

## On the Subject-Object Relation of Ideological and Political Education in the View of Marxism Practice

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### Abstract

The ideological and political education from the perspective of Marxism has the distinct ideology, and reflects the class will of the proletariat together with the class interest demands of the proletariat. The subject, object and their relationship of ideological and political education are the most critical and basic theoretical issues throughout the ideological and political education. The subject-object relationship of ideological and political education is a theoretical problem in the basic theory of ideological and political education. With the emergence of the discipline of ideological and political education, this problem came about, accompanied by the generation of three classic debates: "single subject theory", "double subject theory" and "intersubjectivity theory" as well as three latest debates: "abandonment theory", "unification theory" and "breaking theory". Generally speaking, the crux of these debates lies in two aspects: "whether the human can be understood as object" and "whether object can help settle down subjectivity". On the basis of the existing research results, the "possible solution" to resolve this theoretical problem is to further clarify the analytical framework of "subject-object" as "subject-intermediary object-target object".

**Keywords:** the perspective of Marxism; ideological and political education; subject; object; subject-object relationship

### 1. Introduction

The subject, object and their relationship of ideological and political education are the most critical and basic theoretical issues throughout the process of ideological and political education. A profound analysis of the scientific connotation of the subject and object of ideological and political education and a correct handling of the relationship between the subject and object of ideological and political education are the keys to continuously enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education, and their important values have been widely recognized. However, scholars have not reached a consensus on this issue, that is, which is the subject, which is the object, and the relationship between them. In view of this, starting with the Marxist theory of subject and object, the subject, object and their relationship of ideological and political education is explored.

### 2. The meaning and expression of the subject of ideological and political education

At present, the academic research on subject-object and their relationship mainly focuses on the discussion of "what is subject", such as "single subject theory", "double subject theory", "subject interaction theory", "intersubjectivity theory", etc. In addition to the important academic value of this issue, the most basic reason for the emergence of different views is that the subject-object issue is the issue originated from the epistemology of philosophy. To introduce philosophical issues into ideological and political education will inevitably lead to the divergence in academic circles to some extent. As a consequence, to discuss this issue, there is a necessity to start from the basic point of Marxist theory of subject and object.

The subject is human. According to the difference of the form of human existence, the subject also has many types, including individual subject, group subject, society or state subject. Among them, the individual subject is a singular man engaged in cognitive and practical activities, which is the most basic unit as well as the basis and premise of

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the other two forms of subject. The group subject refers to a group with common interests or modes of action organized according to certain norms, criteria, purposes, etc., such as political parties, classes, etc. If the scope of group subject is expanded, the whole country or society is taken as a certain community of interests to participate in social practice, which is the society or state subject. Specifically speaking, first, in the exchange and confrontation of various ideological cultures and mainstream ideologies throughout the world, there are often ideological communication activities between countries due to the differences of national interests. Moreover, this kind of activities take the country as the main body of interests, and spread their own values to citizens of other countries. The main body of the ideological communication activities in the form of ideological and political education is the state subject. Different state subjects have different mainstream ideologies. The ideological and political education carried out by the state subject with Marxism as the guiding ideology must embody the interests of the proletariat, serve the proletarian party, adhere to and spread the mainstream ideology of Marxism, resolutely resist the anti-Marxist ideology, refute various wrong social thoughts such as historical nihilism, neo-liberalism, and safeguard the dominant position of Marxism in the field of ideology. Second, in class society, ideological and political education is an important tool and means for the ruling class to maintain class rule. The ruling class "rules as the producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of ideas in their own era; this means that their ideas are the dominant ideas in an era." [4] The ruling class often carries out ideological and political education activities with the help of various organizations, such as education departments, teacher organizations, etc., which are all part of the group subject of ideological and political education. Third, in the specific ideological and political education activities, the purpose of educators and educatees is to make educatees accept the relevant knowledge, values and ideology. As far as classroom teaching of ideological and political education is concerned, "the students activities in teaching can be determined as an active and purposeful activity system. In the process of such activities, they know the objects and phenomena of objective reality through teaching materials, and use the acquired knowledge to obtain new knowledge." [5] Therefore, the process of teaching is actually the process of educators helping educatees to understand new knowledge, and finally realizing the

improvement of the understandings of educatees. Educators and educatees participate in practical activities in the form of individuals in the process of ideological and political education, and they are the individual subjects of ideological and political education. In short, the state subject is the essential subject of ideological and political education, the educator is the practice subject of ideological and political education, and educatees is the subject of self-education.

