

Ideological Detachability of “Online Left-wing Youth” and Rethinking Marxist Education

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Abstract—This investigation studies the ideological “detachability” (youli xing 游离性) of Chinese “online left-wing youth”—their distance from general political discussions. Based on an interview with G, an inexperienced teacher who has approximately five years’ teaching experience in ideology and politics, the research identifies three main contradictions resulting in this detachability: the religious interpretation of Marxist theory, the inconsistency between theoretical knowledge and practical application, and the conflict between teaching methods based on indoctrination and the cognitive development of the students. The empirical data, such as a Gini coefficient over 0.4, a high youth unemployment rate of 21.3%, and low teaching satisfaction rates, indicate the background of this separation. The study reinterprets this separation as a potential change from “indoctrination” to “dialogue” in Marxist education instead of considering it as a disadvantage.

Keywords—online left-wing youth, ideological detachability, Marxist education, critical pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

An online left-wing faction has appeared in Chinese cybersociety, reinterpreting the classical Marxist doctrines and establishing a discussion area separate from the main political conversation. According to Marx and Engels, “In every era, the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas” [1]. Althusser [2] considers education as a significant ideological state agency and claims that “Ideology represents the imaginary relation of individuals to their actual circumstances of existence”. This research is based on a thorough interview with G, an inexperienced teacher having about five years of experience in teaching ideological and political theory. Mannheim [3] distinguishes ‘ideology’ from ‘utopia’, stating that “the utopian aspect differs from the ideological one because it can be partly realized”—this distinction is important for comprehending the detachment which involves both revealing contradictions and imagining alternatives. Freire’s [4] criticism of the ‘banking method’ of education, where ‘education turns into a process of depositing’, forms the basis for reconsidering indoctrination.

II. MANIFESTATIONS OF DETACHABILITY

A. Discursive Detachment

G mentioned that the students used terms like “continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat” to solve the current issues. Marcuse pointed out that in the industrial society, critical consciousness is destroyed: “People identify themselves with their commodities” [5]. The revival of the old concepts by these young people is an opposition to “one-dimensional” thoughts. G called their method “scriptural debate” (bianjing 辩经), which means treating Marxist texts as authoritative sources for evaluating the present conditions.

B. Practical Detachment

Gramsci [6] stated that “each social class forms one or more strata of intellectuals”; in this situation, detachment is shown in the difference between online discussion and real life. Evidence supports this: there were 1.108 billion internet users in China by December 2024 [7], and the Fudan Institute’s 2024 report indicated an increase in the reinterpretation of Marxist theory among young people [8].

C. Epistemological Separation

The most profound form is an epistemological break: G used the metaphor of “the first three and the fourth steamed bun”—most young people only know about the prosperity after reform and can’t evaluate whether “another way” was feasible. Zizek [9] pointed out that “the deception of ideology does not lie in knowledge but in action”; detachment breaks exactly this ideological deception.

III. STRUCTURAL ROOTS OF DETACHABILITY

Three inherent tensions produce this detachability.

First, the approval of theory: when Marxist theory is treated as an invincible belief, its critical character is ignored. Marx and Engels also stated, “Communism is not a goal to be accomplished, not an ideal that reality can conform to. We regard communism as the real action which eliminates the present conditions” [9].

Furthermore, the discrepancy between theory and reality: Lenin [10] has discussed the vanguard party theory, whereas Luxemburg pointed out that “without

general elections, without unrestricted freedom of the press and assembly, public life will gradually fade” [11]. Mao [12] has examined the contradictions within the socialist society; however, this line of thought has not been further developed. In 2022, the Gini coefficient of China was 0.467, which is higher than the warning level of 0.4; the peak of youth unemployment was 21.3% in June 2023 [13]. G noticed that “the macro-level enthusiasm of people is decreasing”.

