



RESEARCH ON GUIDING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' RATIONAL PATRIOTISM IN THE CONTEXT OF MAJOR CHANGES UNSEEN IN A CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Patriotic spirit is the most precious spiritual wealth indispensable to a country and nation. Patriotism represents the unity of deep patriotic sentiment and rational patriotic behavior. Promoting patriotic spirit requires not only a foundation of deep patriotic emotions but also rational expression and behavior. In the context of major changes unseen in a century, contemporary university students' expressions of patriotic sentiment have been strongly impacted, with irrational expressions such as blind xenophobia, collective venting, and conformist behavior spreading online. Exploring the interrelationship and organic unity between university students' patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism under this historical background, as well as their interaction mechanisms, and guiding mainstream patriotic values, helps promote positive value orientations among university students and facilitates the rational return of their patriotism.

KEYWORDS: *Major Changes Unseen in a Century, University Students, Rational Patriotism*

1. INTRODUCTION

"Patriotism is the heart and soul of the Chinese nation" (*People's Daily*, 2019). It is the core of the Chinese national spirit, the essence of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and the "deepest, most fundamental, and most eternal" content of socialist core values (*Central Committee of CPC Documentation Research Office*, 2017). It serves as the spiritual banner under which our Party unites and leads people of all ethnic groups to advance into the new era and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the "Two Centenary Goals". Patriotism represents people's deep emotional attachment to their country and nation. Throughout history, university students have always been the vanguard and main force of patriotic movements, with many of their patriotic actions promoting social progress and national rejuvenation. Some university students, being naive in thought and radical in behavior, often find their patriotic motivations at odds with their effects. When facing major events concerning national sovereignty, core interests, and national dignity, university students' expression of protest is a reasonable patriotic act. However, if exploited by hostile elements or forces with ulterior motives, unrestrained by reason and law, these actions can evolve into irrational emotional venting or even illegal behavior, running counter to our original patriotic intentions and potentially causing negative effects. Therefore, in promoting patriotism, we should unite patriotic sentiment with rational patriotism, beginning with the intense outburst of patriotic emotion but ending with rational expression of patriotic behavior, transforming sincere patriotic hearts and aspirations to serve the country into concrete actions to benefit the nation (Liu, 2010).

2. PATRIOTIC SENTIMENT IS THE DIRECT CAUSE OF PATRIOTIC BEHAVIOR

Marx pointed out: "Passion and enthusiasm are human's essential forces in strongly pursuing their objects" (*Complete Works of Marx and Engels*, 1991). Under the control of strong patriotic sentiment, negative emotions such as denial, hatred, and righteous indignation towards all words, deeds, figures, and events that harm national and ethnic interests are also important components of patriotism. From the perspective of the relationship between emotion and behavior, patriotic sentiment often lies deep in the heart, but once triggered by major events, it reaches a climax, manifesting as excitement or collective indignation.



Patriotic sentiment, as a deep feeling for the motherland, is a powerful spiritual foundation for forming national cohesion. On one hand, it requires members of the nation to maintain their national dignity through corresponding moral behaviors and prohibits actions that damage this dignity; on the other hand, it requires other nations to respect this dignity and resolutely prevents anyone from violating or desecrating this dignity in any way. Therefore, patriotic sentiment directly governs the generation of patriotic behavior - without emotion, there would be no specific patriotic behavior.

3. RATIONAL PATRIOTISM IS THE SUBLIMATION OF PATRIOTISM

In any historical period and under any conditions, there is no abstract or empty patriotism, only concrete patriotic sentiments and behaviors. Patriotism requires not only deep emotions but also specific rational behaviors. If emotions lose rational balance, behavior and situations can sometimes deviate from the actors' good intentions and expected goals, not only failing to solve problems but also creating negative impacts. The expression of patriotic spirit does not just stay at the level of simple emotional catharsis but further transforms to the rational level for balance, guiding people to scientifically and objectively understand the history and current situation of the motherland, calmly analyze international relations and the relationship between individuals and the motherland, and on this basis, transform intense patriotic emotions into reasonable, beneficial, and appropriate patriotic behavior. Rational patriotism is the essential sublimation of patriotism.