### 3. The meaning and expression of the object of ideological and Political Education

When discussing the subject and object of ideological and political education, some scholars introduce the intersubjectivity theory into ideological and political education, assuming that under the modern conditions, the object has become the subject, and ideological and political education is the interaction between the subject and the subject. In fact, this view is worth weighing. Imagine if there is no object, where is the subject? If there is no object in ideological and political education, the subject will lose the support of the object, descend to the subject without object, and lose the significance of existence. The subject and object of ideological and political education interact and depend on each other. Just as the subject cannot do without the object, the object cannot do without the subject.

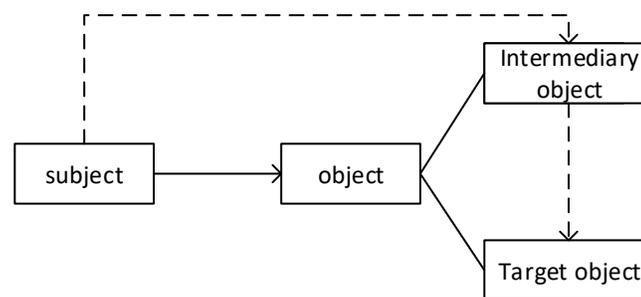
The object comes into being together with the subject, which is "the external object that the subject's activities point to and in turn restrict the subject's activities" in practice. "The object may be both material and spiritual." [1] Since the object is a material thing, then nature also includes human, which can be others or himself. Whether the objective thing can become the object of practical activities, what kind of object it becomes and how it becomes the object depend on not only the needs of the subject and the nature of practical activities, but also the attributes of the objective thing. First of all, the object must be objective, which is different from subjectivity. Objective existence is the premise and basis for the object to become an object. The object of objective existence covers a wide range, such as the sun, rivers, relations of production, political parties, etc., all of which are objective existence. However, for those false things imagined by subjective imagination, they cannot become objects, such as God, paradise, etc. Secondly, the object should also have object name. The things of objective existence are rich and diverse, but not all the things

of objective existence can become objects. As Marx said: "the history of industry and the existence of the objectivity that industry has generated is an open book about the essential power of human beings, and is the psychology of human beings perceptually placed in front of us." [3] The concept of object is only relative to the subject, thus only the objective things that become the object of subject activity can become the object. Objectivity is the key factor why the object becomes the object. Thirdly, the object is also passive. When the object is brought into the object activity of the subject, it already embodies its passive characteristics. The object cannot freely choose the subject, but the subject can choose the corresponding object of cognition and practice according to its own needs. After being accepted into the subject's activities of the human, the object is also changed according to the subject's principles. The subject applies his own thoughts, views or behaviors to the object to realize the subjectification of the object. Finally, the object has regularity. The regularity of the object refers to that the object has its own corresponding norms and laws when it participates in cognitive or practical activities. As Lenin said, the object should not be simply understood as existence, but as "the complete, concrete, self-complete and independent being". [7] On the one hand, the regularity of the object restricts the subject's cognitive and practical activities, and determines the depth and breadth of cognitive and practical activities. On the other hand, once the law of the object is commanded by the subject, it can help the subject understand the object more accurately and transform the object.

#### 4. The subject-object relationship in ideological and political education

The subject of ideological and political education is not a singular existence, and if the specific direction of the subject is different, its object is also different. However, ideological and political education, as a discipline of continuous development and improvement, has its own relatively improved theoretical structure. Based on the theoretical structure of ideological and political education, and in combination with the previous analysis of the subject and object of ideological and political education, it can be concluded that in the subject and object of ideological and political education, there are four kinds of relations: cognitive relationship, practical relationship, value relationship and aesthetic relationship.

