

Research on the Cultivation of College Students' Values from the Perspective of "Post-Truth"

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Abstract: College period is an important special period for the gradual development and modification of the world view, values and outlook on life of the youth. In the new era, with the development of Internet "We Media" and so on, the "post-truth" phenomenon has emerged endlessly, affecting the values of college students to a certain extent. This paper will analyze the influence of the "post-truth" phenomenon on the values of college students, to explore the path of cultivating the socialist core values of college students under the "post-truth" phenomenon.

Keywords: Post-truth; College student; Values

1. Introduction

College period, is an important special period for the gradual development and modification of the world view, values and outlook on life of the youth. In the new era, with the development of Internet "We Media" and so on, the "post-truth" phenomenon has emerged endlessly, affecting the values of college students to a certain extent.

2. Connotation and characteristics of "post-truth"

Between the truth and the lie, there is a third kind of statement, called "post-truth". The concept of "post-truth" first appeared in the *Nation* magazine in 1992 to accuse the US government of manipulating the media and selectively and unilaterally reporting news reports according to its own intentions. In 2016, "post-truth" became a popular term in political commentary in Western countries, driven by events such as Brexit and the US presidential election. In the same year, it was named the Year Word of *Oxford Dictionary*. Since then, the concept of "post-truth" has been gradually known to the people. In Western discourse, the word "post-" in "post-truth" has the meaning of criticism, deconstruction and reflection, indicating a certain reverse trend compared with the original phenomenon. "In the context of Chinese society, the semantic meaning of 'post-truth' has been generalized. It refers to a series of social phenomena that intentionally or unintentionally cover up the truth, such as false news, excessive information, lying by politicians and so on."^[1]

2.1 "Post-truth" is partial

"Truth is a mirror scattered into innumerable pieces, and each man thinks the small piece he sees is the whole truth."^{[2]p27} But the reality is that life is extremely complicated and you can't see the whole picture. The communicator can hide the important truth and distort reality by ignoring it, or mislead the audience to make a one-sided interpretation of the truth by propagating the one-sided truth. Because of their own value orientation, interests, limitations in understanding and so on, the audience will choose a certain aspect of the truth to believe.

2.2 "Post-truth" is subjectively constructed truth

Fact refers to the real situation of things, and the truth is often reflected and restored by separate fact. Some scholars have pointed out that facts should be divided into natural facts and social facts. Facts are not objective and completely rational. Subjective things can also be facts. For example, to say that a plate of braised pork is delicious is a subjective thing, and everyone can have their own opinion. So the truth is complicated and changing. The complexity and change of the truth make the truth have

plasticity. That is, the truth can be constructed, enriched and reconstructed as more facts are discovered [2].

In addition, we cannot express the truth without language description. Our definition of language determines the scope of what we say, and the definition is not changeless, it changes over time, as society develops. Frank Luntz, an American political consultant, said, “Language is like fire. It can heat your house or burn it down, depending on how you use them.” [3] The same situation has different expressions, that is, different expression of the same truth have very different effects. People use certain words intentionally and fraudulently, which is to say, “The person who uses them has his own definition, but he expects the listener to interpret it differently.” [4] Thus, they can achieve their own ends.

2.3 “Post-truth” is a phenomenon in which truth gives way to emotion

The so-called truth is, “in fact, the ‘truth’ that has been reproduced after certain structural or procedural processing”. [5] Before the Enlightenment, the true truth was supported by belief in God, but after the enlightenment of modernity, the truth depends on two things: rational reasoning and inductive data analysis. Rational reasoning requires a certain premise, and then reaches a series of conclusions through logical deduction. But it has been found that so far no absolute truth has been found which can be used as a starting point for logical deduction. The European referendum and the US election (the conclusions of organizations relying on data analysis are completely different with the true results), have shown that relying on data analysis is also unreliable. With the disappearance of rational reasoning and data analysis, people began to look for a new path. They resorted to the principle of subjectivity, “no longer concerned about what the actual truth is, but focused on the ‘post-truth’ after the intervention of subjective emotions, trying to replace the real objectivity with some collection of subjectivity. [5]

“Post-truth” is not the disappearance of truth, but a result of truth giving way to emotion. The truth is not only multifaceted, but revealing the truth needs a process. In this process, various pieces of information are revealed, and the public does not have the patience to wait for the end of this process, so they begin to selectively believe some facts under the influence of emotion or subjectivity, and express their attitudes accordingly. In this case, for the communicator, the authenticity of the content is no longer important. What matters is whether the emotion and emotional influence caused by the content are beneficial to them. For the public, it doesn’t matter what the content actually looks like, what matters is whether it caters to their own emotions and subjective wishes. So, when the truth is finally revealed, everyone no longer cares, the group that should profit has gained, the emotion that should be vented has been vented, and silence remains.

