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Enhancing the dimensions and practical pathways of effective education through scientific theory: A case study of socialist market economy theory

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Abstract

The integration of theoretical knowledge in ideological and political courses is a significant theme in character education. The theory of the socialist market economy stands as a core yet challenging topic in high school ideological and political education. Teachers can utilize this theme to implement the "three teaching methods" to solidify the theoretical content's academic rigor and enhance the effectiveness of character education from multiple dimensions. First, by employing an inquiry-based teaching method, teachers can clarify theoretical logic, thereby enhancing students' ideological and theoretical depth. Second, the comparative teaching method can elucidate historical logic, broadening students' perspectives and vision. Third, through case-based teaching, the practical logic becomes evident, deepening students' practical engagement and aspirations. This approach not only fulfills the educators' responsibility in character education but also amplifies the soul-nurturing function of theory, heightening students' sense of gain.

Keywords: Ideological and Political Educators; Socialist Market Economy Theory; Educational Effectiveness; Pathways

1 Introduction

On March 19, 2019, General Secretary Xi Jinping addressed a symposium for ideological and political course teachers, stating that "ideological and political education should cultivate people with scientific theory". The mission of such courses is to "conduct Marxist theory education and shape students' souls with the ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era" (Xi, 2019). On April 25, 2022, during his visit to Renmin University of China, Xi further encapsulated the essence of ideological and political courses, defining it as "explaining the reasoning", while emphasizing the importance of "paying attention to methods and approaches" to make the reasoning "profound, thorough, and lively" (Guangming Daily, 2022).

The theory of the socialist market economy represents a significant result of the Sinicization of Marxist political economy and serves as a theoretical foundation for Xi's economic philosophy. Currently, this theory, with its primary content focused on "developing a socialist market economy", is incorporated into Unit 9 of *Economic Life*, the required Ideological and Political Science textbook for high school students. Teachers of ideological and political education bear the primary responsibility of imparting scientific theory, with classroom instruction serving as the main channel for this endeavor. Building on the curriculum content, teachers must make optimal use of classroom teaching, innovating methods to present the reasoning within scientific theories in a manner that is "deep, thorough, and lively". This approach aims to enhance the practical effectiveness of the soul-nurturing role of scientific theory, a key duty for ideological and political educators in the new era and stage. Guided by the spirit of Xi's addresses, this paper uses the socialist market economy theory as an example to explore dimensions and practical pathways for enhancing the effectiveness of character education through scientific theory.

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2 Employing Inquiry-Based Teaching to Clarify Theoretical Logic and Enhance Students' Ideological and Theoretical Depth

In the reform of China's socialist market economy system, effectively managing the relationship between planning and the market stands as a central issue. This relationship, at its core, involves examining the dynamics among three economic operating models-commodity economy, market economy, and planned economy-and their connections to the foundational systems of capitalism and socialism. Deng Xiaoping's scientific judgment on this matter formed the direct theoretical basis for the development of China's socialist market economy. This judgment not only continued the profound insights of classical Marxist thinkers and their successors into the relationship between economic operational modes and social systems but also achieved theoretical innovation under new historical conditions.

As leaders in teaching socialist market economy theory, ideological and political course educators bear the responsibility of uncovering the theoretical foundation and intellectual origins of China's socialist market economy. In teaching, educators must elucidate the theoretical logic behind this issue, helping students understand why socialism can optimize resource allocation through market mechanisms. Moreover, students should recognize that planning and the market are not inherent to any particular social system but are economic tools that can serve different social frameworks. Through a detailed analysis of these theories, teachers can assist students in constructing a solid framework of economic theoretical knowledge while also enhancing their ideological depth and theoretical understanding. This approach guides students toward a rational recognition and in-depth comprehension of the socialist market economy system.

