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The ethical dimensions of revolutionary morality: a three-dimensional examination based on "emotion-norm-value"

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Abstract: Revolutionary morality is the moral system forged by the Communist Party of China and the people through long-term revolutionary practice, within which its ethical structure takes shape. From the perspective of Marxist ethics, revolutionary morality forms an ethical system built on the three-dimensional mutual construction of "emotion-norm-value". Contemporary cognitive confusion regarding revolutionary morality stems not from inherent defects in revolutionary morality itself, but from fragmented interpretations of its three ethical dimensions. Analyzing this ethical structure helps restore the true ethical nature of revolutionary morality, deepen theoretical understanding of its essence, and provide important theoretical insights for moral education in the new era.

Keywords: revolutionary morality; ethical structure; patriotism; collectivism; ideals and convictions

1 Introduction: The ethical attributes of revolutionary morality and the proposal of a three-dimensional framework

Revolutionary morality is a special moral form developed by the Communist Party of China and the people during long-term revolutionary practice. It is the product of the integration between the creative transformation of traditional Chinese virtues and the Sinicization of Marxist ethical thought. Chinese revolutionary morality refers to "the excellent morality formed by Chinese Communists, the people's army, all progressive elements, and the masses in China's New Democratic Revolution and socialist revolution and construction"[1]. The basic content of Chinese revolutionary morality includes: taking the realization of the lofty ideals of socialism and communism as the ultimate goal, serving the people wholeheartedly as the purpose and core, taking collectivism as the basic principle, holding high the banner combining patriotism and internationalism, and forming revolutionary spirits such as selfless dedication, tenacious struggle, arduous efforts, and diligence and thrift [2]. As a normative ethical form born out of revolutionary practice, revolutionary morality tempers moral emotions through revolutionary practice, establishes moral judgment criteria between individuals and collectives, anchors its ultimate value in communist ideals and convictions, and constitutes a complete ethical system.

Current research on revolutionary morality mostly concentrates on basic connotations, characteristics, and educational functions. These studies provide an important foundation for understanding revolutionary morality, but there is still a need to reveal the mutual construction relationships among its various dimensions from within the ethical structure. Marx and Engels explicitly pointed out in *The German Ideology*: "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness [3]." This thesis indicates that moral concepts are not independently existing subjective consciousness, but

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are historically generated in material production and social practice, continuously enriching their connotations with the development of the times. From the perspective of moral generation mechanism, the complete cultivation of moral personality necessarily includes three levels: motivation stimulation, behavioral regulation, and value integration, corresponding respectively to moral emotion, moral norms, and value conviction, constituting a complete ethical chain of "initiated by emotion, established through norms, oriented by conviction". The three dimensions of emotion, norm, and value in revolutionary morality were gradually generated in the historical process of the Communist Party of China leading the people in revolutionary practice.

2 The three ethical dimensions of revolutionary morality

The emergence of revolutionary morality is rooted in the development context of Marxist ethical thought and is an inevitable product of the long-term historical practice of Chinese Communists leading the people. Revolution, as an active practical activity, necessarily depends on a specific dynamic mechanism. The core of this dynamic mechanism is emotion, and patriotism is the most concentrated embodiment of this emotion.

2.1 Emotional dimension: Patriotic sentiment constitutes the perceptual foundation

Revolutionary morality is nourished by profound traditional Chinese virtues and is the product of integrating Marxist ethical thought with concrete social realities. During the development and construction of revolutionary morality across different historical stages, it follows the logic of moral development. "The sentiments of caring for family and state and regarding the world as one's own mission are the essence of traditional Chinese virtues and have become the core of Chinese revolutionary morality [4]." Family-state sentiment is essentially a profound moral emotion. The patriotic sentiments nurtured by traditional family-state consciousness, tempered in revolutionary practice, develop into an important emotional foundation of revolutionary morality. Thus, the generation of Chinese revolutionary morality cannot be separated from moral emotion.

