**Effective Ideological Work & the Political Orientation of Social Thought Trends**

**September 2019**

**The author Prof. Wang Bingquan is a researcher at the Institute of Political Science, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences**

[Abstract] People's public opinions and theoretical discourses on interest demands shape social thoughts which have prominent political characteristics. When expressing interest demands, the social thoughts show a clear political orientation. In the face of social thoughts with prominent political characteristics, ideological work should be based on reality, face reality, and adhere to being close to reality, close to life, and close to the masses. Researchers generally believe that social thoughts are a kind of ideological tendency, but they could not give a clear definition of the essential characteristics of social thoughts. After nearly 30 years of practice in the study of social thoughts and the examination and analysis of research results in this area, Chinese scholars have formed a basic view on this issue, namely: social thoughts are ideas or tendencies that are guided by certain ideological theories in the era of social change (based on the evolution of social psychology), reflect the demands of social and historical trends, and have a wide range of influence.

【Key words】social trends, political nature, ideology

Thoughts are a reflection of social reality. In different periods since the reform and opening up, social thoughts have risen and fallen, and their performances are quite different, but thoughts with prominent political characteristics have received more attention and have been more prominent.

 Looking back at the ups and downs of social thoughts since the reform and opening up, what impressed people most was social thoughts’ distinct political nature. Therefore, grasping the political characteristics of thoughts is the key to analyzing social thoughts, and it is also the entry point for grasping the dynamics of ideological theories, the roadmap of public opinion, and the pulse of society.

Maintaining tension with mainstream discourse, highlighting political "issues", and strengthening group consciousness are the main manifestations of the political characteristics of social thoughts.

**Maintain tension with mainstream discourse.**

As a system of ideological theory, the political characteristics of social thought are prominently reflected in the "heterogeneous relationship" between it and the mainstream ideology, that is, there is a distinction between mainstream ideology and non-mainstream ideology.

Any social thought is reflected in a dynamic synthesis of a certain social psychology and ideological theory system. The reason why social thought is different from the expression of mainstream ideology is that the psychology of a part of the social group it reflects cannot accept the values ​​advocated by the mainstream ideology, and it can be expressed under the theoretical support of the corresponding ideological system, that is, it is contrary to the mainstream ideology.

 For example, the so-called "left" thought believes that the mainstream ideology is not "left" enough, and the so-called "right" thought believes that the mainstream ideology is not "right" enough.

From the perspective of ideological work, these thoughts are summarized as "non-Marxist" thoughts or even "anti-Marxist" thoughts, which fully illustrates the political characteristics of the thoughts and also exposes the tension between the mainstream ideology and the non-mainstream ideology.

The existence of this tension has its historical rationality. It is the complex changes of the times and the freedom and openness of society that have given rise to the birth of thoughts and shaped the relationship between thoughts and mainstream ideology.

**Political "issues" stand out.**

With the deepening of reform, the empty ideological debates between thoughts and between thoughts as well as ideological debates between thoughts and mainstream ideology have gradually weakened, and political issues have continued to "appear".

The long-lasting discussions on the value level are retreating behind the scenes, and the actual political orientation is more prominent.

For example, some social thoughts, by taking the so-called "top-level design" and the practice of reform and opening up as a realistic basis, attempt to intervene in the reform process in order to influence the reform design and practice, try to participate in the solution of major social problems, and provide solutions from scratch.

The discourse of thoughts continues to penetrate into the superstructure field, which is related to the critical period of national development and social progress. Reform is moving into the deep water zone, which means that reform is encountering a hard bone to chew and has to touch the real social pain points.

Various thoughts will also participate in it and try to give their own solutions. We can see that for some time, many thoughts have taken the practice of reform and opening up as a realistic basis. In terms of national development and social progress, each thought has different expectations and designs. Some social thoughts want to achieve a "revolution" in the fundamental system, some want to achieve a change in the mechanism, and some want to reconcile the two, reflecting different reform views.

**Group consciousness is enhanced.**

 In the ideological debate over a period of time, the boundaries of different "camps" have become clearer, the demands have become more specific, and the requirements have become more direct.

This phenomenon indicates two problems. One is the division of the intellectual group; the other is that different "opinion leaders" and "opinion elites" have their own clearer and more specific political demands, and these demands and propositions have become the core discourse of different thoughts.

The differentiation of thoughts and the formation of boundaries indicate the differentiation of the social groups they represent and reflect.

From the perspective of different social groups, the thoughts that represent their demands are the external manifestations of the tendency of group consciousness to be independent. At present, due to the increasingly prominent social contradictions and oppositions caused by changes in economic and social structures and the differentiation of interests, the group consciousness and class consciousness of social groups are constantly increasing.