More specifically, regarding the relationship between the market and commodity economy, Marx posited that the market emerged from commodity exchange. In his view, commodities, increasingly expanded by the development of social division of labor, "become equivalent to each other" and thereby "become a market" (Marx & Engels, 1975). Lenin noted that the market evolved in tandem with the production and growth of commodities (Lenin, 1975). Regarding the relationship between economic operational modes and social systems, Engels argued that the development of large-scale capitalist production promoted the commodity economy, which operated as an anarchic (or free) market economy; however, as socialized production advanced to a certain level, this anarchic state of production would transition into a consciously organized plan. Engels believed that both capitalist and socialist societies would eventually incorporate planning in production. In 1917, Lenin referenced Engels' 1891 perspective, stating that it was no longer accurate to say that capitalism equated to a lack of planning; with capitalism transitioning from free competition to general monopolization, "the lack of planning in capitalism ceased to exist" (Lenin, 1975). The emergence of trusts signified that "capitalism was directly evolving toward a higher, planned form" (Lenin, 1975).

With the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP), Lenin and the Russian Communist Party acknowledged the necessity of commodity exchange organization and market mechanisms for the economic construction of a proletarian state. Lenin believed that the Soviet Union at that time could not immediately abolish commodity-money relations and thus needed to "organize commodity exchange in a regular manner" (Lenin, 1975). The Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party emphasized that "commodity exchange should be prioritized and serve as the main lever of the NEP" and that there was a need to "study the market" (Lenin, 1975). The Twelfth Congress proposed "adopting market economic forms" and granted enterprises the freedom to "engage in economic activities in the market" (People's Publishing House, 1964).

In the early stages of China's socialist construction, some Party members developed "leftist" misunderstandings regarding the relationship between socialism and the commodity economy. Mao Zedong promptly addressed these issues, affirming the positive role of the commodity economy and asserting that "commodity production, commodity exchange, and the law of value should be utilized" (Mao, 1999) as valuable tools in service of socialism. Following the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese Communist Party leaders sought an economic development path suited to China's actual conditions, which included the advancement of a model that combined "planning and market regulation" (Deng, 1994). In October 1982, Deng Xiaoping highlighted a challenge within socialism, namely, the ineffective use of markets leading to poor economic performance. He raised the issue of "the relationship between planning and the market", noting that the resolution of this relationship would directly impact China's economic future (Deng, 1994).

Recognizing the objective reality that "socialism can have a market economy, and capitalism can involve planning controls", Deng argued in December 1990 that "the distinction between capitalism and socialism does not lie in the question of planning versus the market" (Deng, 1994). In January 1991, during an inspection of Shanghai, Deng criticized the notion that planned and market economies should respectively correspond to socialist and capitalist systems. He emphasized that "both are tools, and the market can also serve socialism" (Deng, 1993). In February 1992, Deng

reiterated that the extent of planning or market involvement is not a fundamental distinction between socialism and capitalism. He asserted that "planned economy does not equate to socialism, as capitalism also includes planning; market economy does not equate to capitalism, as socialism also has markets" (Deng, 1993), viewing both planning and market mechanisms as economic tools. In other words, neither planning nor the market inherently possesses systemic attributes and thus should not be labeled as defining elements of a basic social system; both can serve socialism as well as capitalism. This explanation "fundamentally removed the ideological constraints that associated planned and market economies with social system characteristics" (Jiang, 2006), thereby providing a solid theoretical foundation for the Fourteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China to establish reform goals for a socialist economic system.

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that ideological and political educators should possess a "righteous character", demonstrated primarily through "scholarly charisma" and "solid theoretical foundations" (Xi, 2019). In the teaching process, educators must employ an inquiry-based teaching method, using their strong theoretical background to thoroughly and clearly articulate the above theoretical foundations and intellectual origins. By embodying the profound and evolving qualities of Marxist thought, teachers can inspire students and guide them to enhance their ideological and theoretical depth through subtle immersion and influence.

