

The Yan'an Rectification Movement from the Perspective of Political Socialization Research

-- Analysis of Objectives and Methods

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ABSTRACT

Background The Yan'an Rectification Movement from 1941 to 1945 was the first rectification movement led by the Communist Party of China and is widely regarded as an extremely successful ideological education practice. **Methods** Revisiting the Yan'an Rectification Movement from the perspective of political socialization has significant theoretical and practical implications. This article begins by introducing an analytical framework for political socialization research, illustrating that the movement can be termed a political socialization activity in terms of both its objectives and methods. It then proceeds to analyze the approach of combining the mechanisms of indoctrination and internalization during this movement, and finally offers a brief evaluation of this practice. **Conclusion** The Yan'an Rectification Movement was the first intra-party rectification campaign initiated by the Communist Party of China. Firstly, from the perspective of political socialization research, the Yan'an Rectification Movement can be seen as a relatively successful practice of political socialization. Secondly, an unprecedented level of unity in terms of thought, politics and organization has been achieved. Meanwhile, internalization involves the transformation of thought within each individual person, which cannot be entirely enforced through subjective demands. Further attentions should be paid in the study of political culture and through the continuous re-examination to look for whether there exists a truly correct path to achieve political socialization.

KEYWORDS

The Yan'an Rectification Movement; Political Socialization; Indoctrination; Internalization.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on "political socialization" emerged and developed alongside studies on "political culture." The "political culture" refers to "a rather new term for an old concept, one dealing with the cultural, mental, emotional, or value orientations which determine the political behavior of a people or group, and it is as old as political analysis itself[1]." Research on political socialization, on the other hand, focuses on "the influence of history on the political attitudes and behavior of adults[2]."

Similar to studies on political culture, researches on political socialization can be traced back to works by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Mill. However, modern political socialization studies primarily began in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, and it did not become a specialized field until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Chinese scholars have largely adopted or synthesized western research findings in the field of political socialization, and some progress has been made in recent years. Academically, political socialization in China is generally viewed as a process involving two aspects: "individual learning" and "political communication," which are interdependent and complementary. Political socialization is not only an important means

for societal members to acquire political attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and emotions but is also a process through which the political system shapes the political psychology and consciousness of its members[3].

However, studies on political socialization in China is not particularly popular, and there are many restrictions on studies related to the Communist Party of China(CPC) and the government. There is a scarcity of research on this movement from the perspective of political socialization. Among the papers retrieved from China National Knowledge Infrastructure, most articles that mention the political socialization mechanism of the Yan'an Rectification Movement treat it as one part of the broader political culture of the Yan'an period, with very few dedicated analyses[4].

Studies on the Yan'an Rectification Movement generally tends to focus on repetitive discussions of its processes, methods, and achievements. In terms of academic papers, out of hundreds of relevant records retrieved from CNKI, the majority analyze the movement from the perspective of ideological and political education. Some papers touch upon political culture and party culture, with more in-depth studies typically conducted by party schools[5]. Overall, while there is a considerable volume of literature on the Yan'an Rectification Movement, much of the content overlaps, and the viewpoints tend to be outdated. Regarding books on the Yan'an Rectification Movement, the most recent publications accessible to the author date back to the 1990s or earlier[6]. Documents from the 1950s and 1960s similarly describe the movement and their evaluations carry a strong sense of ideological correctness. Subsequent documents often discuss it alongside other rectification movements but generally remain within the context of ideologically correct narratives.

2. METHODS OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION WITHIN PARTIES

2.1. Conceptions on Political Socialization

"Political socialization refers to the process by which societal members gradually acquire political knowledge and capabilities, forming political awareness and political positions through political activities." However, this process is actually a dialectical unity of two dynamic processes: political socialization is not only an important channel for societal members to gain political attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and emotions, but it is also the process by which the political system shapes the political psychology and consciousness of its members. In the latter, the political system disseminates and spreads its dominant political consciousness among all members of society through various channels, aiming to have its members accept certain specific political information, emotions and beliefs. The aspect of political socialization where the political system consciously engages in socializing its political culture is noteworthy. Political socialization maintains the political system by regulating and educating societal members to comply with government regulations and fulfill governmental expectations. Thus, political socialization can be seen as a conscious effort by rulers to maintain their rule and achieve governance over society.