Objectively, there is a need for a system of concepts and bearers who can express their own interests. The core expressers of various thoughts, namely "opinion elites" or "opinion leaders", continue to promote the voice of thoughts, and the driving force behind them is the interest orientation and basic demands of specific groups.

The reason why thoughts often oppose each other and there are conflicts in concepts is also the struggle for demands of different social groups. To a certain extent, when group consciousness evolves and develops to a certain extent, party consciousness will emerge, and the political nature of the thoughts attached to it will become more distinct.

Social interests, class consciousness, and the development of self-media have made the political characteristics of social thought more distinct

**Adjustment and differentiation of social interests.**

Marx said, **"Once 'thoughts' leave 'interests', they will certainly make themselves look bad."** The emergence of social thoughts is mainly related to the great changes brought about by social transformation.

To a certain extent, reform and opening up is a process of interest adjustment and resource redistribution. This is not only a process of great development, but also a process of contradictions and problems.

People's public opinion expression and theoretical discourse on interest demands are shaping politically prominent thoughts. The more intense the interest differentiation, the clearer the interest boundary, and the more prominent the political nature of the thought.

Looking at the history of the development of thoughts since reform and opening up, the development of thoughts jumps with the rhythm of reform. Reform promotes the development of productive forces, brings social development and progress, and interests are adjusted and reshuffled.

Specifically for different social groups, there are gains and losses. Those who gain will stick to their inherent things, while those who lose will seek changes. Both will appeal to public opinion, seek theoretical support, form a discourse posture, and different thoughts will emerge.

When expressing interest demands and designing systems to achieve interest demands, thoughts show a clear political orientation. In general, the political orientation of the trends of thought is relatively focused on issues such as power constraints, market norms, the gap between the rich and the poor, and the loss of interests.

The differences in their standpoints and demands have led to opposition and conflict between the trends of thought. After more than 40 years of reform and opening up, with the formation of interest boundaries and the solidification of interest subjects, in the process of comprehensively deepening reform, these deep-seated issues will inevitably be touched upon again, and the political expression of the trends of thought will be more distinct.

**Class consciousness is clearer.**

 For some time, one of the important reasons why social thoughts have a distinct political color is that the boundaries of interest groups have become clearer and clearer, and class consciousness has begun to emerge, so there is a need for theoretical discourse that is consistent with their interests.

 Whether from various newspapers and magazines in recent years or from people's street talk, we can see or hear many opinions and speeches with clear attitudes, sometimes even emotional, which shows that people's perception of interest differentiation is constantly increasing.

A certain political thought that strengthens the socioeconomic differences or conflicts of interest between groups is consistent with interest differentiation and group identity, and will constantly reconstruct the basic pattern of ideology and impact the mainstream ideology in the society.

 The changes in the economic and social structure and the differentiation of interests have also continuously strengthened the class consciousness of ordinary groups among the people, and they also need to have their own interests and wills. With the increasing sense of group belonging of the interest subjects, social thoughts will seek expression on more specific political issues.

**Self-media is developing rapidly, and the right to speak is diversified.**

The Internet provides a broader "activity space" for non-mainstream ideologies such as thoughts. In contemporary China, especially since the mid-to-late 1990s, this role of the Internet has become increasingly prominent. Various ideological websites, forums, personal blogs, and WeChat groups with different tendencies have increasingly become important platforms for the development of thoughts, and their role has exceeded that of traditional media to a certain extent.

Opinion elites and ordinary members of society have achieved the most direct and extensive communication in history through the Internet. The development of self-media has brought about the acquisition of "discourse power", which has enabled the spread of thoughts to gain unprecedented speed and audience, and the group nature has become more prominent, allowing political issues to spread to a wider and deeper extent.

**Political trends will have a greater impact on social life, making the situation in the ideological field more complicated.**

The world is undergoing extensive and profound changes, and contemporary China is undergoing extensive and profound changes. In such an era, along with the profound changes in social structure, social organization form, and interest pattern, the independence, selectivity, variability, and differences of people's ideological activities have been significantly enhanced.

Under the condition of the same fundamental interests, social interests will continue to be differentiated. Thought is an instruction manual for interests. Due to the differentiation of social interest relations, social thoughts reflecting different interest groups and their demands will also be generated and developed accordingly.

In such a society, the expression of various interest demands will become a regular social phenomenon, and political thoughts will also exert social influence in a larger and wider range. The core figures of some thoughts will promote social thoughts to exert greater influence. These people are one of the most active and important components of thoughts. They have already dominated the "discourse power" in some fields. As China's reform continues to deepen, they will take the initiative to promote the development of social thoughts and have a greater impact in various fields. As the real living conditions change, some social thoughts will further gain public opinion space and have a greater impact.

The development of political thoughts makes the situation in the ideological field more complicated.

