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## Interpretation of the theoretical origin of “Psychological Education” in Chinese universities

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### **Abstract**

As one of the three newly added sub-systems in China's new era of ideological and political education, psychological education is a distinctive feature of the current mental health education work in Chinese universities, which contains three theoretical foundations: the theory of man's free and all-round development, the development theory of Humanistic Psychology, and the theory of happiness in positive psychology. Only by fully sorting out and excavating its theoretical basis and current value pursuit, and providing a strong theoretical basis for the development of mental health education in universities (hereinafter referred to as “university”), can it truly play a guiding role in practice.

**Keywords:** *Chinese universities, Psychological Education, mental health education, theoretical origins*

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Научная статья

## Интерпретация теоретического происхождения «психологического образования» в китайских университетах

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### **Аннотация**

Являясь одной из трех недавно добавленных подсистем в новую эру идеологического и политического образования Китая, психологическое образование является отличительной чертой текущей работы по обучению психическому здоровью в китайских университетах, которая содержит три теоретические основы: теорию свободы человека и всестороннее развитие, теорию развития гуманистической психологии и теорию счастья в позитивной психологии. Только полностью разобравшись и разобрав его теоретическую основу и стремление к текущим ценностям, а также обеспечив прочную теоретическую основу для развития образования в области психического здоровья в университетах, он может действительно играть руководящую роль на практике.

**Ключевые слова:** *китайские университеты, психологическое образование, образование в области психического здоровья, теоретические истоки*

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### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 epidemic which is raging around the world has brought unprecedented harm and suffering to human physical and mental health. It not only severely tests people's physical immunity, but also greatly tests people's psychological immunity. The strength of individual psychological immunity mainly involves three aspects: the cultivation of psychological quality in peacetime, psychological counseling and crisis intervention during the epidemic, and psychological reconstruction and assistance after the epidemic. Among them, the cultivation of psychological quality is the foundation, which determines people's psychological self-improvement, social mentality and behavior in fighting the epidemic.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out that "We will improve the system of public psychological services, and cultivate self-esteem, self-confidence, rationality, composure, and optimism among our people" [1]. On February 23, 2020, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, emphasized in remarks on Novel Coronavirus Response Source psychological and counseling services should be increased" [2]. It is necessary to attach great importance to and properly guide the social mentality to develop in a direction that is conducive to epidemic prevention and control.

Facing the epidemic directly requires not only building a psychological defense line to overcome the difficulties with a rational and peaceful attitude, but also showing the psychological quality of working hard in the resumption of work, production and school with a positive attitude. The psychological quality of college students under the epidemic is a test to a certain extent for the effectiveness of psychological education in universities. The level of psychological quality is closely related to the level of mental health, which further highlights the important function and role of psychological education in personnel training.

### **The Connotation and Implication of Psychological Education in Chinese Universities**

As the name suggests, educating people means cultivating, shaping, and transforming people, including two aspects: educating and educating oneself. Psychological education is to achieve the purpose of educating people through mental health education. It is not only an important content of ideological and political education in universities in the new era, but also a new mission of mental health education in universities. In terms of content, "Psychological education means that educators, based on the physical and mental reality of the educational object, follow the laws of human psychological growth and education, implement mental health education in various ways, and provide positive psychological guidance to the educational objects in a purposeful and planned way, relieve psychological confusion, develop psychological potential, improve psychological quality, and promote a sound personality, in order to achieve the purpose of cultivating a new generation with ideals, abilities and responsibilities" [3].

At present, the level of specialization and standardization of mental health education has been continuously improved, but there are certain problems in the psychological education mechanism of universities in terms of organizational structure, education team, teaching content, teaching methods and guarantee mechanism. There is still a long way to go from a high-quality psychological education system, which requires improving the theory, concept, content, team, method, and approach system of psychological education, so that psychological education can become the power source of talent training. Among them, the key discussion is how to stand on the height of educating people and explore the effectiveness of psychological education, especially its theoretical basis and current value pursuit must be fully sorted out and excavated, so as to provide strong support for the development of mental health education in universities. A strong theoretical basis can play a guiding role in practice.

### **Theoretical Basis of Psychological Education in Chinese Universities**

Psychological education in Chinese universities conforms to the principles and policies of the party and the country and is also urgently needed by the society. The theoretical basis of psychological education is the key and premise of how to develop mental health education scientifically. For building the value pursuit and practical path of effective psychological education in the new era, for thoroughly implementing the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, for studying and implementing the spirit of general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, Xi Jinping's series of important speeches, and for improving the quality of psychological education in universities under the

new situation, it reveals the rich theoretical basis of psychological education from multiple angles, which has both theoretical observation significance and practical guiding value. Through sorting out, there are mainly the following three important theories that are closely related to psychological education and have great guiding significance for the implementation of psychological education.

