

The Historical Evolution of Ideological and Political Education in Russia and Its Practical Implications

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Abstract

Ideological and political education in Russia has traversed four thematic stages of historical change: the “germination” of the late-Tsarist and Provisional-Government periods, the “development” of the Soviet era, the “collapse” in late- and post-Soviet times, and the “reconstruction” in the new Russian period. Within these stages, ideological and political education in Russia evolved through seven sub-themes: embryonic form—systematization and maturation—vacuum and alienation—return and reconstruction. Anchored in the new era, this evolution offers practical implications for China’s construction of ideological and political education that is both distinctly Chinese and attuned to the times.

Keywords: Russia; ideological and political education; historical change; implications

I. Introduction

Ideological and political education is defined as “under the leadership of a given class, political party, or political group, the purposeful, planned and organized educational activity that employs certain ideological consciousness, values and moral norms to influence members of society so that the educated are shaped into persons needed by that society and that class” (Chen Binggong, 2001, pp. 40–42). From this definition two conclusions follow. First, ideological and political education is a social practice and a historical category; it arises at a specific historical stage and under certain historical conditions, and it changes continuously with social development. Second, because ideological and political education possesses political, social and practical attributes, it is indispensable. Russia once pioneered socialist ideological and political education and accumulated rich experience; studying the historical trajectory and developmental experience of ideological and political education in Russia is therefore of great practical significance for China’s own ideological and political education and for the practice of ideological and political theory courses.

Yet current academic attention to the theme of “ideological and political education in Russia” is limited and narrowly focused. Qin Yiyang (2013) and Ge Lijuan (2009) concentrate mainly on methodological comparisons between China and Russia and on extracting lessons learned. Li Zedan (2019), Wang Yuehua (2012) and Wang Chunying (2008) have conducted systematic studies on the history of Russian ideological and political education, but research on the pre-October-Revolution period remains sparse. In light of this, the present article aims to make three marginal contributions: first, to supplement research on the theme of ideological and political education in Russia; second, at the historical level, to incorporate an overview of pre-October-Revolution Russian ideological and political education; and third, at the practical level, to examine ideological and political education in the dual context of the new Russian period and China’s new era in order to uncover more profound practical implications.

II. “Germination”: Ideological and Political Education in Russia before the October Revolution

Ideological and political education has existed since ancient times, but its genuine beginning must be verified by two criteria: whether education emerged to sustain class rule, and whether it aimed to cultivate citizens with political consciousness (Chen Lisi, 2017). These criteria are determined by the core attribute of ideological and political education—its political nature. Therefore, when examining the origins of ideological and political education in Russia, we must first focus on the period before the October Revolution (the late-Tsarist and the bourgeois Provisional Government periods), when the Russian people, led by Lenin, gradually awakened politically.

2.1 “Existence since Ancient Times”

The Tsarist period was an era of autocratic centralization; the Tsarist government attached great importance to controlling the ideology of the populace and did so quite effectively through religious education. Its ideological stance was also reflected in the history textbooks of the time (Perschina, 2016). This can be regarded as the historical origin of the “existence since ancient times” of ideological and political education in Russia, yet in essence it served only to maintain and strengthen autocratic rule and therefore cannot be regarded as genuine ideological and political education.

2.2 “Emergence of the Embryonic Form”

From the late-Tsarist era to the February Revolution and the establishment of the Provisional Government, the political-liberation consciousness of the Russian populace rose rapidly, and the embryonic form of ideological and political education in Russia became visible. Specifically, on the one hand, the rapid development of capitalist economy and politics in this period led to a seesaw struggle between the autocratic government and the forces of the proletariat and bourgeoisie. On the other hand, revolutionary parties and organizations emerged, representing a new form of guiding and organizing revolutionary energy (Epifanov, 2015), stimulating the Russian people’s growing desire for “peace, bread, and freedom” and evolving into a

new ideological orientation. The conditions for genuine ideological and political education in Russia became increasingly ripe.

