

Staying True to the Original Aspiration and Upholding Fundamental Principles While Innovating—An Exploration of the Psychological Processes of Individual Belief Formation and Change (Postprint)

Authors: Fu Xiaolan

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Abstract

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Full Text

Abstract

The formation and change of ideals and beliefs are closely related to individual psychological processes and mental states. This article analyzes the connotation and function of staying true to the original aspiration, the formation and change of individual beliefs and their influencing factors, and the dialectical unity between staying true to our principles and making innovations, hoping to provide insights for party building and ideological education.

Keywords: ideals, beliefs, formation, change, influencing factors

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At the celebration of the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized “staying true to the original aspiration and continuing to forge ahead” ten times, stating that “to stay true to our original aspiration and continue moving forward, we must bear

in mind that our party established the pursuit of communism and socialism as its program from the very day of its founding, uphold the lofty ideal of communism and the common ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and continuously advance the great practice of striving for noble ideals” [1].

As the ancient saying goes, “Everything has a beginning, but few see it through to the end” ; only by staying true to the original aspiration can one reach the destination. The Communist Party of China is a political party composed of more than 89 million party members. Strengthening party building requires every member to stay true to the original aspiration, firmly uphold the lofty ideal of communism and the common ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and continuously advance the great practice of striving for noble ideals. This article first analyzes the connotation and function of staying true to the original aspiration, then discusses the psychological processes of belief formation and change and their influencing factors, and finally emphasizes the dialectical unity between staying true to principles and making innovations, hoping to provide insights for party building and ideological education.

The Connotation and Function of Staying True to the Original Aspiration

The Connotation of Staying True to the Original Aspiration

The original aspiration refers to the ideals established and beliefs formed at the starting point of life—the goals one strives for and longs to achieve throughout one’ s lifetime. Staying true to the original aspiration means adhering to one’ s original heart and upholding the ideals and beliefs established at the outset. It represents the commitments and convictions held at the beginning and the responsibilities undertaken in times of difficulty. Only by staying true to the original aspiration can one maintain the direction of life, firm up one’ s pursuits, and never lose one’ s way on the long journey. However, in today’ s era of rapid development and transformation, the original aspiration is often forgotten. As the renowned Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran lamented, “We have walked too far to remember why we started.” Once the original aspiration is forgotten and principles are abandoned, blindly emphasizing innovation becomes not only meaningless but also dangerous—at best, one becomes like duckweed, losing one’ s roots and drifting with the current; at worst, one changes flags and banners, heading down the wrong path and leading the nation to the brink of failure.

The original aspiration of Chinese Communists is the solemn oath pledged under the party flag and the unchanging purpose of wholeheartedly serving the people that flows in their blood. On the journey of reform and innovation, the Communist Party of China must never forget the path it has traveled, no matter how far it goes or how glorious its future becomes, and must never forget why it started [1]. It must “unswervingly hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, neither taking the old path of seclusion and rigidity nor the wrong path of changing flags and banners” [2].

Ideals, Beliefs, and Their Functions

Ideals and beliefs are unique spiritual phenomena of human beings. Engels pointed out that “in the realm of social history, actors are conscious individuals who act thoughtfully and passionately in pursuit of certain goals; nothing happens without conscious intention or anticipated purpose” [3]. Marx also noted that at the end of the labor process, the result already existed in the worker’s imagination at the beginning, “existing ideally,” and that “passion and enthusiasm are the essential forces through which man strongly pursues his object” [4,5]. People with ideals and beliefs will strive for them with firm determination and fervent emotion.

Ideals, beliefs, and worldviews represent the highest level of human spiritual life [6]. Belief is the internal conviction in the truth of theory and the correctness of practical behavior [7]; people do not doubt their truth, consider them indisputable, and strive to live by them [8]. Beliefs are consciously held ideas that people consider correct and unshakable, formed through social practice [9,10]. Beliefs contain cognitive, emotional, conceptual, and intentional components and constitute the smallest element and basic structural unit in a person’s cognitive system, playing a decisive role in rational psychological activities (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]) [12].

Ideals are beliefs associated with goals that have the possibility of realization, representing aspirations and pursuits for the future, the concentrated expression of worldview and stance on goals, and the highest standard for establishing life values. Ideals and beliefs are interdependent: the realization of ideals relies on the power of beliefs, while the firmness of beliefs is based on the choice of ideals. Both belong to the spiritual realm, and noble social ideals and scientific beliefs are tremendous spiritual forces that provide significant guidance for the practical activities of individuals and groups [13].