*First, The theory of Man's Free and All-round Development.*

The theory of Man's Free and All-round Development is the highest value proposition of the Marxist social development theory system, and it is also an important theoretical basis for China to formulate educational policies and educational goals. Report at 16th Party Congress stressed "The ideological and ethical standards, the scientific and cultural qualities, and the health of the whole people will be enhanced notably" [4]. The process of cultivating high-quality talents in universities is also a process of promoting the free and all-round development of college students. Promoting the free and all-round development of college students is the fundamental goal of college students' ideological and political education. The theory of man's free and all-round development plays a decisive role in formulating mental health education tasks, development directions and educational methods for college students. It can be said that psychological education is not only the inherent requirement for the free and all-round development of college students, but also one of the effective means to promote the all-round free development.

"The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations" [5]. "Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man" [6]. "Production is most encouraged by a mode of distribution which allows all members of society to develop, maintain and exercise their capacities with maximum universality" [7]. The free and comprehensive development of human beings refers to the full, free and unified development of all human attributes such as social relations, needs, abilities, and individuality. Moreover, the development of social relations, needs and abilities are in the service of "Free Individuality", which indicates the inevitable law of human development.

The reference of this theory requires that, in educating students in universities, we should pay attention to the all-round development of students' quality in all aspects, and pay attention to the all-round Development of students' subjectivity, personality, ability and quality. all-round development includes both the group of college and university students and the all-round development of individual college and university students. The all-round development of college students mainly refers to seeking common ground while reserving differences on the basis of promoting the all-round development of college and university students in a relatively free and equal educational environment, so as to promote the overall and coordinated development of college and university students, the coordinated development of various basic qualities such as mental health quality, ideological and moral quality, scientific and cultural quality, etc. Psychological education is not only an important part of the comprehensive development education of college and university students, but also a powerful driving force and an important guarantee for study and life. It is an urgent need to cultivate high-quality talents in the new era to cultivate the good psychological quality of college and university students, improve the social adaptability, and promote all-round development.

*Second, the Development theory of Humanistic Psychology.*

In the history of psychology, following the Psychoanalytic School and the Behaviorism School, the Humanistic Psychology that emerged in the 1950s is known as the third force of psychology. The most influential views are Abraham Harold Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and C.R. Rogers' Client-Centered therapy. In 1943, Maslow proposed in his Theory of Human Motivation that people have five basic needs: physiological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs, esteem and self-actualization needs [8]. The most urgent needs of people are the main motivation to motivate them to take action, the need for self-actualization is to achieve the best state of self-satisfaction through exerting maximum effort and ability to realize one's ambition. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs reveals the law of human needs, in psychological education, according to the law of needs, we can help students gradually meet the needs of all levels from low to high, and effectively motivate them.

Maslow also proposed that psychological research should be centered on questions that are instructive to others, and the application in educational practice is problem-centered, the famous PBL (Problem-Based Learning) is a problem-centered teaching model with very good results, which was pioneered by American

neurology professor Barrows at McMaster University in Canada in 1969. Rogers developed a “self theory” of personality in psychotherapy practice and research, and advocated “patient-centered therapy”. Its basic assumption is that human nature is inherently good, and that individuals have the ability to heal, realize and grow, and there is no need for direct intervention by counselors in psychological counseling and therapy. Applied to education, Rogers put forward the “learner-centered” teaching point of view, advocating, that teachers fully trust students, let students do the classroom leadership. A good psychological atmosphere for students’ personality changes is important. They both believe that the goal of education is to promote the development of students so that they can adapt to changes in society.

Humanistic psychology provides an important theoretical reference for psychological education. It pays attention to the primacy, existence and core value of human beings, and advocates the study of human nature, self-value, special experience and human dignity, gives full play to people’s potential and creativity, provides an appropriate environment, helps people strive to improve themselves, and ultimately achieves self-realization. In other words, the development of potential is derived from the need for self-realization of human beings. Potential theory of humanistic psychology, also known as Potential Theory, advocates that human development is reflected in two potentials: One is that human beings have the ability to grow or realize, and the other is that human beings have the ability to establish mutual relationship ability. Human development is understood in terms of the stages in which these two potentialities are increasingly realized and integrated. Human development consists of three stages: external self, internal self, integrated and realized self. The ultimate goal of development is to form a new integrated and realized self [9].