From the perspective of historical materialism, moral emotion is not an innate human disposition but a product of specific socio-historical practice. Marx and Engels proposed in *The Holy Family*: "History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends [5]." This thesis reveals that all spiritual and moral experiences are rooted in the historical activities of real individuals. The patriotic sentiment in revolutionary morality is not an individual's spontaneous subjective psychological impulse, but a historically and practically grounded emotion formed amid national peril and class oppression. This sentiment arises from the suffering realities commonly experienced by the people, the revolutionaries' aspiration for national independence and the people's liberation, as well as the shared destiny. It reflects not only a rational understanding of its mission but also the emotional resonance of the subject breathing together and sharing a common destiny with the people.

As the perceptual foundation of revolutionary morality, this practice-oriented patriotic sentiment constitutes the internal psychological prerequisite for moral practice. It enables individuals to transcend the narrow boundaries of self-interest and bind personal destiny with the overall destiny of the nation and people, thereby generating the action tendency to devote oneself to the revolutionary cause. Meanwhile, this shared emotional experience also shapes value consensus within the community, enabling scattered individuals to transcend the barriers of private interest and coalesce into a moral community of shared destiny.

The power generated by emotion cannot independently complete self-regulation and self-calibration. Relying solely on emotional drive may spark noble moral force but can also easily slide toward subjective impulse. This means that the moral emotion of patriotism cannot be self-sufficient. If separated from the constraints of the normative dimension and the guidance of the value dimension, patriotic emotion can easily slide toward blind impulse, even falling into narrow-

mindedness. This inherently requires it to form linkage with collectivist norms and communist ideals and convictions.

2.2 Normative dimension: Collectivist spirit constitutes the mediating norm

If the emotional dimension provides revolutionary morality with its original driving force, then the normative dimension provides it with operational and implementable behavioral principles. The second dimension of revolutionary morality is the mediating norm centered on collectivist spirit. The term "mediating" refers to collectivism's bridging role between emotion and value. It transforms the emotional impulse of patriotism into specific behavioral norms while providing an institutionalized practical path for the value pursuit of communist ideals and convictions.

Collectivism is an ethical principle that advocates subordinating individual interests to collective interests. This principle has special historical rationality in revolutionary morality. During the revolutionary period, only by forming a community could individuals have the possibility of achieving liberation. Mao Zedong explicitly pointed out in "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War": "At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate them to the interests of the nation and of the masses [6]." This statement is precisely the concrete expression of the collectivist principle in revolutionary practice.

Collectivist spirit performs a dual ethical function in revolutionary morality. On one hand, it provides clear behavioral boundaries for individual behavior. Morally-driven behavior under emotional impetus has strong and blind characteristics; collectivist norms incorporate emotion into an orderly behavioral track by clarifying what behavior "ought" to be. On the other hand, it reconstructs the value relationship between the individual and collective, opening an ethical path for individuals to attain actual freedom. However, it does not "swallow" the "individual" with the "collective" but emphasizes the dialectical unity of the two in revolutionary practice. "By immersing oneself in active, creative collective practice, developing individuality and creating history in the process of transforming the realm of necessity, freedom can thus be achieved [7]." The development of the collective is not a suppression of the individual; on the contrary, it is the realistic condition for the full development of individual capabilities. An individual is not only a natural being but also a social being. Within the ethical framework of collectivism, the value of individual life is confirmed through devotion to the revolutionary cause. Therefore, collectivism both constrains the behavioral boundaries of individuals and provides them with a spiritual home for self- fulfillment, enabling them to achieve unity between self and community in the revolution.

Collectivist norms likewise cannot exist independently separated from the nourishment of emotion and value. Normative compliance lacking emotional foundation degenerates into external coercion; collectivism lacking value guidance may regress into mechanical organizational discipline.

2.3 Value dimension: Ideals and convictions constitute value integration

Ideals and convictions provide revolutionary morality with its ultimate basis of legitimacy, namely the manifestation of value rationality. Value rationality means that action does not take utilitarian gains and losses as the primary weighing scale but is based on the adherence to ultimate value faith. For revolutionary morality, this ultimate value faith is communism. Precisely because communism possesses the "utility-transcending" characteristic of value rationality, ideals and convictions rooted in it can transcend specific means and norms in the ethical structure and perform an integrating role over the whole situation.