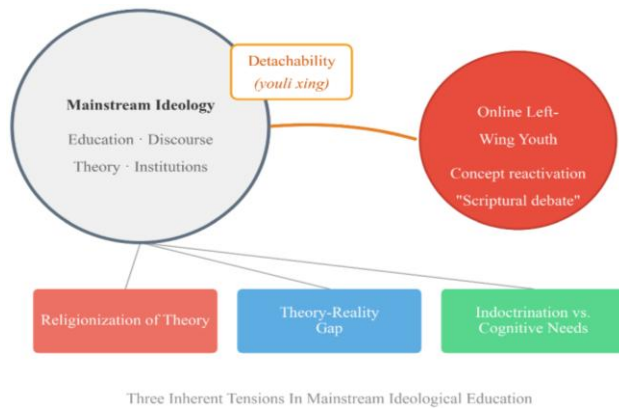


Fig. 1. The concept of “Detachability”: Disembedding from mainstream ideology.

Fig. 1 illustrates the concept of “detachability” (youli xing) as the disembedding of online left-wing youth from mainstream ideology. The diagram positions mainstream ideology—comprising education, discourse, theory, and institutions—on the left, and online left-wing youth—characterized by concept reactivation and “scriptural

debate”—on the right. The orange arrow labeled “detachability” signifies the ideological distance between them, which is driven by three inherent tensions shown at the bottom: the religionization of theory, the theory-reality gap, and the conflict between indoctrination and cognitive needs.

Moreover, the discrepancy between indoctrination and the students’ cognitive growth: Mao’s [14] on Practice mentions “by practice we gain knowledge, and by practice we improve and broaden knowledge”. A survey of 70 universities shows that the teaching methods are rated as satisfactory by 79.4%, which is lower than the satisfaction with the faculty (83.8%) and the content (81.9%); students tend to go to the internet, where they can enjoy more independent thinking.

IV. RETHINKING MARXIST EDUCATION

Fig. 2 presents the three inherent tensions within mainstream ideological education, illustrating how they converge to produce “detachability”. Tension 1, the religionization of theory, occurs when theory is reduced to dogma and the critical spirit is dissolved. Tension 2, the theory-reality gap, reflects vanguard alienation and the widening gap between equality promises and actual conditions, leading youth to search for “another path”. Tension 3, the paradigm-cognition misalignment, arises when cognitive needs remain unmet in the formal system, driving youth in flight to cyberspace. These three tensions converge to produce “detachability” as a structural symptom of ideological education.

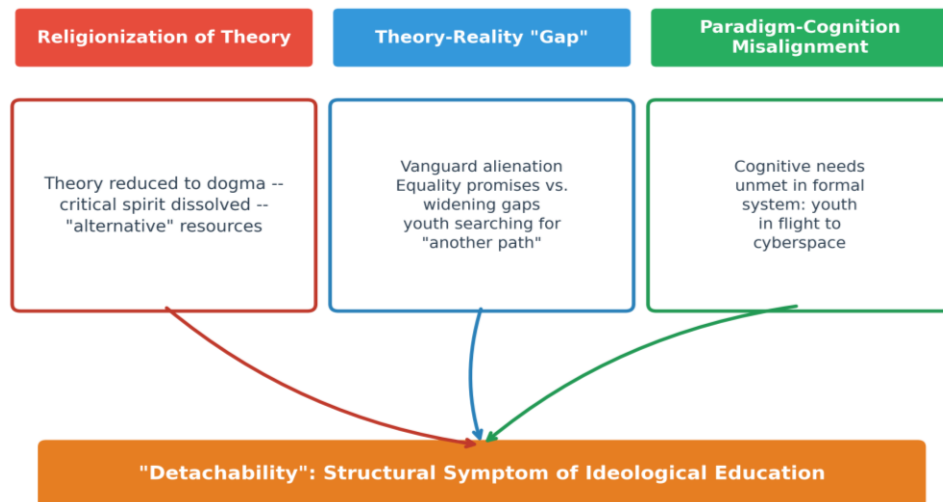


Fig. 2. Three inherent tensions in mainstream ideological education.