Psychological education in universities adheres to the principle of “people-oriented, student-oriented”, and should have a comprehensive and detailed grasp of the characteristics of college students. Teachers should become promoters of students’ self-exploration and self-discovery, not preachers. Differential mental health education should be carried out according to individual differences, the different situations and psychological characteristics of each student. It not only respects the personality of each person, and aims to promote free and comprehensive development to give full play to their potential, but also pays attention to each person’s physical and mental characteristics and needs at different levels. We should pay attention to the individual value of students, improve students’ self-awareness, and develop students’ good emotional experience and personality. School work focuses on developmental counseling and personal growth.

### *Third, Happiness theory of Positive Psychology.*

In the 1980s, Positive Psychology emerged as a new revolutionary field, whose psychological foundation was mainly humanistic psychology and human potential research, which laid the foundation for its development. The philosophical foundation mainly included Buddhist philosophy and constructivism philosophy. It not only expands the theoretical and practical horizons of psychology, but also penetrates into the fields of medicine, education, economics, sociology and management. For example, its application in the field of organizational management has formed Positive Organizational Behavior (POB). Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Behavior catalyzed the birth of psychological capital and its theory.

The formal proposal of the concept of Positive Psychology, is marked by the paper *Introduction to Positive Psychology* published by American Psychologist Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi M. in January 2000. The word *positive* means *potential* and *actual*, which includes both inner conflict and the actual potential ability of the individual. Martin Seligman, the father of Positive Psychology, believes the ultimate goal of Positive Psychology is to make people happier by understanding and building positive emotions, satisfaction and meaning. Positive Psychology improves the negative model of the “Problem, Disorder” pathological psychopathology that dominated the development of psychology in the 20th century, turns to explore the positive factors and qualities of people themselves, such as happiness, human virtue and potential, and advocate the cultivation of a positive attitude and positive thinking, so that more healthy people can become happier, realize your potential, not just solve problems and relieve pain. Its theory can be summarized as “One Center and Three Supporting Points”, happiness is the center, positive subjective experience, positive personal traits, and positive institutions are the supporting points. It mainly studies three aspects: the subjective “Positive subjective experience”, the individual’s “Positive individual traits”, and the group’s positive organization system “Positive institutions”.

"The field of positive psychology at the subject level is about valued subjective experience: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic" [10].

Positive emotional experience can improve psychological adaptability and promote individual mental health; individual formation of positive personality characteristics can make positive attributions to difficulties and reduce negative emotional distress; positive organizational system can achieve people's experience and potential. Corresponding to these three aspects, many related theories have been formed, such as the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, the theory of positive emotional contagion, formation and change theory of positive personality traits, theory of personal social relationship change, theory of interconnection between social environment and concept of happiness, etc. Positive psychology is further expanded in psychology and many other fields around positive psychology through scientific empirical research, and the results are applied to the promotion of social development and human progress.

Psychological education in universities is based on the theory of positive psychology, which can better change the work concept and focus. That is, for all students, from focusing on preventive education to positive psychological orientation, potential development and the cultivation of positive psychological qualities. In work, we should never only focus on psychological counseling and crisis intervention for students with psychological problems, while ignoring the positive guidance of most students in their growth process, but should focus on identifying, measuring, stimulating, and promoting students' positive psychological qualities, cultivating students' healthy personality, guiding students to formulate self-development plans, providing active publicity and psychological growth training, etc., and using positive interventions to make college and university students happier.

In this way, university students can be guided to form appropriate self-recognition, strengthen their emotional management ability, learn to communicate well, establish good interpersonal relationships, and shape or awaken positive personality traits; pay attention to the experience of college students, tap the positive emotions such as happiness of college students, let college students discover their advantages, potentials and virtues, cultivate their temperament and improve their personality in a positive atmosphere. As a result, psychological education can build a long-term mechanism, complete the personality cultivation and happiness navigation of college students, focus on promoting the scientific, humanized, and sustainable growth of higher education.

### **Changes in the Working Concept of Mental Health Education in China**

*First, psychological education: the latest results of the changes in the concept of mental health education.*

Since Chinese reform and opening-up, mental health education has been positioned as an important part of the ideological and political education of college and university students, which reflects the society's requirements for talent training, the development of the educational situation, the need for quality education, and the improvement of students' personality. At present, this position has not changed, but the working concept of mental health education has become more and more scientific in practice. With the continuous innovation of ideological and political views in the new era, the work status of "Psychological Education" is becoming more and more important. School mental health education emerged in the mid-to-late 1980s. Since 1984, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University, Tongji University, Beijing Normal University and other universities took the lead in establishing psychological counseling centers. After 40 years of continuous exploration, we have achieved rich practical experience and results. At the same time, people are more deeply aware that while cultivating morality, we must cultivate their minds, and cultivate their healthy minds when paying attention to the moral growth of college and university students.