After the February Revolution, the Provisional Government attempted to mobilize the populace to support the war by means of slogans such as “patriotism” and “nationalism,” but because its policies failed to solve core issues such as land and peace, the propaganda achieved the opposite effect (Arkhipov, 2009). Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks, led by the great revolutionary teacher Lenin, actively educated the masses politically with the aim of raising their political consciousness and cultivating class awareness. In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin articulated the famous theory of inculcation in the history of ideological and political education: “the working class, by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness; socialist consciousness must be brought to it from without” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 236). It should be emphasized that Lenin’s theory of inculcation is not “coercive.” Etymologically, the original Russian text reads “Оно могло быть принесено только извне,” literally “it could only be brought from outside,” showing that Lenin did not imply coercion. From Lenin’s further elaboration we see that he believed “different people, depending on their work, background and experience, should be inculcated and educated in ways they can accept” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 29). In practice, Lenin stressed that inculcation must proceed on the premise of valuing the audience’s spontaneous consciousness and respecting the audience’s subjective needs (Lu & Zhu, 2023).

III. “Development”: Ideological and Political Education in the Soviet Period

Ideological and political education in the Soviet period was formed and developed in the practice of socialist construction in the country; it pioneered socialist ideological and political education. During the Soviet period, ideological and political education in Russia realized systematization—namely, systematization of management and of content—and, after “two leaps,” gradually matured, that is, maturation of theory and method.

3.1 Systematization of Ideological and Political Education

After the October Revolution, the world's first socialist state was born, and under the leadership of the Soviet regime socialist ideological and political education developed systematically. First, a relatively complete organizational system of ideological and political education was formed. In the Lenin period, there was “one center”—the Chief Committee for Political Education under the leadership of the Party Central Committee—and “two coverages”: the Russian Communist Youth League and the Institute of Social Sciences covered the implementation of communist education among youth and other groups respectively (Sun, 2021). In the Stalin period, the status and role of Soviets, trade unions, the Komsomol, schools, cooperatives and the Party in ideological and political education were further clarified, and a systematic management and organizational system of ideological and political education was constructed (Ma & Wang, 2015). Second, a systematic framework of ideological and political education was formed. At the top-design level, ideological and political education in the Soviet period always adhered to Marxism as the fundamental guiding ideology, while also being influenced by localized Leninism and Stalinism, as well as by the gradually alienated Khrushchevite “three peaces and two wholes” theory (“peaceful coexistence,” “peaceful competition,” “peaceful transition,” “state of the whole people,” “party of the whole people”) and Soviet revisionism. At the implementation level, it encompassed Marxist theoretical education, communist and labor education, and patriotic education (Xiao Su, 1987), building a systematic content framework for ideological and political education.

3.2 Maturation of Ideological and Political Education

Ideological and political education in the Soviet period continuously moved toward “maturation,” completing “two leaps.” First, Lenin achieved the first leap. On the one hand, he organically combined Marxism with Russia's actual conditions, proposing that ideological and political education must serve Russia's economic construction and socialist construction. He emphasized “talk more about the economy and less about political empty talk” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 139), and he elaborated maturely on the dialectical relationship among education, politics and the

economy (Xu Bin, 2017). On the other hand, he implemented ideological and political education throughout the process of socialist revolution and construction and developed the method of ideological and political education in practice. Lenin developed the practical-exercise method, a mature approach still used today, stressing that ideological and political education must “rely on the participation of the most unenlightened and least developed strata of the proletariat in the struggles of everyday life” (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 336). Second, Stalin achieved the second leap. On the one hand, Stalin fully affirmed the theoretical significance and historical status of Leninism and took Leninism as an important content of ideological and political education. At the same time, he inherited and carried forward Leninist theory, including the theory and practice of inculcation and the practical-exercise method. He emphasized the need “to inculcate socialist consciousness into the spontaneous labor movement, to combine the labor movement with socialism, and thus to give the proletarian struggle a social-democratic character” (Stalin, Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 88). On the other hand, Stalin’s view of ideological and political education was more deeply rooted in Russian revolutionary and construction practice. In accordance with the realities of Soviet socialist construction, he creatively developed a variety of methods of ideological and political education, such as the typical-model method, the ideological-criticism method, and the artistic-influence method; the status of ideological and political education in literature and art, academic research, and educational culture was also established, pushing Russian ideological and political education forward and realizing creative development (Liu Hong, 2014). It should be noted that amid its vigorous development, ideological and political education in the Stalin period also harbored crises, mainly because Stalin’s forceful governing style and the rapid rise of a personality cult eroded and hindered its development.

IV. “Collapse”: Ideological and Political Education in Late- and Post-Soviet Russia

Beginning with Khrushchev, post-Stalin Soviet leaders attempted to break the rigid Stalinist model and to replace the administrative-command, overtly repressive style

that had dominated education and culture. Ideological and political education continued to receive attention and was even strengthened (Shi, 2015), injecting a certain new vitality. Yet, amid relentless reforms toward “liberalization,” “democratization,” and the “new thinking,” the process culminated in a wholesale repudiation of Soviet history and the socialist system; ideological and political education slid into “value vacuum” and “value distortion.”