Firm Ideals and Beliefs Are the Soul of Staying True to the Original Aspiration

Ideals are ideals because they are lofty; beliefs are beliefs because they are persistent. From its birth, the Communist Party of China has written Marxism on its banner and established the realization of communism as its highest ideal. Throughout its 96-year history, countless Communists have shed blood and sacrificed their lives for this ideal, relying on this faith. Countless Communists have endured hardships without regret, most importantly because of their internal conviction of “consistency in my way” and their unchanging pursuit of noble ideals and goals, their tenacious persistence of “hearing the truth in the morning and dying content in the evening,” and their powerful will of “once chosen, pursued for life.” Although they knew that the ideals they pursued throughout their lives would not be realized in their own hands, they firmly believed that through continuous efforts and sacrifices from generation to generation, the noble ideals would surely be achieved. This arduous and extraordinary journey

fully demonstrates that the rock-solid ideals and beliefs of Chinese Communists are the foundation of the invincible Chinese military under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the root and soul of the party' s eternal vitality, and the spiritual pillar for the vigorous development of the Chinese nation.

Ideals and beliefs are the foundation of Communists and the “calcium” of their spiritual life. General Secretary Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized: “Firm ideals and beliefs make strong bones; without them, or when they are not firm, the spirit will ‘lack calcium’ and develop ‘rickets,’ which may lead to political degeneration, economic greed, moral corruption, and debased lifestyle.” Therefore, firm ideals and beliefs are the soul of staying true to the original aspiration, the foundation of strengthening one’ s spirit, and the “master switch” for solving the fundamental issues of worldview, outlook on life, and values. Only by supplementing the “calcium” of the spirit and securing this “master switch” can one uphold the correct political direction, stand high, see far, and maintain a broad mind, staying true to the original aspiration in both victory and prosperity, and remaining undaunted and unwavering in hardship and adversity, withstanding various risks and difficulties, consciously resisting the erosion of decadent ideas, and fundamentally preserving the political integrity of Communists.

The Formation of Beliefs and Their Influencing Factors

Psychological Mechanisms of Individual Belief Formation

Beliefs are grounded in knowledge of objective laws [14]; they are forms of consciousness built upon cognition and emotion, concepts formed through social practice that individuals consider correct and unquestionable [13,15]. In people’ s cognitive and practical activities, everyone consciously forms certain beliefs.

Many complex factors influence individual psychological behavior (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]). The psychological mechanisms of belief formation are also quite complex—being influenced not only by psychological processes but also by personality psychology [16]. This complexity is mainly manifested in the diversity of psychological factors, the systematic nature of psychological structures, the complexity of psychological processes, the multidimensionality of interactions, and the multifaceted nature of interventions and influences [17].

Research shows that long-term internalized viewpoints and concepts can form people’ s beliefs. For example, an individual’ s political beliefs strongly depend on the shared political beliefs of the community in which they live [18]; most people believe their religious beliefs were taught to them from early childhood [19]; teachers form their educational beliefs through individual self-construction and cultural adaptation [20]. Studies also find that belief formation mainly undergoes three stages: an unconscious stage, a stage of belief concretization and quasi-reflection, and a stage of individual philosophization of beliefs [21].

The Importance of Values Cultivation

In the process of belief and ideal formation, values are crucial. Values are psychological tendencies that permeate all actions and personalities, governing people's evaluation of what is good and bad, right and wrong. Based on values, people express attitudes toward various cognitive results, make evaluations, and carry out selections, determining through reflection, evaluation, and choice what they firmly believe in, thereby forming steadfast beliefs. Therefore, what kind of values one has determines what kind of ideals and beliefs. If a person only pursues fame and wealth, their ideal will be to get promoted and make a fortune, their belief will be "every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," and their behavior will inevitably be devoid of moral and political bottom lines.

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "The values of youth determine the values of future society as a whole, and since youth are in the period when values are being formed and established, it is very important to cultivate values during this time. It is like buttoning a shirt—if the first button is buttoned wrong, all the rest will be wrong. The buttons of life must be buttoned correctly from the start" [22]. Therefore, ideals and beliefs education must start from childhood, beginning with good family traditions and home education, and exerting effort in kindergarten, primary, and secondary education. We must abandon bureaucratic tones, preaching, and indoctrination, and instead adopt equal, heuristic, interactive, guiding, and experiential methods, combining reason with emotion, striving to enhance the persuasiveness and appeal of ideals and beliefs education, creating strong resonance and impact among young people, improving their sense of identification and acceptance, and helping them master the correct direction in life and establish lofty ideals and noble beliefs.

Noble faith and firm beliefs do not arise spontaneously. When many of us join the party and organizations, we have only taken the "first step" in learning Marxism, with understanding its scientific and truthful ideological system being merely "a goal." As the saying goes, joining the party organizationally takes "a moment," but joining ideologically takes "a lifetime." Therefore, "to develop an indestructible body, we must arm our minds with scientific theory and continuously cultivate our spiritual home" [23]. We must continuously strengthen theoretical learning and party spirit education among party members, establishing ideals and beliefs on rational identification with scientific theory, correct understanding of historical laws, and accurate grasp of basic national conditions.