2.2. Goals of Political Socialization

Shaping the political psychology and consciousness of individuals is both the essence and the goals of political socialization. Rulers always timely imbue political culture with new connotations and transmit these to societal members through various mechanisms, thereby altering the political orientations of societal members and forming individual and social political cultures that align with the development of the political system. This generally includes three levels: recognition of the political system, party attitudes and political participation. Recognition of the political system pertains to the acceptance of the political system, political norms, institutions, structures and norms; party attitudes refer to stances toward the authority of those in power, as well as toward other individuals, groups, policies and ideologies competing for power and influence.

2.3. Methods of Political Socialization

Social and political organizations are aggregates of societal members formed for certain political purposes. As advanced forms of social and political organizations, the parties exert significant influence on political socialization. The primary purpose of establishing a party is to seize state power, and its main mode of operation is to extensively propagate its political platform and seek support from societal members as much as possible. This nature remains unchanged even during revolutionary war times and is often reinforced by the realities of the environment. Parties are disciplined political organizations, usually possessing a rigorous organizational structure and strict organizational discipline. Through their organizational systems, parties can provide political education and training to their members, standardizing their behaviors. Therefore, to achieve their political goals and form a shared political belief and behavior among their members, parties often adopt methods of political education to regulate the behavior of party members, mobilize them to work actively towards achieving the party's political goals and to a certain extent obey the party's directives.

In terms of its implementation, the methods of political socialization can broadly be divided into two categories: indoctrination and internalization. The former regards political socialization as the process by which social organizations and groups provide political education and instill ideas into individual members to align their thinking and behavior with societal requirements. The latter refers to the transformation of external objects into internal subjects, truly believing and accepting others' viewpoints from the depths of one's heart, thus fundamentally changing one's own attitude.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE YAN'AN RECTIFICATION MOVEMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

From the perspective of political socialization, the Yan'an Rectification Movement was indeed an initiative launched by the party setting all party members as the target audience. Its objectives were to implement the spirit of the current Central Committee and to strengthen the party's leadership in ideological, political and organizational terms. This movement exemplifies a political socialization activity initiated by a party. The Yan'an Rectification Movement took place over four years. At the beginning of 1941, the Central Committee gathered more than 120 senior leaders for a period of rectification study, which can be considered the prelude to the party-wide rectification. With the smooth progress of ideological mobilization from early February to early April 1942, a comprehensive rectification study activity was systematically carried out across the entire party from April 1942 to October 1943[7]. From October 1943 to the convening of the Seventh Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee in April 1945, it was a phase of summarizing and learning from the party's historical experiences by senior party cadres, also marking the concluding phase of the rectification movement.

3.1. Political Objectives of the Yan'an Rectification Movement

When a political entity undergoes significant changes or faces issues that threaten its survival, it may employ political socialization to alter its political culture. As previously mentioned, rulers often impart new connotations to political culture and transmit these to societal members through various mechanisms to change their political orientations. This principle also applies to political organizations during wartime, such as the CPC.

3.1.1. Both External and Internal Challenges to the CPC

In terms of the external environment, on one hand, the anti-Japanese forces of the CPC were subjected to attacks from both Japanese invaders and the Kuomintang (KMT); on the other hand, the Anti-Japanese War had reached a stage of strategic stalemate, during which the liberated areas experienced

relatively less change in circumstances. "In December 1941, Japan initiated the Pacific War; although it continued to deploy a large portion of its forces against the liberated areas, it no longer had the strength to completely fight against the anti-Japanese bases, and at that time, our forces were not yet capable of fully liberating the occupied territories[8]."

From the perspective of internal party factors, several challenging conditions necessitated a party-wide political socialization movement: The need for intra-party "struggle," specifically the conflict between the previous "leftist" opportunistic errors and their lingering negative influences, and the line led by Mao Zedong. In terms of organizational status, the rapid increase in the number of party members meant that some did not meet the ideological standards required of Marxist adherents, and these issues needed addressing[9].