3. The influence of “post-truth” phenomenon on college students’ values

Value is a kind of thinking or orientation for people to identify things and distinguish between right and wrong. It shows people’s judgment criteria for the truth, goodness, beauty, false, evil and ugly of people, things and things. The values of college students refer to the values of such a special group of college students. Under the common influence of society, school and family, we can see that the values of contemporary college students are positive on the whole. The vast majority of college students can correctly understand the socialist core values, and take it as their own value orientation, showing the spirit temperament of contemporary college students.

Under the “post-truth” phenomenon, the communicators release information selectively based on their needs of interests and the public values emotional resonance rather than facts, which leads to multiple truths and different versions of the same story. When truth is no longer unique, it will be no longer valued, the foundation of values we shared is shaken. For the contemporary college students who are in their teenage years, their values are forming and establishing, and they are easy to be disturbed by the external environment. Some college students’ values are affected, for example, they pursue individualism but the collective concept is weak, they pursue utilitarianism but the social responsibility is lacking, they pursue money worship but the ideal belief is weak, and so on. Although these ideas are not mainstream, they need our attention.

3.1 The one-sided interpretation of truth in “post-truth” breeds utilitarianism

Due to the complexity and multiplicity of truth, it’s possible to lead to one-sided interpretation of

truth. In the “post-truth” phenomenon, we see cases everywhere where people hide important facts by ignoring them and distort reality to achieve their own aims. In the book *Post-Truth Era* of Hector MacDonald, he proposes that asset managers will set up all sorts of different funds, but will only advertise the ones with the best growth rates. Medical managers will celebrate the decline in cancer deaths but not mention the rise of infection in hospital. All these indicate that people can achieve their own aims by emphasizing the truth of one aspect and ignoring the truth of the other, and the possibility of misleading the audience can be achieved without resorting to deception.

This kind of one-sided tailoring of the truth for their own use with a certain utilitarian tendency, has also affected contemporary college students. At present, some college students always see the people and things around them with colored glasses. They will actively participate in those that are beneficial to them, while they are indifferent to those that are not beneficial to them. This is especially reflected in the excellence selection and joining the Party and so on. Some college students participate in activities, make contributions to the collective, compete for performance, just for the evaluation or joining the Party. Once reaching the goals, they can't stick to it. Because they don't see the real meaning behind these activities.

3.2 The phenomenon that truth giving way to emotion in “post-truth” breeds individualism

Many hot events in recent years have such characteristics that the event itself is no longer the focus, but whether it is relevant to people's own needs and whether it can arouse their emotional resonance. For example, in the “Luo Yixiao incident”, public support and resistance were not based on the incident itself, but on the emotional resonance of people. At the beginning, most of support was from the moving of the tweet “*Luo Yi, please stop*”, which generated a strong sense of engagement and emotional resonance. And when it was revealed that the marketing was behind the event, everyone's emotion was impacted and denounced. No one still paid attention to what the event itself was. From this, we can see that people use the phenomenon of “post-truth” to shake the status of truth, fight for the right to speak, and strive for their own interests. This kind of value orientation centered on individual and self-emotion has a strong tendency of individualism, which is widely circulated in the network.

The online rate of contemporary college students is almost 100%. They are an important part of the netizen in our country. They are both participants and those affected by these phenomena. This individualistic way of thinking and value orientation are also reflected in all aspects of their study and life. Contemporary college students are used to looking at problems from their own perspective, oriented by individual interests rather than collective interests. According to a survey conducted by a scholar on students at a university, 53.97 percent of students said they would not take part in volunteer activities that would take a long time or would not benefit them. It can show that most college students pay more attention to their own interests and ignore collective interests, with obvious tendency of individualism.