3.1 Only When Externalized into Concrete Patriotic Behavior Does Intuitive Abstract Patriotic Sentiment Have Practical Significance

Emotion is just an inner psychological experience and feeling. Deep patriotic sentiment can only become a real driving force for achieving a strong socialist modernized country with economic prosperity, political democracy, cultural flourishing, social harmony, and ecological beauty when externalized into rational and firm patriotic behavior. Therefore, the most powerful way of patriotism is not shouting empty slogans or simply expressing love for the motherland, but transforming patriotic hearts and aspirations to serve the country into practical patriotic actions.

3.2 Only with the Guidance and Manifestation of Rational Force Can Reasonable, Beneficial, and Appropriate Patriotic Behavior Be Sustained and Firm

Emotion generates motivation, while reason helps people distinguish right from wrong and understand behavior. A nation without passion, without strong feelings of love and hate, is a nation without hope. Rational patriotism can help people step out of current public opinion and environment, calmly observe problems from the perspective of the overall situation and long-term development, analyze problems from the perspective of the laws governing the occurrence and development of things, and understand problems essentially. Mao Zedong once pointed out: "We cannot immediately understand what we have sensed; only what we have understood can we feel more deeply. Sensation only solves phenomenal problems, while understanding solves essential problems" (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, 1991). Only after rationally analyzing the culture of the country and nation, understanding the world situation, national conditions, social conditions, and people's conditions, can simple patriotic sentiment be sublimated, internalized into moral principles and behavioral norms universally recognized by the nation, and externalized into specific patriotic behaviors in a lasting and stable manner.

Therefore, patriotism needs to express patriotic enthusiasm rationally, legally, and orderly within the framework of law and moral norms, taking the maintenance of national and ethnic interests as the starting point and focus, and express patriotic behavior in a reasonable, beneficial, and appropriate manner. When under rational guidance, patriotic behavior yields fruitful results, it will in turn enrich patriotic sentiment, making patriotic feelings more lasting and firm. In the context of major changes unseen in a century, facing the changing international situation, sometimes when we need to express our patriotic enthusiasm and indignation to the international community, we need to be appropriate and moderate, showing Chinese people's calmness, wisdom, and unity, and more importantly, truly understand, implement, and execute the central strategic decisions and policy guidelines. Excessive emotions losing rational balance sometimes simplify complex problems, and may even be instigated and utilized by those with ulterior motives, potentially triggering more serious political events, thus severely harming the interests of the motherland and the people. We cannot separate patriotic sentiment from patriotic behavior. If patriotism is equated with patriotic sentiment, believing that expressing patriotism must be grandiose, even disregarding any consequences, or without rational analysis, due to the "group effect", individual wisdom in the group is weakened, personality is weakened, individual heterogeneity is swallowed by homogenization, and from the perspective of emotionally triggered actions, they will appear stronger than individuals (Le Bon, 2015), making patriotic sentiment and patriotic behavior impulsive



and hasty, causing a split between patriotic motivation, patriotic sentiment, and patriotic behavior. This kind of blind patriotic high-profile stance is difficult to rise to rational, objective, and positive patriotic behavior. Patriotism needs passion, but more importantly needs reason. Only in this way can we maintain and safeguard social stability, maintain our country's good international image, promote the healthy and harmonious development of our economy and society, and protect our fundamental interests.