On the other hand, there were favorable conditions for launching a political socialization movement: The leadership of the Central Committee headed by Comrade Mao Zedong had achieved notable successes over several years, establishing a degree of prestige necessary for leading and organizing a large-scale rectification movement. There was a solid base of support among the party members, from high-ranking officials to ordinary members, who endorsed Mao's line, providing a foundation for the movement[10].

3.1.2. Specific Objectives of the Movement

What was required was an educational movement within the Party to strengthen the leadership of the Central Committee in ideological, political, and organizational matters to address these real issues. Therefore, the specific objectives of this movement were:

- Ideologically, to eliminate the influence of the "leftist" line represented by Wang Ming and to embrace the correct ideological line formulated by the Central Committee led by Mao Zedong.
- Politically, to support the political policies set by the Central Committee led by Mao Zedong, such as the establishment of the Anti-Japanese National United Front.
- Organizationally, to uphold the correct leadership of the Central Committee led by Mao Zedong.

The goals of the rectification movement as an ideological education activity included: opposing subjectivism to rectify learning styles, opposing sectarianism to rectify Party conduct and opposing stereotypical writing styles to rectify literary practices. It is evident that these "educational" objectives align with the political aims intended to be achieved. The Yan'an Rectification Movement thus had both the purpose of educating new Party members and considerations of political struggle embedded within it.

3.2. Methods of the Yan'an Rectification Movement

The methods employed by the CPC in the Yan'an Rectification Movement for political socialization combined social indoctrination with individual internalization. Social indoctrination was the primary form while internalization, which represents the desired state, was also emphasized as a metric in the learning process prescribed by the Central Committee, thereby acquiring a tint of compulsory indoctrination. In the theory of political socialization, indoctrination refers to the educator using certain means to impart the political culture they endorse to the educated, aiming to have them accept political thoughts and behaviors that conform to societal requirements.

Here, the educator refers to the ruler or ruling class; within a political organization like a political party, it particularly refers to those in power. Individual internalization is a complex psychological process where the educated, under the influence of education and other external environments, transform societal political demands into internal political needs, which are frequently manifested in their behaviors. In simpler terms, it is the process of genuinely accepting the views taught. Dialectical materialism posits that internal factors are the basis for the changes and development of things, while

external factors are the conditions for such changes and development, acting through internal factors. Therefore, in the Yan'an Rectification Movement, both indoctrination and internalization were given importance and application, manifesting throughout the process of the movement.

3.2.1. Indoctrination Mechanism

The mechanism involved a top-down hierarchical approach in form and the learning of designated documents in content. At that time, approximately ten thousand people from various organs, military units, and schools in Yan'an participated in the rectification study.

The institutions of the movement

To strengthen the leadership of the rectification movement, the Central General Study Committee (referred to as the General Study Committee) was established on June 2nd. Under the General Study Committee, five major systems were organized: the Central Direct System, Central Military Commission System, Central Propaganda Department and Culture Committee System, Central Party School System, and the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region System. These five systems were all led by the General Study Committee, with Mao Zedong serving as the chairman.

"Within these five systems, separate regional study committees (referred to as branch study committees) were established to lead the rectification movement within each system. Within each department, organ, school, or group under these systems, study branches or central study groups were formed. Under the leadership of these branches, three types of study groups (designated as Group A, Group B, and Group C) were established. Group A comprised leading cadres who would learn first and then participate in Group B to play a guiding role[11]."

This pyramid structure allowed any policy regarding rectification study from the Central Committee to be swiftly conveyed to every single party member, representing a prominent example of the Party's top-down approach to political socialization indoctrination.

Political socialization contents of the movement

The primary content of the rectification movement's study was the works of the leaders. These works carry ideas, and the study of the designated works by the leaders is the most direct way to learn and accept their thoughts. Although this type of study was officially referred to as the "voluntary" learning by comrades, the political indoctrination inherent in this process is self-evident. The method of rectification, "simply put, is the method of learning, inspection and summaries, which involves first studying the specified basic documents of Marxism-Leninism, then on the basis of good study, inspecting and reflecting on one's own thoughts, work, and history, going through appropriate criticism and self-criticism, and finally making a summary of the rectification study[12]." The aforementioned "specified documents" were 22 fixed documents proposed by the Central Committee led by Mao Zedong. Their content ranged from interpretations of Marxism to methods for conducting the rectification study, and they could be considered a set of materials of high purposefulness, political significance, and quality.