Communist ideals and convictions, as the highest value faith, do not exist suspended apart from actual patriotic emotions and collective norms. They are embedded within revolutionary morality as an ultimate value anchor. First, they set the ultimate purpose for patriotic emotions and collectivist norms; second, they provide a value scale, both correcting the blindness of emotions and preventing collective norms from degenerating into mere instruments. When emotions fade and rules waver, ideals and convictions are used to reactivate them, thereby completing the reshaping of revolutionary

morality as a whole.

From the perspective of the internal logic of ethical structure, ideals and convictions are not abstract doctrines divorced from practice but the value foundation that maintains the integrity of the ethical system. If this integration is removed, revolutionary morality will degenerate into fragmented emotions and rigid regulations, losing ethical height and transcendence. It can be seen that revolutionary morality is not a simple addition of emotions, norms, and ideals and convictions; the three must achieve organic linkage under the integration of revolutionary practice.

3 Contemporary theoretical implications of the three dimensions

The three-dimensional mutual construction structure of revolutionary morality not only reveals the internal mechanism of its historical formation but also provides a theoretical reference for analyzing contemporary cognitive deviations. Revolutionary morality was formed in the specific practical context of revolutionary struggle. In times of peace, the original practical conditions have changed, the linkage foundation among the three dimensions has weakened accordingly, and fragmented one-sided understanding easily arises.

First, we must abandon fragmented interpretations and grasp the essence of revolutionary morality from an ethical organic perspective. Revolutionary morality is not a simple accumulation of virtues such as patriotism, collectivism, and ideals and convictions, but an organic whole in which the three support each other based on practice. In reality, there is often a tendency to isolate and unilaterally magnify a single dimension: separating patriotism from normative constraints and equating it with emotional venting; removing the emotional and value foundation and reducing collectivism to cold commands; downgrading ideals and convictions to knowledge texts divorced from reality. The root of these misunderstandings lies in severing the internal connections among dimensions. Patriotic emotions need collectivist norms to regulate them; collectivism needs ideals and convictions to integrate it; and ideals and convictions must also rely on emotions and norms to be realized. Only by maintaining organic linkage can the authentic connotation of revolutionary morality be completely presented.

Second, we must prevent cognitive deviations arising from dimensional disconnection. When communal sentiment tends to fade, people easily misunderstand collectivism. Either they view it as external coercion that suppresses individuals' reasonable demands, ignoring that the collective is actually a practical stage for realizing individual freedom. Or, influenced by individualistic thought, they completely deny the ethical value of collectivism. Once emotions fade and norms are misinterpreted, ideals and convictions become divorced from reality, turning into empty slogans. These deviations are not defects of revolutionary morality itself but cognitive deviations caused by disconnection among dimensions within the ethical structure.

Third, the three-dimensional framework can provide indirect theoretical reference for moral education in the new era. Moral education cannot be limited to knowledge indoctrination and behavioral discipline. If emotional resonance is ignored, norms can easily degenerate into external coercion; relying solely on spontaneous emotional impulse, moral behavior lacks stable restraint; the ultimate direction of education is to cultivate value-conscious ethical subjects and promote individuals' transformation from superficial cognition to internal conviction.

Revolutionary morality is an ethical organism rooted in Chinese revolutionary practice. Patriotic sentiment provides sensory motivation, collectivist spirit establishes mediating norms, and communist ideals and convictions perform value integration. The three are not a simple juxtaposition of static elements but a dynamic system of mutual construction and symbiosis in practice. Artificially severing the three dimensions necessarily leads to one-sided misreading. Returning to this analytical framework helps transcend superficial textual interpretation and restore the complete ethical profile of revolutionary morality, providing theoretical reference for its contemporary inheritance.

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Conflicts of interest

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