4. ACHIEVING ORGANIC UNITY OF PATRIOTIC SENTIMENT AND RATIONAL PATRIOTISM IS THE REQUIREMENT OF THE TIMES FOR PATRIOTISM

For university students to be rationally patriotic, they must first understand why they should be patriotic. The prerequisite for rational patriotism is that we have deep feelings for our motherland and nation where we have lived for a long time. "Emotion is like an engine, generating forward momentum; reason is like a steering wheel, controlling the direction of development" (Liu, 2010). Additionally, "everyone bears responsibility for the rise and fall of their nation", people cannot separate from their country, and the country's future and destiny are closely related to themselves. Therefore, patriotic sentiment often erupts in moments of national pride and joy, or when facing internal troubles, external threats, or natural disasters. Regardless of the time, the starting point and end point are always national honor and ethnic interests, which is the common characteristic of patriotic behavior in all eras, only with different manifestations in different times. In peacetime, when contemporary university students express patriotic sentiment and carry out patriotic actions, they should carefully consider whether all manifestations align with the requirements of the times, whether they are connected with the realization of the country's long-term and fundamental interests, and truly understand how to maintain and realize national interests. They cannot break away from rational control, and more importantly, cannot disregard the dignity of law and social stability in the name of patriotism.

People's judgment of things has instantaneous characteristics. Whether university students' instantaneous performance is rational depends on their life experience, knowledge accumulation, quality cultivation, environment, and other factors. How can university students achieve rational patriotism and display composed, mature, and intelligent responses in situations?

First, improve university students' understanding of the significance of rational patriotism. The significance of university students' rational patriotism has three aspects: First, it is conducive to advancing our country's peaceful development strategy. Peace and development are the trends of our times. In over 70 years of development under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, China has consistently adhered to the path of "peaceful development", actively participated in international cooperation, shouldered great power responsibilities, escaped poverty and backwardness, and become one of the world's strongest economic powers, promoting the construction of a "community with a shared future for mankind". Today's China cannot be separated from the world, and the world cannot be separated from China. As university students, they should understand this strategy and cherish the hard-won peaceful development environment. Second, it is conducive to maintaining national security and stability, seizing opportunities, and deepening reform. Stability overrides everything. Due to university students' political immaturity, they are easily influenced and deceived by various wrong trends of thought, often expressing emotions radically, prone to blind xenophobia and rallies. China's reform and opening up has entered the deep water zone and crucial period, with various social contradictions constantly emerging. Currently, domestic issues such as uneven distribution, employment, healthcare reform, pension insurance, environmental pollution, and food safety are all urgent problems that need to be solved. If university students cannot face these issues rationally and cautiously, radical words and actions could amplify contradictions and trigger chain reactions, endangering national security and stability. Third, it is conducive to realizing the Chinese dream of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". In the era of economic globalization, international situations are complex, with both cooperation and competition between countries, but cooperation is the mainstream of today's world. Friction and conflict between various interests are normal in this era, and international hostile forces are not happy to see China strong and stable, viewing China as a threat. If we handle things improperly, causing China to fall into social turmoil and stop developing, that would play right into the hands of hostile forces. When university students are rationally patriotic, they can show the world China's good image, letting people see that China's development is an opportunity rather than a threat to the world, which is conducive to realizing the Chinese dream of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".



Second, university students should recognize the harm of irrational patriotic behavior.

Irrational behavior manifests in: First, smashing and looting. For example, in events such as U.S. sanctions against China, there are extreme words and even willful destruction of foreign-invested enterprises and brand stores. Second, symbolic violence. Verbal abuse and insulting images and other symbolic violence frequently appear on the internet. Third, boycotting "foreign goods". In multiple demonstrations, blindly boycotting "foreign goods", some people not only damage their own purchased "foreign goods" but even force others not to buy, sell, or use "foreign goods". Fourth, illegal gatherings. Unauthorized assemblies and demonstrations, blocking traffic, disturbing social order, etc. Irrational behavior is a weak mentality, and its harm is manifested in: First, damaging the national image. Legal and orderly demonstrations reflect a country's level of civilization and citizens' quality, while extreme words and actions create negative images of Chinese people as advocating violence and having weak rule of law. Second, hindering diplomatic decision-making. Many international disputes are originally advantageous to our country, but university students' extreme venting, blind xenophobia, and other words and actions may affect government decision-making, causing diplomatic passivity. Third, affecting social stability. In irrational demonstrations, smashing and looting prevail, which can easily be exploited by hostile forces and groups, who take the opportunity to cause trouble and create social unrest.