Another key component was the Central Party School and the "Liberation Daily" newspaper. School education is one of the important channels for political socialization. Schools impart specific political values and attitudes through various activities, strengthening students' emotional ties to the political system, and training them in political knowledge and skills. In a sense, the Party School is also a kind of school, albeit with a stronger political orientation, directly influencing the political socialization process of its students. The Central Party School played a significant role in the Yan'an Rectification Movement, which is another manifestation of the implementation of political socialization indoctrination methods. To implement the spirit of rectification, "the Central Party School was reorganized in February 1941, and it was placed directly under the Secretariat, with Mao Zedong responsible for political guidance."

Achievements of the indoctrination mechanism

Before the full-scale rectification began within the Party, the Central Party School first educated the high-ranking leaders within the Party. The process of education involved first reaching consensus on the issue of the line, then eliminating the influence of erroneous thoughts, and finally summarizing the experience. The steps of the rectification study in the Party School aligned with the subsequent Party-wide rectification study. First, the experience gained could be directly applied to the Party-wide rectification, and secondly, the leaders who had already received education could guide other Party members in their studies, thereby having a greater impact.

This approach made significant contributions to the rectification movement. Firstly, due to the shortage of paper and inadequate printing conditions at the time, publishing learning documents in the newspaper was necessary. Secondly, with limited access to newspapers and books, the degree to which people's viewpoints were influenced by mainstream political thought would significantly increase. Data shows that to guide and promote the rectification movement, the "Liberation Daily" published 33 editorials related to the rectification movement in 1942 alone, along with 4 substitute editorials and 87 articles. Moreover, during the implementation of the rectification movement, whenever new issues arose, the "Liberation Daily" also served as a policy guide. For example, the introduction of strategies for enhancing self-reflection, summaries of learning tasks at various stages, and the promotion of exemplary cases in the model demonstration method were all communicated through the newspaper.

3.2.2. Mechanisms of Internalization Combined with Indoctrination

The Yan'an Rectification Movement did not solely rely on social indoctrination for its implementation; it also emphasized the internalization by individual members. However, this emphasis on internalization was mandated and required to meet certain criteria. As pointed out in the rectification study methods, learning should not merely involve rote memorization of documents but should be done with genuine understanding. Nevertheless, this requirement can be vague and difficult to verify externally, so the Central Committee, recognizing this issue, promptly proposed methods for earnestly studying the rectification documents and self-examination models through channels such as the Party School and newspapers.

Self-examination models

Self-criticism or self-examination is a crucial part of the internalization mechanism in political socialization. Typically, this process is lengthy and occurs gradually over time. However, in politically motivated socialization activities directed by a political party towards specific political goals, it is logical to actively combine internalization mechanisms with indoctrination. The Yan'an Rectification Movement stands out as a prime example of this combination.

The Yan'an Rectification Movement, therefore, not only adopted a top-down approach to indoctrination but also integrated internalization mechanisms, ensuring that the process of internalizing the correct political thoughts and behaviors was both guided and monitored. This dual approach aimed to foster a deep-seated commitment to the Party's ideals and objectives among its members.

Earnestly studying the rectification document

The Central Committee emphasized the need for a correct learning attitude and attention to learning methods-after a preliminary reading of the documents, one should carefully read each piece according to the aspects of learning style, Party conduct, and writing style, followed by a comprehensive review. During the reading process, independent thinking is encouraged. Additionally, personal study must be closely combined with collective discussion, regularly organizing informal talks involving three to five people, as well as various types of discussion meetings held by Party cells, branches, or joint sessions of several branches.