Education must recognize the correctness of detachment. G agreed that “allowing people to realize the possible cause of the disease is beneficial”. Mannheim pointed out that utopian ideas promote changes [15]. The teaching method should be changed from propaganda to discussion. Present Xi Jinping stressed the combination of constructiveness and criticism. G’s action verifies this: he ‘incorporates critical thinking materials’ into the general teaching system.

G found that “humanism is evident in the Marxist view”, indicating that detachment has dialectical potentials. His viewpoint—“to respect the individual will of the students while giving them active, scientifically based guidance”—excludes both dogmatism and relativism.

Fig. 3 provides empirical data that contextualize the structural conditions underlying “detachability”. The Gini coefficient trend (Fig. 3a) reveals persistent income

inequality, with values consistently above the 0.40 warning threshold from 2008 to 2024. Youth unemployment data (Fig. 3b) show rates surging past 20% in mid-2023, reflecting intensifying economic pressure on the demographic most active in online left-wing discourse. Meanwhile, ideological course

satisfaction (Fig. 3c) remains relatively high (79.4%–83.8%), suggesting that detachment is not driven by educational delivery failure alone, but by structural contradictions between institutional promises and socioeconomic realities experienced by youth.

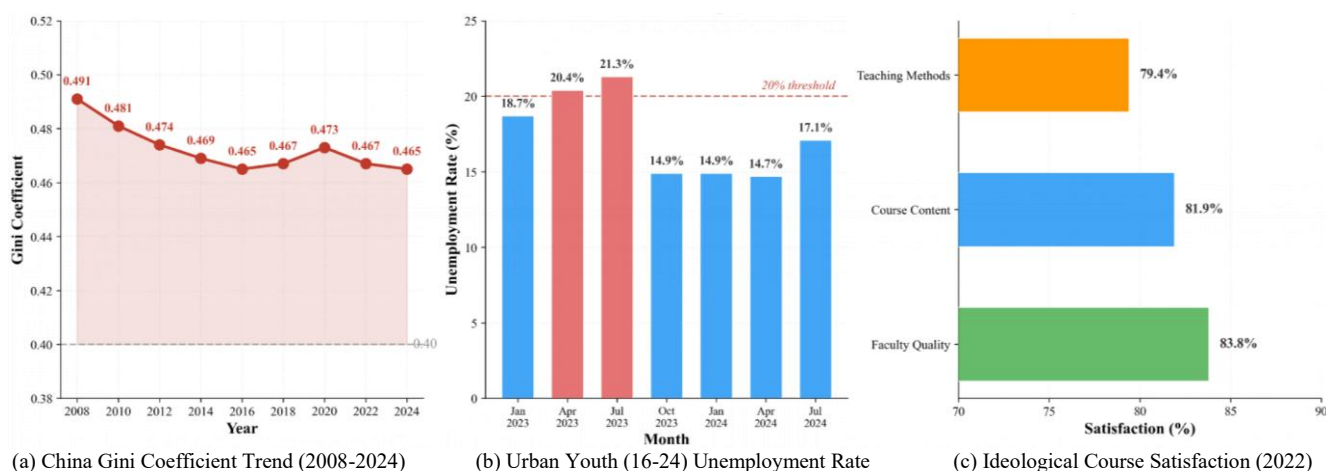


Fig. 3. Data supporting “detachability”: Income gap, youth employment, and education satisfaction.

V. CONCLUSION

This study reinterprets the ideological independence of online left-wing youth as a sign rather than a deficiency, indicating the existence of structural conflicts in Marxist education. Three fundamental contradictions cause this independence: the religious attitude towards theory removes the critical spirit, the discrepancy between theory and reality destroys the ideological authority, and the indoctrination does not correspond to the cognitive development of the students. Empirical evidence supports these underlying structures. We should reconsider Marxist education by accepting the rationality of this independence and promoting a synthesis of criticism and construction through a change from “indoctrination” to “dialogue”. However, the limitation is the small number of interviewees; further research should increase the sample size and incorporate various data sources.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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