3 Employing Comparative Teaching to Clarify Historical Logic and Broaden Students' Perspectives and Vision

As discussed above, the relationship between planning and the market can be viewed as a microcosm of the relationship between economic operation modes and social systems. Classical Marxist theorists and their successors have conducted in-depth research on this issue, while proletarian political parties, through their exploration of economic operation models, have continuously advanced these theories. In the 1930s, with the onset of the Great Depression, the limitations of economic regulation in Western capitalist countries became increasingly apparent. The relationship between planning and the market shifted from a latent contradiction to an explicit challenge, becoming a core issue that Western countries had to confront and resolve. Reviewing the developments from the 1930s onward, the exploration of economic models in countries with different social systems has provided valuable historical lessons and experiences for China's economic system reform.

Simultaneously, the relationship between planning and the market has also undergone continuous evolution within the framework of China's socialist practice. Building on historical experience, the Chinese Communist Party has gradually promoted innovative development in both the theory and practice of the socialist market economy, ensuring that this theory aligns with practical needs and progresses continuously. Therefore, in teaching ideological and political courses, educators should directly address the key points and challenges within these theories, enhancing the relevance of their teaching. By leveraging both horizontal (international) perspectives and vertical (historical) dimensions, they can clarify the historical logic underlying the development of China's socialist market economy.

Through a comparative analysis of the developmental trajectories of economic models in different countries and historical stages, teachers can help students understand the unique characteristics of China's socialist market economy system and its developmental logic within the historical process. This approach effectively broadens students' perspectives, enabling them to cultivate a broad historical and international vision during their studies. Not only does this deepen students' understanding of the socialist market economy, but it also equips them to view China's economic system choices and developmental path more rationally within the context of globalization.

On one hand, capitalist countries began employing planning measures in the aftermath of the Great Depression, using government-led macroeconomic interventions to stabilize society and stimulate growth. In the 1930s, under President Roosevelt's New Deal, the United States adopted Keynesian economic policies, launching a new model of economic regulation for capitalism. This policy shift was characterized not only by increased planning within individual enterprises but also by a significant rise in macroeconomic regulation at the national level. After World War II, particularly in the 1960s, Western capitalist countries devised and implemented various forms of economic plans at the macroeconomic level to meet the demands of the Third Technological and Industrial Revolutions, greatly enhancing their productivity. On the other hand, the Soviet Union displayed a certain rigidity in the planning and management of its economic system. Although Stalin acknowledged the existence of commodity production within the socialist economy in the early 1930s, he theoretically dismissed the role of the law of value in socialist commodity production. This theoretical paradox led the Soviet economic system to adopt highly centralized administrative planning methods in its operation. While this model somewhat spurred Soviet economic development and productivity growth during World War II, the rejection of market mechanisms and excessive reliance on planning hindered subsequent economic reforms, limiting economic vitality and the sustainability of productivity. Over time, the flaws in this model became increasingly apparent, affecting the efficiency of economic development and social stability. Historical experience

reveals that countries with different social systems must manage the relationship between planning and the market effectively when faced with developmental challenges. Adjusting and reforming economic systems in response to practical demands has become essential. Whether through planning measures in capitalist countries or market mechanism exploration in socialist states, effectively managing the relationship between planning and the market has emerged as a critical factor in advancing economic reforms and achieving sustainable development.

Drawing lessons from history and grounding them in rational analysis, the Fourteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party established "building a socialist market economy" as the goal of China's economic system reform, emphasizing that "the market should play a fundamental role in resource allocation under the macroeconomic control of the socialist state" (Jiang, 2006). The Third Plenary Session of the Fifteenth Central Committee advocated for "fully leveraging the market's fundamental role in resource allocation under national macroeconomic control", which the Sixteenth Congress refined to "enhancing this role to a greater extent". In 2010, Hu Jintao reframed the core issue of China's socialist market economy reform from a "planning versus market" issue to one of "government versus market", a perspective reaffirmed at the Eighteenth National Congress. At the Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping identified this issue as a focal point for comprehensive reform in the new era, articulating that the goal is to "enable the market to play a decisive role in resource allocation while improving the role of the government" (Central Document Publishing House, 2017). This marked the entry of China's socialist market economy development into a new phase, calling for the establishment of an "effective market" and a "capable government".