3.3 The social construction of truth in “post-truth” breeds money worship

The social construction of truth in “post-truth” means that truth is created by people, who can construct different truths according to their own purposes. For example, in the Brexit event, those who want to remain in the EU and those who want to leave the EU gave different descriptions of the EU respectively from their own position. What people receive is the truth about the EU, which has been constructed by both sides. The EU can be a free-trade zone, an unelected rule-maker, a political superpower, a moral defender or a bulwark of defense.

In current China, we see that “the capital logic with the ultimate purpose of capital appreciation has been involved in cyberspace”. The core of the capital logic is to maximize interests and believes in “money determinism”. They advocate consumerism and worship “money fetishism”, which undoubtedly makes some college students fall into the frenzied consumption view depicted by capitalism and cannot extricate themselves, forming the value of money worship.

4. Thinking about the path of cultivating college students' socialist core values under the “post-truth” phenomenon

Under the “post-truth” phenomenon, the education and promotion of the historical and humanistic quality of college students need to be strengthened, the discourse expression of the education of

socialist core values needs to be improved, and the ways and methods of cultivation of socialist core values of college students need to be innovated to promote the cultivation of the socialist core values of college students. Radically reform should be performed from the source and the banner of truth needs to be held highly to let the reality of truth stand in front of the stage through the curtain of “post-truth”, making science and reason become the value principle of young college students in learning knowledge, exploration and pursuing.

Firstly, the education and promotion of college students’ historical and humanistic quality should be strengthened. The post-truth carries with it historical nihilism and populism, and allows the unhealthy western social trends such as money worship, individualism and utilitarianism to erode the core values of society. These thoughts encourage people to pursue the value orientation of diversification and freedom and advocate the supremacy of the individual, individual value experience and so on. It looks like respecting human rights superficially, but is a refined form of self-interest in nature. In essence, the objectivity of the truth behind the post-truth phenomenon is questioned. People no longer look for the objective basis of events from the outside, but are more inclined to turn inward to seek the inner “truth”. Therefore, in view of the “absence” of truth in the post-truth era, it is more necessary to strengthen the history and humanities education of college students and rebuild the subjective value framework system close to the historical truth in the education system, rather than allowing the historical truth to be arbitrarily “tampered” by various subjective positions in the post-truth “public opinion field”.

Secondly, we should innovate the discourse expression of socialist core values education. As Internet natives, contemporary college students are deeply influenced by the Internet. The concept of equality and interaction on the Internet and vivid discourse expression have been integrated into the thoughts and emotions of college students. In order to stimulate the emotional identity of contemporary college students, we should be good at using vivid concepts and categories to teach knowledge. For example, in recent years, popular phrases such as “awesome, my country”, “clear love, only for China” and “low red, high black” which are deeply loved by young people have appeared on social platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. They vividly show the value choice of contemporary young college students. Therefore, as the leader of socialist core values, we should innovate the discourse expression of socialist core values education, be good at making use of the popular network discourse of young college students, expound the patriotic tradition of the Chinese nation, tell the inspiring story of the red revolution, spread socialist core values well, and control the voice of public opinion.

Finally, we should innovate and reform the ways of cultivating the socialist core values of college students. Undeniably, in the so-called “post-truth” era in which the position precedes the truth, emotional resonance is more likely to trigger people’s value choice and judgment, and emotional precedence becomes the premise of value guidance. From the perspective of popular psychology, when the facts conflict with people’s opinions, position and emotion, everyone will often choose to ignore or question the truth of the facts, but accept the truth they recognize from their subjective perspective, position and emotion. In the post-truth era where stance and emotion take precedence, the cultivation and guidance of college students’ values are no longer simply theoretical preaching based on objectivity and fact principles, nor exerting influence simply by stories, because the objectivity and fact principles of the former are questioned in the post-truth, while the latter are always difficult to shake off the suspicion of subjective invention from the post-truth perspective of infinite expansion of subjectivity. Therefore, in this sense, we should not only stimulate emotional resonance but also follow the principle of objectivity and facts in subjective participation, so as to actively innovate the situational teaching, immersive teaching, on-site teaching, field teaching, interactive teaching and other methods of value education for college students. The cultivation of college students’ values and correct guidance are realized in the “dialectical unity of objectivity and subjectivity” and reconstruct the belief in truth of the “truth” value neutrality and truth principle in the “post-truth” era.

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