

The Alienation of Contemporary College Students' Spiritual Life and Its Solution from the Perspective of Internet Subculture

Zheng Bufan^{1,a}

¹College of Marxism Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, 321004, China
^a393938663@qq.com

Abstract: Internet subculture is a form of popular culture that is distinct from mainstream internet culture and embodies distinctive aesthetics and values. It is primarily characterized by circling stratification of subjects, vulgarization of contents, symbolization of forms, and utilitarianization of market. In the context of internet subculture, the spiritual life of contemporary college students presents a triple alienation pattern, namely, mental and emotional life, cultural and aesthetic life, and moral and faith life, which correspond to the perceptual level, rational level, and transcendental level, respectively. In order to cope with this problem, it is necessary to guide college students based on the practical process of spiritual life, to improve the "quality and efficiency" of spiritual production, to facilitate the "deep interaction" of spiritual communication, to achieve the "rational consciousness" of spiritual consumption, thus promoting the high-quality development of the spiritual life of contemporary students.

Keywords: internet subculture; college students; spiritual life; alienation

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the internet era, the internet has become a major venue for youth subculture, giving birth to the internet subculture. Internet subcultures are spreading in the spiritual life of contemporary college students, providing them with a new perspective on the world while inevitably leading to the alienation of their spiritual life. On the whole, the spiritual life of contemporary college students shows obvious dichotomous characteristics. On the one hand, they are born in the best period of national development and have a better development environment and broader space for growth; on the other hand, they are also plagued by many problems in the process of post-modernity, especially in the spiritual life. Therefore, in the internet subcultural field, it is necessary to face the alienation of the spiritual life of contemporary college students and explore feasible paths to promote the high-quality development of college students' spiritual life.

2. The essential connotation and important representations of internet subculture

Internet subculture is a form of popular culture that is distinct from mainstream internet culture and embodies distinctive aesthetics and values. Internet users make use of their virtual identities in the virtual space of the internet. By creating and disseminating virtual symbols in the internet medium, they construct unique value systems and behavioral norms while expressing their discourse, venting their emotions, expressing their personalities, and reshaping themselves. Specifically, internet subculture has the following four major representations.

2.1 Subject: circling stratification under the guidance of "interesting relationship"

"Interesting relationship" refers to a social relationship between people based on common interests, emotional needs, and value orientation. Although the phenomenon of "interesting relationship" has been around for a long time, before the formation of the internet, it did not become a dominant social relationship due to historical conditions, geographical environment, media technology, and other constraints. With the rapid development of the internet era, the social relationship with "interesting relationship" as the core has been formed. Due to their different interests, internet subjects have formed different circles in the internet space. Different circles have their own rules, culture, and language.

Under the guidance of the "interesting" relationship, the internet subculture shows the characteristics of the subject's circles and tend to lead to the creation of "information cocoons".

2.2 Content: vulgarization under the custody of pan-entertainment

Pan-entertainment refers to a cultural phenomenon that takes consumerism and hedonism as the core, uses modern media as the main carrier, and tries to relax people's nervous nerves through dramatic and indiscriminate performances in a shallow and empty content so as to achieve pleasure. Neil Postman once pointed out in his article "Amusing ourselves to death" that "we live in an age of entertainment to death, where the masses are increasingly inclined to present themselves in an entertaining attitude or manner, whether in terms of language or behavior."^[1] Under the custody of pan-entertainment, people have abandoned the pursuit of the "noble" and indulged in deformed internet culture, making the internet subculture vulgarized in content.

2.3 Form: symbolic under the tendency of visual narrative

A visual culture is a form of culture that uses images as ideographic symbols. It has increasingly become the core element and dominant form of contemporary cultural development, making people's daily life "landscape-oriented" and "visualized". In the age of information explosion, when people are overwhelmed by the huge amount of information, the contemporary youth group, is more inclined to accept visual image narratives that are intuitive, simple, and vivid, which has led to corresponding changes in the expression of internet subculture. Under the tendency of visual narrative, various online subcultures with images as the core elements have developed rapidly, such as the major live-streaming platforms represented by HuYa and DouYu, short video social software represented by TikTok and KuaiShou, as well as various kinds of popular online emoji packs, which are all symbolic representations of internet subculture expressions.

2.4 Market: utilitarian wrapped in the logic of capital

The logic of capital is the logic of capital expansion in pursuit of surplus value maximization. The unique online subculture has met the psychological needs of young people in pursuit of identity, and the high willingness of young people to pay has led to a huge expansion of capital in this field. With the strong involvement of capital, the production, dissemination, and realization of online subculture content have formed a complete industry cycle. Many subculture core groups directly incorporate subcultural capital into the calculation of interests by means of "traffic to cash", which has given rise to economic forms such as internet celebrity economy and fan economy. Wrapped in the logic of capital, the market of internet subculture shows a utilitarian character.