4.1 “Value Vacuum” in Ideological and Political Education

From late-Soviet times to the collapse, ideological and political education in Russia drifted toward a “value vacuum,” manifested in two respects. First, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the erstwhile value-leader, gradually “left the stage” and eventually “disappeared.” Under Gorbachev, the CPSU first withdrew entirely from ideological and political work in the armed forces, abolishing the Main Political Directorate and stipulating that “CPSU organizations and institutions may not interfere with the work of administrative personnel or military command organs” (Yanaev, 2012, p. 6). After the multi-party system supplanted one-party rule, the CPSU lost its dominant position in the ideological domain altogether. Second, the value-content of ideological and political education became “de-politicized”: communist thought and Marxism were abandoned and negated, Marxism-Leninism courses were removed from schools, and education was subjected to “de-ideologization” (Li, 2019).

4.2 “Value Alienation” in Ideological and Political Education

During the Gorbachev and Yeltsin periods, ideological and political education underwent a twofold “value alienation.” First, after its “de-politicization,” the ruling authorities actively promoted education in “universal human values.” Gorbachev rejected class standpoints and proposed the “new thinking” that “the interests of all humanity are above everything else” (Gorbachev, 1987, pp. 37, 177, 184, 288). Under Yeltsin, “universal human morality” was explicitly elevated above national or class morality. Second, the domestic “value vacuum” was compounded by Western

“peaceful evolution,” leaving Russian citizens ideologically confused and increasingly Westernized; a segment of the population blindly worshipped Western values and repudiated the nation’s own history and culture.

V. “Reconstruction”: Ideological and Political Education in the New Russian Period

After coming to power, Putin introduced the political model of “managed democracy,” enabling rapid implementation of policies conducive to national strength (Wang, 2010). In the sphere of ideological and political education, this quickly brought about “value return” and “value reconstruction.”

5.1 “Value Return”

Under Putin, the new-era Russian state once again attached importance to ideological and political education and re-embedded it in native historical and cultural traditions. First, the government’s Outline for the Development of Russian School Education (2002–2004) proposed the establishment of a “unified moral-education space,” formulated standards for evaluating the effectiveness and quality of school moral-education work, and elevated the social status of ideological-and-political educators. Second, in his article *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium*, Putin declared that “traditional Russian values are an important pillar of social cohesion” (Putin, 1999). He also noted the indispensable role of the Russian Orthodox Church in national history. The Strategy for the State Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 explicitly calls for “promoting the inter-generational transmission of traditional social values, norms, and customs,” aiming to restore traditional culture and values (Li, 2018, p. 187). Finally, the Putin administration promoted a “new historical outlook,” objectively and rationally appraising Russian history and legislatively protecting it (Guo & Cui, 2018). In sum, ideological and political education in the Putin era has gradually recovered and achieved “value return.”

5.2 “Value Reconstruction”

In the new period, Putin has gradually constructed a values education guided by the “new Russian idea” and endowed with Russian characteristics, realizing three dimensions of “value reconstruction.”

(1) Patriotism. Putin maintains that “without patriotism, there can be no identity or future for the nation” (Putin, 2014). Two successive Concepts of Patriotic Education (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2006) have established patriotism as the core of ideological and political education.

(2) Great-power consciousness and state identity. Russia needs a strong state organization determined by its geopolitical, economic and cultural conditions. Putin holds that “ideology can effectively promote Russian social solidarity and assist the construction of the ideological and spiritual spheres” (Bai, 2000, pp. 73–77). Great-power consciousness has become an important component of the new-era ideological and political education and of the new ideology.

(3) Social solidarity. Putin points out that “in today’s Russia, social solidarity is extremely important. The long-standing Russian mindset and traditional accumulation that emphasize collective activity and mutual aid are difficult to change in the short term. How to use these traditional accumulations to further strengthen the unity of the people should be fully considered in social policy and institutions.” Social solidarity is both an important foundation for building a strong nation and a significant tradition of the Russian people, and thus has become an important mission of ideological and political education.