Third, strengthen university students' education about national and world conditions. University students should rationally reflect on national culture rather than blindly worship it. They should neither be complacent due to historical glory nor feel ashamed due to historical humiliation. Their understanding of domestic and international situations should be comprehensive and objective, not overreacting due to a bit of "excessive praise". In the era of economic globalization and value diversification, world conditions have undergone profound changes, peaceful development is the theme of the times, and win-win cooperation is the requirement of the times. Against this background, dependencies between countries deepen, conflicts and friction are inevitable, and competition and cooperation are normal. University students should be good at listening to different voices, some noise does not affect China's overall development. They should also be alert to "excessive praise" and prevent the development of national arrogance.

Overall, university students' rational patriotism requires heart and practical action. In the context of major changes unseen in a century, our country faces complex and changing international situations and extremely arduous domestic development tasks. University students should firmly believe in the Party and the country, think calmly, and analyze rationally. Actively guiding university students' rational patriotism, closely connecting personal development goals and value realization with the future and destiny of patriotism, deeply recognizing that patriotism in peacetime is mainly manifested in diligent work, organically combining aspirations to serve the country with actions to serve the country, promotes the positive orientation of university students' patriotic values.

5. STRENGTHENING RATIONAL GUIDANCE IN PATRIOTIC EDUCATION

Strengthening patriotic education helps stimulate university students' enthusiasm and belief in building and developing a strong socialist country with Chinese characteristics, enhancing their sense of social responsibility and mission. When conducting patriotic education, higher education institutions need to carefully study the new situations, challenges, and problems facing patriotism, and strengthen rational guidance in patriotic education.

First, guide university students to properly handle the relationship between patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism, understand the essence of patriotism, and prevent blind impulses. In today's era, profound changes have occurred in both international and domestic situations, with unprecedented close connections between international and domestic development. Globally, "our country is in the best development period since modern times, while the world is experiencing major changes unseen in a century" (Xi, 2020). The world's major changes highly coincide with China's historical process of achieving national rejuvenation, with both intertwining and interacting. Regarding the world, "the changes unseen in a century and the century-old pandemic are intertwined" (Xi, 2021). Various contradictions interact and are intricately complex, especially with the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 adding a heavyweight new variable to this global change, highlighting the "chaos in the West" and proving "China's governance". These factors continue to dissolve the original world pattern, calling for a new world order to face common challenges. In this context, economic globalization encounters headwinds from anti-globalization trends. In recent years, Britain's Brexit vote, America's successive "withdrawals" and increased border adjustment taxes, unilateralism, protectionism, and nationalism have risen, politics have turned conservative, separatism has spread, bringing increased global economic risks, intensified international investment competition, and reversed cooperation development between nations. Simultaneously encountering anti-globalization, these two forces wrestle and collide, inevitably affecting university



students' ideological concepts and thinking patterns, thereby influencing whether they believe in the country's major policies, actively respond to the Party's call, and deeply implement patriotic words and deeds. University students are in their youth, and emotional polarization is a psychological characteristic of this period. Whether they can guide university students to recognize the essence of patriotism under the impact of dual trends, coordinate the relationship between patriotic passion and rational patriotism, abandon extreme thoughts of emotional indifference and emotional excess, maintain moral and legal bottom lines, reasonably express patriotic sentiment, establish correct patriotic values, and actively implement patriotic behavior is a major challenge for patriotic education in the new era. To protect university students' patriotic enthusiasm while guiding it onto the correct track requires not only moving people with emotion but also convincing them with reason, especially combining basic principles of patriotism and targeting specific current events to explain what behavioral choices can truly achieve patriotic effects.