3. The alienation of the spiritual life of contemporary college students from the perspective of internet subculture

The Dictionary of Spiritual Civilization defines "spiritual life" as "the kind of spiritual production and enjoyment activities that people carry out for survival and development."^[2] Spiritual life is not naturally existing and instinctively inherited but needs to be generated and developed by the subject through conscious practice and active realization, pursuit, realization and transcendence. In this regard, consciousness plays an important role. Different levels of individual consciousness development bring about differences spiritual life development. In this sense, spiritual life can be divided into perceptual, rational, and transcendental levels, which correspond to different levels of individual awareness development.^[3] Based on this, the alienation pattern of the spiritual life of contemporary college students in the context of internet subculture is manifested in three aspects, namely mental and emotional life, cultural and aesthetic life, and moral and faith life, which correspond to the perceptual level, rational level and transcendental level respectively.

3.1 Perceptual level: college students' mental and emotional life is negative and passive

Mental and emotional life is the perceptual experience dimension of spiritual life, which is fundamental to the spiritual life of human beings. In a sense, human psychology and emotions are innate, but they are mainly strengthened and enhanced in the social environment where the individual lives later in life based on the subject's awareness. Lenin once said: "In front of the man is the web of

natural phenomena. The instinctive man, namely the savage man, does not distinguish himself from nature. The self-conscious man distinguishes himself."^[4] Having distinguished himself from nature, the conscious man is driven by his inner needs to think about his relationship with nature and interact actively with it. In this process, the individual's reflection of the external world and reaction to external stimuli are inevitably accompanied by some sensory experiences and perceptions. These basic cognitive, emotional, and volitional activities constitute the individual's psycho-emotional life. Under the influence of the internet subculture, their psycho-emotional life presents a negative and passive alienation pattern.

3.2 Rational level: college students' cultural and aesthetic life is utilitarian and deformed

Cultural and aesthetic life is the rational cognitive dimension of spiritual life. Engels once said, "People must first eat, drink, live, and dress before engaging in politics, science, art, religion, and so on."^[5] Real people can construct specific culture based on their experience and perception to the real world. "When more material of perceptual understanding is accumulated, a leap is made, and it becomes rational understanding, which is thought."^[6] Through continuous accumulation, people process perceptual materials, thus deepening their understanding of things and raising perceptual understanding to rational understanding. Under the influence of internet subculture, contemporary college students face challenges in the knowledge pursuit and the aesthetic construction, and their cultural and aesthetic life present a utilitarian and deformed pattern.

3.3 Transcendental level: college students' moral and faith life is indifferent and vain

Moral and faith life is the social character dimension and meaningful realization dimension of spiritual life, which has a guiding role in the spiritual life of human beings. When human consciousness is not limited to the subjective reflection of objective things or the rational grasp of the non-intuitive world but can transcend the limitations of the material and social life and inquire into the meaning of existence and even the original question of the world, it reaches the highest level of consciousness activity and the highest level of spiritual development.^[7] This paradigmatic effect of spiritual life on real life is manifested mainly through the moral and faith life. The moral and faith life of an individual means that human existence is not only the existence of life itself but the interpretation, and transcendence of the value of self-existence, which concentrates the ultimate orientation of individual spiritual pursuit. Under the influence of the internet subculture, college students' moral and faith lives present an alienated state of indifference and emptiness.

4. The feasible path to promote the high-quality development of the spiritual life of contemporary college students in the context of internet subculture

According to the viewpoint of historical materialism, spiritual life does not consist of abstract conceptual discourse or pure spiritual experience but is based on realistic social practice. Therefore, to deal with the alienation of the spiritual life of contemporary college students in the field of internet subculture, we should not just stay on the surface but should guide college students based on the practical process of spiritual life, to improve the "quality and efficiency" of spiritual production, to facilitate the "deep interaction" of spiritual communication, to achieve the "rational consciousness" of spiritual consumption, thus promoting the high-quality development of the spiritual life of contemporary students.

4.1 To improve the "quality and efficiency" of spiritual production

Based on the critique of alienated labor, Marx compared human beings with animals and put forward Marx's theory of universal production. According to Marx's theory of universal production, spiritual production is not governed by man's physical needs, and it is the production of beauty that man can carry out according to the inner spiritual laws of man, which is the mark of man's being human.^[8] How to mobilize the dynamism of human beings by regulating spiritual production is the key issue to upgrade the spiritual life of contemporary college students. At present, the internet subculture has profoundly influenced and shaped the way of spiritual production and spiritual life of contemporary college students. On the one hand, it actively promotes the change of spiritual production mode, thus opening up more space for the spiritual life of contemporary college students; on the other hand, it also brings problems such as capital hostage, technological alienation, and secular immersion to spiritual

production, which makes it difficult for contemporary college students to produce according to the law of beauty and causes the poverty and emptiness of their spiritual production.