In short, under the guidance of the “new Russian idea” that foregrounds patriotism, great-power consciousness, state identity and social solidarity, Russia has gradually built an ideological-education system with patriotism at its core, great-power consciousness and state identity as its main content, and social solidarity as its key mission. The basic model of ideological and political education in the new era has thus taken shape.

VI. Implications and Prospects

Ideological and political education in Russia has traversed the four thematic stages of germination, development, collapse and reconstruction, and undergone the seven sub-thematic shifts of embryonic form—systematization and maturation—vacuum and alienation—return and reconstruction. Its successes and failures refract the central role of ideological and political education in national governance and social integration, as well as its inherent developmental laws. Once the cradle of socialist ideological and political education, Russia offers important reference value for the development of socialist ideological and political education with Chinese characteristics. Anchored in the historical position of China's new era, an in-depth analysis of Russia's experiences and lessons can provide multi-dimensional lessons for China's innovation while remaining true to its roots.

6.1 Upholding the Party's Value Guidance over Ideological and Political Education

The history of ideological and political education in Russia demonstrates that a country's direction and ultimate fate in this field are closely tied to the governing party's leadership and its rise or fall. In the late-Soviet period and for some time after the Soviet collapse, the CPSU gradually “withdrew” and “disappeared” from the field of ideological and political education, relinquishing leadership over ideological work, abolishing a series of management systems, plunging the Soviet people into ideological confusion, and driving ideological and political education into a value vacuum. China's ideological and political education must unswervingly uphold the Party's leadership and maintain Marxism's fundamental guiding position in the ideological realm. At the same time, China must continue to improve the overall pattern of ideological and political education under the unified leadership of the Party committees, with Party and government working in concert, the propaganda departments coordinating, relevant departments assuming their respective responsibilities, and the whole society participating, so as to carry out value guidance from top to bottom.

6.2 Continuously Advancing the Sinicization and Modernization of Ideological and Political Education

Russia's experience shows that a country's ideological and political education is inevitably shaped by its historical and cultural traditions, spiritual heritage and actual national conditions, and is constantly challenged and transformed with the times. Therefore, continuously advancing the Sinicization and modernization of ideological and political education is essential.

(1) Under the premise of upholding Marxism as the fundamental guide, ideological and political education in China must proceed under the innovative theories of Marxism adapted to the Chinese context and the times. As a social practice, ideological and political education requires scientific theoretical guidance; by virtue of its political and class nature, it also requires value guidance from the ruling party.

(2) Ideological and political education in China must be carried out in line with China's actual national conditions. At present, China is "advancing the comprehensive rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernization" (Chinese Communist Party, 2022). Chinese modernization is a development model based on national conditions. China has a "vast territory and a huge population," which dictates that it must pursue a path of common prosperity for all rather than the Western path of polarization (Wen, 2023). Moreover, Chinese modernization is one of coordinated material and spiritual civilization, of harmony between humanity and nature, and of peaceful development. In the context of Chinese modernization, ideological and political education must firmly grasp the national condition of a "vast territory and a huge population," meet the public's aspirations for "common prosperity" and "coordination of material and spiritual civilization," and guide the global aspirations for "harmony between humanity and nature" and "peaceful development." China also possesses a 5,000-year civilization; its long and profound traditional culture and national spirit constitute another major national condition. Ideological and political education in China must delve deeply into the "root" and "soul" of fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, unearthing the essence of patriotism, moral norms and the

spirit of struggle, endowing them with new connotations and modern forms of expression, and continuously advancing the Sinicization and modernization of ideological and political education in the integration of national culture and national spirit.

(3) The content and methods of ideological and political education in China must meet the demands of the times and make good use of the tools and arenas created by contemporary innovation. On the one hand, in the present era—where the great changes unseen in a century intersect with the strategic context of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the new round of technological and industrial revolutions accelerates, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution is in full swing—ideological and political education must meet the requirements of the new technological era and cultivate “new-type talent” with patriotism, humanistic care and technological ethics. On the other hand, ideological and political education in China must also utilize the technological achievements of the “new productive forces” of the new era, such as actively exploring the use of generative artificial intelligence to enhance the teaching practice of ideological and political courses at all levels.

The historical evolution of ideological and political education in Russia—from germination, development, collapse to reconstruction—offers China many lessons worth borrowing. In the striving new era, all of China’s achievements and its continued pursuit of greater achievements are inseparable from the cause of ideological and political education. To cultivate the new generation capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation and to open up new vistas for ideological and political education in the new era, these lessons must be earnestly absorbed.

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