, strengthen system research and strive to build the discipline system of Chinese corporate ethics. Second, highlight Chinese characteristics and build a socialist corporate ethics theory with Chinese characteristics suitable for Chinese economy, law and culture. Third, expand the research content, focusing on the corporate ethics theory, major corporate ethics issues in the new development pattern, the history of Chinese corporate ethics, the relationship between corporate ethics and regional culture, etc. Fourth, strengthen empirical research, seek the commonness of enterprise moral construction on the basis of case study, and strengthen the research on the evaluation index system of enterprise moral strength.^[4]

Promoting the construction of corporate ethics is one of the hot issues concerned by the conference. Professor Li Zhixiang of Nanjing Normal University analyzed the practical mechanism of corporate social responsibility. He pointed out that the key to promoting the construction of corporate social responsibility is to reasonably build a bridge between corporate responsibility performance and public moral response, so that corporate moral failure will be condemned and punished by the society, corporate responsibility performance will be appreciated and supported by the society, and finally realize the unity of “morality” and “happiness” and the symbiosis of “righteousness” and “benefit”.^[5] Professor Zhang Xiao of Renmin University of China analyzed the social evaluation system of enterprises. He believes that adjusting the rational person hypothesis of self-interest maximization with ethics related motivation, using ethics related social achievement evaluation concept to encourage enterprises to accumulate moral capital dominated by reputation and build an enterprise social achievement evaluation system can internally stimulate enterprises and capital. Professor Xia Mingyue of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics regards labor relations ethics as the core competitiveness of enterprises. She believes that “labor relations ethics” is the presupposition of knowledge legitimacy based on the combination of economics and Marxist philosophy. It is an important factor to enhance the core competitiveness of enterprises. Embedding relevant variables into the core competitiveness model of enterprises can build a more complete evaluation and analysis model.^[6]

3. Ruling Ethics, Ecological Ethics and Rural Ethics in the Century since the Founding of the Communist Party of China

Scholars agree that ethical research needs to face real life and pay attention to the practical moral problems in China’s social development, so as to facilitate the moral construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Under this consensus, scholars discussed the ruling ethics, ecological ethics and rural ethics since the founding of the Communist Party of China.

The construction of the Ruling Ethics of the Communist Party of China is an important part of the construction of socialist democratic politics and ethical civilization. Nanjing Normal University Professor Zhang Zhen believes that the Communist Party of China has always attached great importance to and continuously strengthened the construction of Ruling Ethics. The centennial development history of the Communist Party of China is also the construction history of Ruling Ethics of the Communist Party of China. In the future, we should build a service-oriented, responsible, legal, learning and innovative political party.^[7] Professor Cui Xinyou of Jiangsu Open University analyzed the principles of “integrity” and “innovation” of the century-old ruling ethics of the Communist Party of China. “Keeping upright” means adhering to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and “innovation” is the excellent character possessed by the people of the Communist Party of China in previous dynasties. “Red boat spirit” and “party building spirit” are vivid portrayals of “integrity” and

“innovation” as well as the spiritual source and red gene passed down from generation to generation by the Community Party of China.

Professor Cao Mengqin of Nanjing Normal University discussed ecological ethics from the perspective of the relationship between man and nature. He pointed out that taking the purpose of labor as the standard is to abrogate alienated labor, open a new world with ecological labor, reflect the beauty of human nature with the truth, goodness and beauty of the new world, create people in the real sense and promote the resurrection of nature. The realistic nature created by man is the realistic presentation of man’s essence. Through the realistic nature, people can intuitively see their own self-image. The essence of ecological crisis is the crisis of human nature. Only by constructing a real natural world according to the law of beauty can people return to human beings and move towards the nobility of human nature.^[8]

Professor Wang Lulu of Nanjing Normal University put forward three problems that must be paid attention to in the study of rural ethics: first, use the interdisciplinary perspective based on the cross perspective of ethics, sociology, economics, politics, anthropology and folklore, and pay attention to highlighting the basic theoretical perspective of ethics. The second is to learn from the method of moral narratology, adhere to the idea of “village entry” and “subject closeness”, and reveal the moral tradition and characteristics of the village ethical community through the field investigation of the combination of qualitative research of in-depth interview and quantitative research of questionnaire survey. The third is to deal with the relationship between the individual exploration of “local moral knowledge” and the overall grasp of Chinese rural ethics.^[9]

4. Other Basic Theories of Ethics

In addition to the moral practice in contemporary China, participants at the conference also conducted in-depth discussions on some important ethical theoretical issues. Jiang Jinghua, associate professor of Beijing University of Science and Technology, expounded the way of the origin of everything in the world – “love” and “struggle”. Citing the views of scholars such as Empedocles, she believes that love and struggle constitute the original existence of the world. Without love, life may be an irrelevant element. People need love because of their own limitations and fragility. Only when people walk hand in hand with other lives can they make life fresh and vivid. Only by attaching importance to the ethical power of “love” and the coexistence relationship with “struggle” can our life be more meaningful. Tao Tao, associate professor of Nanjing Normal University, believes that Plutarch's practical ethics is to explain the concept of virtue on the basis of moral psychology based on soul theory, explain the overall view of passion on the relationship between reason and passion, and apply it to specific practice on the basis of the above two points, so as to achieve the purpose of “meditation” and achieve virtue progress.^[10] Tao Tao pointed out that Plutarch inherited the tradition of strong rationalism and reserved the space of emotionalism.

Famous experts gathered at this forum, with warm discussions and clear views. The participants focused on the latest development and frontier trends of moral capital theory and contemporary Chinese moral construction, which will play an important role in promoting the moral construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the development of ethics.

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