 In the new era, the relationship between social thoughts and other social thoughts, as well as the relationship between social thoughts and mainstream ideology will become more complicated, and the differentiation and opposition between thoughts will become more and more obvious. The opposition between thoughts will become more prominent.

The reason is that if these social thoughts further acquire social resources, they will inevitably cause a relatively large backlash in the entire social thought field, and the social thoughts which are opposite to these social thoughts will also react accordingly. More importantly, those social thoughts that are contrary to the mainstream ideology will have a greater impact on the mainstream ideology.

They will continue to integrate their group power and "compete to gain the support of the masses" with the mainstream ideology in various ways; they will continue to infiltrate their own ideas into economic, political, and cultural life practices in various ways. "Ideological mass events" will appear and even develop into social actions.

 **Ideological debates are not limited to the intellectual and theoretical circles.**

 Today, with the full development of various media, ideological debates have already moved towards and will move deeper into the masses. Any influential politically prominent ideology will incorporate certain views or discourses of the people and "go to the masses" when the time is right.

The development of online media has also led to the non-elitism of ideas and concepts. The masses may actively or passively participate, and "ideological mass events" will appear more frequently. From this perspective, differences in ideology and theory may lead to social instability.

**Strategies for dealing with the political characteristics of social trends: This needs solving problems, responding promptly, improving work, and strengthening anti-corruption efforts**

Fundamentally solve the problem of unbalanced and inadequate development. While China has made remarkable achievements in exploring the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it has also produced a series of development problems that need to be solved urgently.

These problems often lead to confusion and contradictions in the ideological understanding of some people. Therefore, effectively solving the major problems that have emerged in the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, constantly promoting the self-improvement and development of China's socialist political system, and better playing the superiority of the party's leadership and the socialist system in practice are the fundamental solutions to effectively resist various erroneous tendencies and build ideological consensus among the whole party and society.

**Respond to social hot issues in a timely manner.**

Political thoughts often use various social hot spots to expand the social influence of their propositions. Social hot spots are the "catalysts" for the development of various concepts.

From the perspective of historical development, important thoughts often revolve around the theme of historical progress, and in a relatively short period of time, important thoughts are reflected through various social hot spots. The so-called "hot spots" are some important changes in social, political and economic life, which are often formed spontaneously in social life and have internal basis.

They seem accidental, but in fact they are inevitable. Since the reform and opening up, the most concerned social hot spots are often the new concepts, new policies, and new measures taken by our party to deepen reform. Looking at the process of reform and opening up, every step of deepening reform is the most important hot spot in social life, especially every party congress is the hot spot among hot spots.

Interpreting the new terms and new insights in the political report of the congress is the core issue of various thoughts, and different groups try their best to interpret it in accordance with their own interests. This requires relevant parties to interpret the central spirit in a timely and accurate manner and respond to social hot spots quickly to avoid being passive.

**Strengthen team building and improve working methods.**

The ideological work team should have ideals, beliefs and skills. At present, there is a tendency that the party's theoretical propaganda and ideological work tends to be professionalized, which is a profession rather than a career.

Although ideological work requires experts and professionals, it has a distinct political nature. It is bound to be unworkable to focus on the interpretation and construction of words, and the ideological and theoretical achievements produced are irrelevant to practice, far from the people, and are becoming more and more circle-oriented and niche.

Technically speaking, the main impression given by our current ideological work is that it "shiels off" all disputes and replaces them with many "projects" in ideological work.

These are practices that do not conform to the laws of ideological work. It is extremely absurd to engage in face projects and image projects in ideological work. Ideological work should be based on reality, face reality, and adhere to the principle of being close to reality, close to life, and close to the masses. The nihilistic orientation that is divorced from the masses and reality will not have a positive effect.

**Strengthen anti-corruption and improve the supervision of power.**

The supervision of power seems to have nothing to do with the "chaos" of ideology, but strengthening the supervision of power may be the starting point for improving ideological work and reshaping the image of mainstream ideology.

Our party is the core of leadership, the core of "contradictions", the main contradiction, and the main aspect of contradictions. The political orientation of various concepts and trends in the field of ideology and in the field of theory is our party.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2012), the new central leadership has been able to make a good start, which has received good social response and has been widely supported by the ruling group and the people.

Several experiences can be summarized from this. For example, starting with me is in line with our political operation mode, and the upper level will follow the lower level; starting from the point and expanding to the surface, implementing the basic experience of promoting reforms for many years; starting from reality, within the tolerance range of the target group; starting from the problem, it is specific rather than conceptual, and it is operational. These experiences are helpful to introduce and implement methods to further strengthen the supervision and restriction of power.

(The author is a researcher at the Institute of Political Science, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)

【References】

①Wang Bingquan: "On the Role of Thinkers in the Formation and Development of Social Thoughts", " Party Building and Ideological Education", Issue 17, 2011.