Regarding how to conduct inspections, the Central Committee had clear requirements-"Such inspections must be based on the ideological principles, political principles, and organizational

principles outlined in the rectification documents. During the inspection, self-criticism should be conducted voluntarily, affirming correct aspects and criticizing erroneous ones, analyzing the causes, circumstances and roots of mistakes, and proposing methods for correction. When summarizing the Party's historical experience, it is stressed that the guiding principle should be the unity of the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese revolution, clarifying the correctness or incorrectness of the lines, and drawing correct conclusions. Based on self-inspection and with mutual help, everyone should write a summary of their learning or thoughts."

Achievements of internalization mechanism

The methods employed in the rectification movement were gentle, conciliatory, or initiated from a standpoint of gentleness and conciliation. Unlike harsh indoctrination and suppression, it emphasized that those who made mistakes should strive to correct them consciously. This is reflected in the slogan "clarify thoughts and unite comrades" and the guideline of "learn from past mistakes and cure the sick to save them"- "To draw lessons from past erroneous lines and educate Party cadres and members, a crude and coercive approach should never be taken towards ideological issues; instead, a meticulous and patient method of persuasion and education should be used, which means employing criticism and self-criticism. Both clarifying thoughts and uniting comrades are essential."

Furthermore, ideological transformation should be viewed as a joyful process. "For those comrades who engage in intense ideological struggle, there might be some pain, but once their thoughts are elevated and their faults removed, they will experience incomparable joy[13]." From the Central Committee's repeated emphasis on "self-reflection," "self-criticism," and "conducting self-inspection by linking theory with practice," it is evident that the Yan'an Rectification Movement was a political socialization movement using indoctrination techniques with a strong desire to achieve internalization.

4. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of political socialization research, the Yan'an Rectification Movement can be seen as a relatively successful practice of political socialization. Considering the historical context, the Communist Party of China (CPC) managed to consolidate its internal unity within a relatively short period despite operating under extremely challenging conditions. In terms of the comparison between its objectives and the final results, the degree of goal achievement was notably high.

Firstly, following the Yan'an Rectification Movement, the CPC achieved an unprecedented level of unity in terms of thought, politics, and organization. Ideologically, the line represented by Wang Ming was completely negated and eradicated, while the pragmatic and realistic line represented by Mao Zedong was widely accepted and established as the Party's guiding ideology. Politically, the conditions that gave rise to previous "Leftist" opportunistic errors were overturned, and the entire Party embraced the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought. Organizationally, the leadership position of the current Central Committee was consolidated, especially solidifying Mao Zedong's position as the General Secretary of the CPC, leading to a grand unity under the leadership of the Central Committee headed by Comrade Mao Zedong.

Secondly, the theoretical level of Marxism within the entire Party was significantly enhanced. In terms of implementation, the movement effectively utilized both indoctrination and internalization mechanisms, employing various methods to propagate the "mainstream" political culture, ultimately achieving the initial goals of political socialization. On this foundation, the CPC achieved consecutive victories, winning the War of Resistance against Japan and the Liberation War, and establishing the People's Republic of China. It can be said that the unity within the Party formed after the Yan'an Rectification Movement laid the groundwork for all subsequent achievements.

However, what worked at one time may not work indefinitely. It should be recognized that the process of the Yan'an Rectification Movement was not without error, contrary to what many textbooks might suggest. Although the Yan'an Rectification placed great emphasis on the role of internalization

mechanisms, internalization involves the transformation of thought within each individual person, which cannot be entirely enforced through subjective demands such as self-criticism, writing summaries, and making reflections.

The political socialization activities initiated proactively by the current leadership possess dual attributes of education and political struggle. Therefore, their appropriateness depends on the sagacity of the leaders. Should the leaders lose their wisdom, the consequences would be unbearable. Negative events such as the "Rescue Campaign" occurred during the Yan'an Rectification Movement. People tend to trust in experience, that is, they develop a path dependence on actions that have previously led to good outcomes. If the essence of past events was not what it was perceived to be, then repeating those actions will not yield the same results and may even worsen the situation. It can be said that the application of both mechanisms during the Yan'an Rectification Movement, as well as the top-down mode of command, sowed the seeds for the various difficulties the Communist Party of China would later face. Whether there exists a truly correct path to achieve political socialization, what this path should look like, and how the Communist Party of China should proceed in handling such matters in the future, these answers should be found in the study of political culture and through the continuous re-examination of history.

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