The most important thing is that the promotion of mental health education requires certain values to guide the general direction, and the focus of attention has also experienced the process of psychological obstacles – psychological development – psychological education.

Looking back at history, first, the working concept of Chinese mental health education has achieved a change from psychotherapy to psychological development and then to psychological education. In the early stage, there was more psychological counseling, focusing on psychological disorders and psychological diseases, which focused on the prevention and treatment of psychological problems; Later, it emphasized providing comprehensive services for students, with “educational model as the main, medical model as a supplement”; In recent years, it has focused on developmental counseling and positive psychology concept guidance.

*In addition*, is the strong support of national policies. Since 1990, mental health education has been highly valued in China. A series of related education policies have been introduced one after another. Up to now, the essence of mental health education has been gradually emphasized, and the mental health quality of college and university students has been improved. For example, in 1998, the government and education authorities in Shanghai and other places began to incorporate school mental health education into the Education Quality Assessment system. In 2010, Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee adopted Outline of the National Plan for Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), emphasizing school mental health education at the height of national strategy. “Promote mental health education to improve students’ mental and physical health for physical strength and a strong will” [11].

*Second, psychological education: one of the ten education systems of ideological and political views in the new era.*

President Xi Jinping’s report at 19th CPC National Congress clearly stated that “Foster a new generation capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation” [1]. “Improve the system of public psychological services” [1] This means that psychology has great potential in serving the country, and also means that psychological education has established work philosophy of a new era for mental health education in universities, we must adhere to the combination of nurturing heart and morality, and continuously improve the effectiveness of psychological education, make due contributions to nurturing newcomers of the era. This is of great significance to improving the quality of ideological and political education and promoting the development of mental health education. The concept of ideological and political education in universities is also constantly innovating in the process of inheritance [12]. The ideological and political outlook in the new era has not only changed from the previous knowledge-oriented to the current education-oriented, but also emphasizes the three comprehensive education of all-faculty, whole-process, all-around educational objective system characteristics of the times, and it has also gone through from the Three Education Systems to the Seven Education Systems, and then to the Ten Education Systems.

In order to further strengthen the awareness and consciousness of educating people, Ministry of Education of the Communist Party of China published “Implementation Outline of Ideological and Political Work Quality Improvement Project in universities” [13], in 2017, it is clearly proposed to build an integrated Ten Education systems, requiring universities to build implementation content, carrier, path and method of ten systems of Curriculum, Scientific research, Practice, Culture, Network, Psychology, Management, Service, Funding, Organization, give full play to the education of the Ten Education system synergy. The outline pointed out that it is necessary to build a quality improvement system for psychological education”, “Cultivate teachers and students’ physiologically peaceful, positive and healthy mentality, and promote the coordinated development of teachers and students’ mental health quality, ideological and moral quality, scientific and cultural quality” [13].

As one of the three newly added sub-systems, psychological education reflects the innovation of education paths and methods in universities, and also has its own independent education function. In 2018, Ministry of Education of the Communist Party of China issued the *Guidelines for Mental Health education in high schools*: “Adhere to the unity of nurturing heart and morality, strengthen humanistic care and psychological counseling, standardize the development of mental health education and consulting services, better adapt to and meet the needs of students’ mental health education services” [14]. This shows that we should not only incorporate psychological education into the talent training program, but also improve the quality of psychological education. In particular, as an important part of the ideological and political work assessment in universities, implementations of the relevant spirit of the state on mental health educa-

tion is of great significance to the healthy growth of college students and the harmony and stability of campuses.

### Conclusion

Psychological education in universities can only have a clear direction and work philosophy with the guidance of rich theories, and will have the full confidence to build a long-term mechanism. It will be able to better respond to the requirements of Three Comprehensive Education of all-faculty, whole-process, all-around educational objective system, promote the effective operation of the mental health education work pattern of The Five-sphere Integrated Plan of education and teaching, practical activities, consulting services, preventive interventions, and platform guarantees. Psychological education in the new era strives to reflect the times, creativity and effectiveness, and it is necessary to continue to find the value pursuit and practice path of psychological education" in universities in Chinese new era.

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