Based on this, facing the alienation of the spiritual production of contemporary college students, we can provide spiritual food for the high-quality development of college students' spiritual life by starting from three aspects. First of all, we should build a firm theoretical position, guiding college students to enrich their minds with Marxist theories and master the scientific worldview and methodology. Secondly, we should strengthen the value leadership and gather the "maximum convention" of social consensus with the socialist core values, guiding college students to generate value identity. Finally, we should pay attention to practical cultivation, return to the humanized nature of spiritual production by the subject's conscious labor, and realize the free and comprehensive development of human beings.

4.2 To facilitate the "deep interaction" of spiritual communication

According to Marx's theory of communication, the essence of human beings "is the sum of all social relations"^[9]. Since the spiritual life of human beings is created in certain social relationships and communication structures, promoting the deep spiritual communication of college students is an important way to improve the quality of their spiritual life. However, the popularity of internet subculture has invariably changed the way of spiritual interaction among contemporary college students. On the one hand, the network era has eliminated physical time and space limitations and traditional identity restrictions and closed the distance between people, which provides richer choices and broader fields for the spiritual communication of college students. On the other hand, the internet subculture characterized by circling stratification has blocked spiritual communication among college students by the uniqueness of discourse system, the similarity of cognitive framework, and the limitation of communication range. As a result, contemporary college students are unable to coalesce into a spiritual community with mutual dependence in emotion and consensus in value.

Based on this, facing the alienation of the spiritual communication of contemporary college students, we can start from three unifications. The first is to realize the unification of the leading role of educators and the main role of educated people, to change the education method from "indoctrination" to "interaction". Secondly, we should strive to realize the unification of online social intercourse and real social intercourse, to guide college students to actively recognize and consciously adjust the relationship between themselves and the internet, not to be dominated by online social intercourse. Thirdly, we should be dedicated to achieving the unification of mainstream culture and subculture. The mainstream culture should find the resonance point with college students' thoughts, appropriately draw lessons from the narrative style and discourse expression of internet subculture, and implicate the mainstream culture in implicit education.

4.3 To achieve the "rational consciousness" of spiritual consumption

"Without production, there is no consumption; but, without consumption, there is no production."^[10] From Marx's theory of consumption, as the "terminal link" of the chain of spiritual life, spiritual consumption should not only realize the realm of individual spiritual life but also play its role in optimizing the whole process of spiritual life.^[11] Unlike consumers' one-way domination of material products in material consumption, spiritual consumption focuses more on the two-way interaction between consumers and spiritual products. If a tension balance is reached between the intrinsic value of spiritual products and the acceptability of consumers, consumers can effectively consume spiritual products, thus enriching their own spiritual world and promoting free and comprehensive development.^[12] However, at present, the heterogeneous space created by the internet subculture is commodified under the support of capital, so that some college students show irrational behaviors such as "over-consumption", "extravagant consumption" and "comparison consumption", and fall into the phenomenon of spiritual consumption alienation such as superficial consumption, materialistic consumption, and symbolic consumption.

Based on this, facing the alienation of spiritual consumption of contemporary college students, the spiritual life of college students can be restored to a virtuous cycle from the two subjects. For consumers, we should play the leading role of socialist core values, to correct the concept of spiritual consumption and improve the level of spiritual consumption products. For spiritual consumption products, educators should break the inertial thinking, find the combination point with modern information technology to push out new ideas for teaching content that lack attraction, change the status quo of spiritual consumption, and create unique spiritual products with value.

References

- [1] [US] Neil Bozeman. *Amusing ourselves to death* [M]. Translated by Zhang Yan. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004: 20.
- [2] Feng Lianhui, Sun Zhen. *Dictionary of Spiritual Civilization* [M]. Beijing: China Prospect Press, 1987: 728.
- [3] Zeng Lan. *Study on the current situation of spiritual life of contemporary college students and its optimization* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2021: 40.
- [4] *Lenin's Monographs - On Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2009: 131.
- [5] *Selected Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 3* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2012: 1002.
- [6] *Mao Zedong's Collected Works: Volume 8* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1999: 320.
- [7] Zeng Lan. *Study on the current situation of spiritual life of contemporary college students and its optimization* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2021: 42.
- [8] Zhao Zhihong. *On Marx's theory of "spiritual production" and its significance - back to social development and human development* [J]. *Journal of Sichuan Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 2004(01): 12-17.
- [9] *The complete works of Marx and Engels: volume 3* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1960: 5.
- [10] *The complete works of Marx and Engels: Volume 2* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1995: 9.
- [11] Bai Lu. *The contemporary connotation and value following of common affluence in spiritual life* [J]. *Marxist Studies*, 2022(02): 64-75+156.
- [12] Zheng Yuhao, Zhu Xiaoling. *The obstruction of cultural consumerism to the common affluence of spiritual life and its response* [J]. *Journal of Yunnan University (Social Science Edition)*, 2023, 22(01): 5-11.