Second, enhance the mainstream value guidance of university students' patriotic education in cyberspace and promote the positive orientation of university students' patriotic values. The Internet is one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century, relating to everything from clothing, food, housing, and transportation to dining, studying, medical care, and entertainment. It can be said that the Internet has created new space for human society and new fields for national governance. "The Internet is the main battlefield of current propaganda and ideological work" (Xi, 2017), and it is also an important position for patriotic education. How to seize the online position and how to make good use of this double-edged sword directly relates to the success or failure of patriotic education. The Internet is essentially information output carried by digits, with characteristics of openness, directness, interactivity, and sharing, breaking through the time and space limitations of patriotic education, enriching patriotic education content, and building multiple platforms for patriotic education. Meanwhile, the Internet has also formed a huge public opinion field with characteristics of spontaneity, conflict, anonymity, and difficulty in control, not only producing huge positive energy but also having areas where negative energy accumulates, bringing many challenges to patriotic education. For example, an information explosion, with overwhelming data bringing uncertainty to people's cognition, "if lies are not easy to prove, he will use lies without hesitation" (Liu, 2013), but screening lies to obtain valuable information requires spending a lot of time cost, therefore the complex world of public opinion has brought great impact to mainstream discourse. Currently, various complex Western theoretical trends still try to insert various noises and create various fallacies to deal with non-Western societies, attempting to interfere with and destroy the great cause of Chinese national rejuvenation and prevent China's rise. As the main young users of the Internet, university students' values are influenced by multiple ideologies in the Internet where facts cannot be objectively presented, which inevitably brings ideological confusion and perplexity to university students' value judgment and choice, making it easy to fall into the value trap of capital logic, leading to fragmentation and irrationality in patriotic cognition. Facing the complex situation of the Internet, Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that "if we cannot pass the Internet hurdle, we cannot pass the long-term governance hurdle" (Xi, 2020). Therefore, entering the Internet era, patriotic education channels should expand following the characteristics of the times, and online space patriotic education methods must follow the personality characteristics of university student youth subjects, using "Internet language" that young netizens like to hear and see to express rational patriotic thoughts, promoting the positive development of university youth groups' patriotic sentiment expression and patriotic values.

Third, seriously study and answer new questions about achieving organic unity of patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism in the context of major changes unseen in a century. Emotion and reason are different stages and different forms of expression in the psychological development of patriotism. Cultivating patriotic spirit must accurately grasp the regularity and stage characteristics of patriotic spirit formation and development. In the process of patriotic spirit education and cultivation, especially when encountering major events, objective and scientific analysis should be made based on the interaction mechanism between patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism to properly handle the relationship between emotion and rational patriotism. Particularly when conducting patriotic education for university students, attention should be paid to patriotic sentiment education, stimulating patriotic passion, and cultivating patriotic feelings. The positive significance of patriotic sentiment should be affirmed, helping them consolidate and develop positive and healthy thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, timely rational guidance should be given to patriotic sentiment to prevent it from running out of control like a wild horse towards extremes. According to the development mechanism of university students knowing patriotism, why to be patriotic, and how to be patriotic, adopt educational methods from near to far, from concrete to abstract, from perceptual to rational, using passion as the foundation, utilizing emotional internal motivation to nurture university students' deep patriotic sentiment, establish lofty aspirations to serve the country, express rational patriotic behavior, to achieve coordinated development of patriotic



sentiment and rational patriotism, becoming a huge spiritual force promoting national development and realizing national rejuvenation.

Patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism are mutually unified in patriotic education, with distinct characteristics of the times. Patriotic education is an important content of ideological and political education. In the practical process of conducting patriotic education for university students, we must fully recognize the stage and sequential characteristics of university students' patriotic expression, profoundly reflect the dialectical relationship between patriotic sentiment and rational patriotism, and prevent blind impulses.

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