Cognitive relationship, practical relationship, value relationship and aesthetic relationship constitute the four pairs of the subject-object relationship of ideological and political education, which forms a kind of fact relationship that corresponds, interacts and promotes each other and point to the significance of the existence of the subject-object relationship of ideological and political education. Therefore, the subject-object relationship of ideological and political education from the perspective of Marxism is the unity of cognitive relationship, practical relationship, value relationship and aesthetic relationship, which not only embodies the significance of the free and all-round development of human beings, but also reflects the significance of the development and progress of human society.



**Figure1** An analytical framework of the subject-object relationship in ideological and political education

#### 5. The reason of the debate on the subject-object relationship in ideological and political education

The debate on the subject-object relationship in ideological and political education has never been solved satisfactorily. While solving some problems, it

seems that new problems arise, and even the problems themselves may be transformed into other problems. Therefore, to solve this theoretical problem, it is a necessity to find out the crux of the debate. The following two aspects may be above all.

### 5.1 Can human be understood as the object?

The main aspect of the debate on the subject-object relationship of ideological and political education lies in the object of ideological and political education. The core argument of scholars who oppose understanding educatees as the object of ideological and political education by applying the concept of subject and object of ideological and political education is that educatees are living people rather than objects, and the relationship between educators and educatees of ideological and political education is not the relationship between people and objects, but the relationship between people, that is, the "subject-subject" relationship. If only holding on to the classic sentence of Marxism "subject is human, object is nature" [6], educatees can only be nature or thing according to the framework of "subject-object". As a result, people who understand the relationship between educators and educatees of ideological and political education as the "subject-object" relationship fail to respond: as educatees are living people, how can they become nature or things? However, the skeptic does not question whether the understanding of the object as nature or thing is complete and accurate. It is on this premise that inter-subjective philosophy, which is regarded as the philosophical basis of "intersubjectivity theory" ideological and political education, criticizes the "subject-object" framework and constructs the "subject-object-subject" framework. In accordance with the "inter-subjective" philosophy, the academic circles of ideological and political education put forward the view of common subject and common object, that is, "educators and educatees are both subjects of ideological and political education, and are plural subjects, who regard educational materials as common objects and form a 'subject-object' relationship with educational materials."

Can the object only be fixed as nature or thing? Is this the whole connotation of the object? In fact, it is not accurate to equate the object with nature or thing, which is worth discussing. According to Guo Zhan's classification of the object forms, the "nature" in "subject is human and object is nature" is the nature of nature and the first object in the original sense. With the development of human social activities, humanized nature is the second object. [8] Although the activities of ideological and political education cannot be separated from nature or things, its objects are not the first and second objects, but the third, fourth and fifth objects, which are human thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, it is not proper to

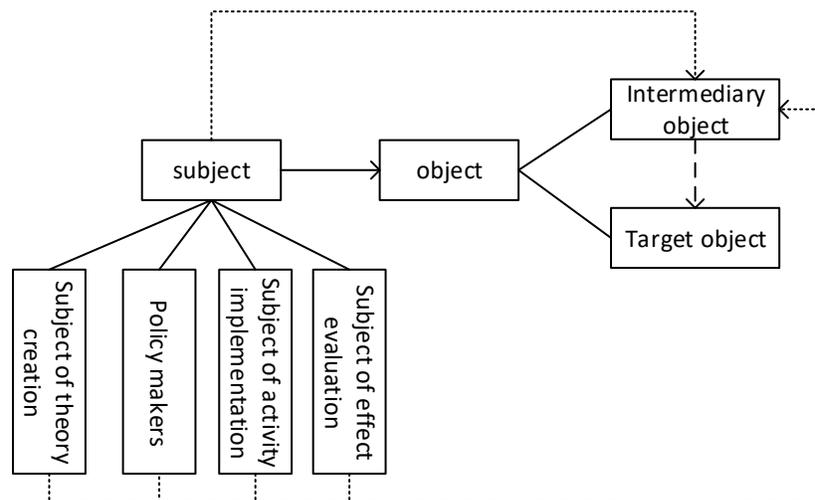
understand the object as nature or object only, and on this basis, the view criticizing that the relationship between people is understood as "subject-object" relationship is improper, which is the performance and result of not understanding the whole connotation of the object. In the meantime, according to Li Deshun's analysis, the subject-object relationship includes at least four levels, which cannot only refer to the relationship between man and nature or things, but also the relationship between man and man, man and society. [9] The essence of "subject-object" relationship is the highest abstraction of basic elements and structure of human objective activities. "All the objective activities of human beings must contain subject and object and their relations." [3] In the process of ideological and political education, the educator and educatee form an objective relationship, one of which is the subject, and the other is the object. Therefore, "from the overall reference and description of ideological and political education activities, the educator can only be said as the subject of ideological and political education, while the educatee as the object of ideological and political education."