General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that ideological and political course educators must possess a "broad perspective", encompassing not only a "knowledge perspective" but also a "wide-ranging international and historical perspective" (Xi, 2019). In the teaching process, educators should employ comparative teaching methods, leveraging their expansive spatiotemporal perspective to contrast the development trajectories of economic operation models across different social systems and within various countries under the same system. Concurrently, they should present the evolution of China's socialist market economy reforms and their core issues. This approach guides students to understand the historical logic underlying the development of China's socialist market economy from both horizontal (international) and vertical (historical) perspectives, thereby broadening their outlook and vision.

4 Utilizing Case-Based Teaching to Clarify Practical Logic and Deepen Students' Practical Engagement and Aspirational Depth

The *Implementation Plan for Reform and Innovation in Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools for the New Era* specifies that the objectives for high school ideological and political courses include guiding students to "practice the core values of socialism", "enhance their awareness of the rule of law", and achieve development in areas such as "clarifying direction, observing law and discipline, and understanding honor and disgrace" (Economic Daily, 2019). Additionally, the *Opinions on Promoting the Establishment of Long-Term Mechanisms for Cultivating and Practicing the Core Socialist Values in Schools at All Levels* further emphasize that, "in the face of the new characteristics of diverse and evolving ideological awareness under the conditions of reform, opening up, and developing a socialist market economy, the task of fostering value education among youth is particularly challenging and urgent". It suggests that teachers should employ a variety of teaching methods in the value education process, with a special focus on "integration" (China Youth Daily, 2014).

Consequently, the development of the socialist market economy and the cultivation of core socialist values are intrinsically unified, presenting new demands for ideological and political educators. Teachers must employ dialectical thinking to integrate the development of the socialist market economy with the education of core values. By analyzing the logical relationship between the two, educators can guide students to deeply understand and internalize the significance and content of core socialist values, thereby strengthening students' practical abilities and deepening their aspirations for social responsibility and value-based pursuits.

As previously discussed, the decisive role of the market in resource allocation is a universal principle of market economies. Market economies incorporate equality, competition, and openness, which have been repeatedly proven to positively contribute to economic growth and productivity improvement. The socialist core values of "prosperity" and "freedom" can also be progressively realized through the development of a market economy. However, there are inherent boundaries in the market's capacity to allocate resources, as not all types of resources are suited for market-based allocation. Moreover, the market itself has limitations: its efficiency and effectiveness in resource allocation depend on a stable and orderly market environment. Without such a foundation, or if it becomes unstable, resource allocation efficiency declines, outcomes weaken, and issues like market disorder, deviant behavior among market participants, and socioeconomic instability may arise. These issues further exacerbate income inequality and widen