5.2 In the process of ideological and political education, the subjectivity of educatee is something we have to confront and confirm. In the traditional society, ideological and political education may not need the subjectivity of educatees. However, in modern society, the development and enhancement of human subjectivity (including educators and educatees) is an undeniable reality. Especially with the advent of the Internet era, people's subjectivity is constantly enhanced, definitely including educatees, the ability of whom to grasp and process information may be far stronger than the educators. The traditional authority of educators is being deconstructed. Practice is the source and foundation of theoretical innovation. Ideological and political education has the theoretical character of self-renewal, without doubt, which has seen the changes of the times, and actively recognizes the subjectivity of educatees in consequence, and emphasizes to improve the status of educatees and stimulate the subjectivity of educatees. "Double-subject theory", "inter-subjective theory", etc. are all theory innovations to confirm the subjectivity of educatees. This starting point undoubtedly is great, and also the right direction, basically without any skeptics. However, if the educatee is transformed into the object, the problem will come about: the subjectivity

is the characteristic of the subject, how can it become the characteristic of the object?

The realistic needs and theoretical weakness of the subjectivity of the educatee promote the subject-object problem of ideological and political education. To solve this problem, there is a need to correctly deal with the relationship between the objectivity and subjectivity. The crux of the problem lies in whether the object can help settle down the subjectivity. "The cause and essence of the argument between the subject and the object of ideological and political education is nothing complicated, but concerned with how to confirm and help settle down the initiative of the educatee in the basic theory of ideological and political education." [3] In fact, as long as the whole connotation of the object can be really comprehended and the concepts that the object can be used to refer to people and the "subject-object"

can be used to refer to the relationship between people can be accepted, then in the objective relationship, the object as the objective is still human in substance or essence, and must have subjectivity as a man (a complete man). Therefore, in the objective activities of humans, humans as objects can settle, accommodate and release subjectivity. On this issue, Liu Jianjun's explanation is the most convincing at present, who points out that in the process of ideological and political education, the educatee "as an object has its passivity, but its subject qualification as a man does not disappear in consequence. As a consequence, there still exist initiative in and out of its passivity." After re-understanding, "the initiative of the educatee can be accepted and settled here, and not reluctantly, but becomes an essential requirement."



**Figure 2** The analysis framework of subject-object relationship of ideological and political education (the expanded version)

## 6. Conclusion

In the ideological and political education activities, the subject, object and their relationship of ideological and political education should be determined according to the expected purpose of ideological and political education. When analyzing and grasping the subject, object and their relationship of ideological and political education, it is a necessity for us to consciously distinguish the two different contexts of the ultimate purpose and specific purpose of ideological and political education. In the context of the ultimate goal of ideological and political education, the educator is the subject of ideological

and political education, and the educatee's thoughts and behaviors are the target objects of ideological and political education, while others such as educational content, educational methods, educational carriers, educational situations, etc. are the intermediary objects of ideological and political education. In the meantime, each specific purpose of ideological and political education is different, its subject, object and their relationship will be different. Therefore, there is no fixed identity of subject and object, and there is no invariable relationship between subject and object. The expected purpose of ideological and political education is a complex system, which determines that the subject-object

relationship of ideological and political education is also a complex system. The overlap and interaction of each specific subject-object relationship together constitute a complete subject-object relationship system of ideological and political education.

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