income gaps, potentially leading to serious social fragmentation. Such conditions clearly contradict the socialist core values of "civility", "harmony", "justice", and "integrity", as well as the Chinese Communist Party's commitment to a "people-centered" value pursuit and the fundamental socialist goal of "achieving common prosperity". Consequently, the socialist market economy not only seeks "freedom" and "equality" but also emphasizes "fairness" and "justice". This requires that market participants uphold ethical qualities, such as civility, friendliness, honesty, trustworthiness, and law-abiding behavior. It also calls for proactive government intervention: the government must establish a fair, open, and transparent regulatory framework by implementing sound laws, industry standards, and moral guidelines for market conduct. Additionally, the government should leverage the advantages of socialist ownership of production means and distribution systems, employing strong macroeconomic controls to stabilize market order, narrow the wealth gap, reduce polarization, and achieve common prosperity, thus safeguarding social fairness and justice. In summary, the socialist market economy, like its capitalist counterpart, must respect and apply the universal principles of market economy, allowing the market to operate fully within appropriate domains to maximize resource allocation effectiveness and efficiency. However, the fundamental nature of China's market economy is defined by its socialist orientation, meaning it must adhere to the Chinese Communist Party's core values and the basic goals of socialism to effectively mitigate potential market economy pitfalls. The socialist core values embody a consensus among the Party and society, reflecting the essence of the socialist system at both ideological and spiritual levels. These values are the guiding principles required for the development of China's socialist market economy, and they provide a moral framework that all market participants are expected to consciously follow and embody.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that teachers of ideological and political courses should have "strong political resolve", "deep emotional commitment", and "innovative thinking". These courses should guide students toward "virtue and maturity", and their reform and innovation must uphold the unity of "theory and practice" (Xi, 2019). China's socialist market economy is not only a significant theoretical concept but also a practical imperative. Practicing core socialist values is essential not only for schools to fulfill the fundamental mission of "cultivating virtue and character" but also as an inherent value requirement and practical logic within China's socialist market economy. As high school students, they are both current consumers and future builders and inheritors of socialism. Their everyday consumer behaviors and future economic activities will be conducted under the conditions of a socialist market economy. Therefore, in their teaching, ideological and political educators must maintain a strong political stance and a steadfast belief in socialism. By incorporating real-life examples from current economic activities and applying case-based teaching, teachers can thoroughly explain the nature and attributes of the socialist market economy and its intrinsic connections with core socialist values. This approach helps students understand and internalize the value orientation and practical logic of China's socialist market economy. Through this guidance, teachers can encourage students to consciously practice core socialist values in their economic lives, using these values to regulate their own economic behavior. This process enhances their sense of national mission and social responsibility, fosters a profound love for the country and its people, and strengthens emotional resonance. Ultimately, it broadens and deepens students' engagement in social activities and their pursuit of personal and social values. In conclusion, ideological and political course teachers must continually enhance their theoretical competence, broaden their temporal and spatial perspectives, and strengthen their political stance. By effectively employing diverse teaching methods, they can conduct a comprehensive and profound academic analysis of the socialist market economy theory, clarifying its theoretical, historical, and practical logic. This instructional approach can significantly enhance the effectiveness of character education, enabling students to gain a stronger sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in the learning process.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of the socialist market economy theory into high school ideological and political courses provides a unique framework for fostering comprehensive character education and deepening students' understanding of complex socio-economic concepts. By employing inquiry-based, comparative, and case-based teaching methods, educators can significantly enhance students' theoretical knowledge, broaden their historical perspectives, and develop practical application skills. Through inquiry-based teaching, students can explore the intricate theoretical foundations of socialism and understand the logical interplay between socialism and market economies, enabling them to critically assess economic models beyond simple binaries. Comparative teaching, on the other hand, contextualizes China's socialist market economy within a global framework, allowing students to examine how different societies have grappled with similar economic challenges over time. Such a historically grounded, cross-national perspective not only enhances students' intellectual depth but also broadens their awareness of alternative economic pathways, thus fostering a more informed and balanced worldview.

Moreover, case-based teaching reinforces the connection between theory and practice, helping students internalize core socialist values while nurturing a practical understanding of the socio-economic structures that define China's unique

approach to economic development. By engaging with real-life scenarios and analyzing the implications of economic principles in various contexts, students can recognize the ethical responsibilities and societal impact inherent in economic decision-making, thereby strengthening their sense of social responsibility and commitment to socialist ideals. Through this multidimensional approach, educators can cultivate students who are not only academically knowledgeable but also morally grounded, socially aware, and deeply engaged in the socialist mission of achieving common prosperity. This holistic pedagogical framework, therefore, not only empowers students with a sense of national mission and purpose but also prepares them to become conscientious participants and future leaders in China's socialist market economy, ultimately fulfilling the educational objectives set forth by the ideological and political curriculum in the new era.

Compliance with ethical standards

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