In the process of cultivating young people's outlook on life, worldview, and values, and in the process of "strengthening the bones and supplementing the calcium" of party members, how to fully utilize psychological research findings and explore various effective approaches, methods, and ways to further strengthen party building and ideals and beliefs education deserves our high attention and urgently requires in-depth research and bold practice.

Belief Change and Its Influencing Factors

Psychological Mechanisms of Belief Change

Ideals and beliefs are relatively stable but not constant; they fluctuate or drift with changes in subjective factors, time, space, natural and social environmental factors, and random factors [17]. Belief adjustment theory suggests that belief adjustment depends on how beliefs are represented [24]. Belief adjustment mainly involves three steps: using models to detect inconsistencies; the mismatch principle determining what to modify; and explaining belief conflicts [25]. The entire process is based on deterministic rather than probabilistic representation. When faced with inconsistent information, people either reject the major premise or the minor premise. However, belief revision does not necessarily completely negate original beliefs—it is not an all-or-nothing process but rather a readjustment of belief strength, sometimes only adjusting the intensity of original beliefs, especially since the representation of certain causal beliefs is more likely probabilistic than deterministic [26,27]. Therefore, the explanatory mechanism hypothesis proposes that belief adjustment involves people actively constructing new components from inconsistent information, incorporating them into causal structures to form new causal structures [28-30]. In other words, when people encounter inconsistent information, they reduce the strength of original beliefs and introduce new components to explain the original causal structure.

Research shows that the magnitude of conflict between old and new beliefs, emotional factors, and the strength of original beliefs all influence whether people change or maintain original beliefs [31]. For example, studies find that changes in teachers' beliefs are mainly influenced by prior beliefs and cognitive conflicts, emotions, belief strength, school culture, and colleagues [32]. Regarding post-traumatic growth (PTG), research indicates that core belief challenge has a greater effect on PTG [33]. Core beliefs, also called world assumptions, refer to people's beliefs and assumptions about the world, others, and themselves that guide behavior and help people understand why events occur [34]. The greater the challenge trauma events pose to individuals' core beliefs, the greater the change in those core beliefs after trauma. This change leads trauma survivors to consider previously unnoticed strengths and rethink their relationships with the world, themselves, and others, helping to promote PTG [35]. Core belief challenge after trauma can not only directly and positively predict PTG but also negatively predict PTG through intrusive rumination, positively predict PTG through deliberate rumination, and positively predict PTG through intrusive rumination via deliberate rumination (Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]) [36].

Analysis of Reasons for Shaken Ideals and Beliefs

General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly pointed out: “The shaking of ideals and beliefs is the most dangerous kind of shaking, and the landslide of ideals and

beliefs is the most dangerous kind of landslide. The decline of a political party often begins with the loss or absence of ideals and beliefs. Whether our party is strong depends not only on whether the entire party is unwavering in its ideals and beliefs but also on whether every party member is unwavering in their ideals and beliefs” [1]. Currently, Western hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism continue to rise, and struggle in the ideological field is fierce; China’s economic system is undergoing profound changes, social structure is profoundly shifting, interest patterns are profoundly adjusting, and ideological concepts are profoundly changing. People’s ideological activities are increasingly independent, selective, changeable, and diverse, with various social contradictions interacting and overlapping, all of which may pose severe challenges to individuals’ core beliefs and even shake their ideals and beliefs. For example, the market economy’s inherent “economic man” concept of maximizing self-interest has penetrated into people’s belief systems, forming a direct confrontation and conflict with communism’s advocacy of selfless dedication. This has caused some party officials to experience distorted values, turning to worship money and vulgarizing into “everything for money,” thereby shaking their communist faith. In such a complex and changing domestic and international environment, when carrying out party building work, we must pay special attention to party members’ core concepts and their changes, actively and effectively intervening when facing crises or trauma to avoid value distortions and strive to achieve “post-traumatic growth.”

Methods for Strengthening Party Members’ Ideals and Beliefs

- (1) Political firmness comes from theoretical clarity. This requires continuously strengthening rational identification with Marxism and communist faith, strengthening rational identification with socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strengthening immunity in ideological activities and the spiritual world. Every party member, especially leading cadres, must consolidate their foundation and cultivate their essence, establishing a life-long learning philosophy, continuously strengthening Marxist theoretical cultivation, deeply studying General Secretary Xi Jinping’s series of important speeches—this contemporary living Marxism in China—and grasping the broad trends of social development through the connection between theory and practice, history and reality. This will firm up Communists’ lofty ideals and common ideals, enhance confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, firmly establish political consciousness, consciousness of the overall situation, core consciousness, and alignment consciousness, fortify political stances and pursuits, achieve piety and persistence, profound faith and deep commitment, always maintain conscious awareness of the party’s lofty ideals and mission, and always maintain the original aspiration and determination to struggle for the party and the people’s cause.
- (2) Normal psychology and correct behavior require both strict self-discipline

and sufficient external discipline. Self-discipline is rule by virtue; external discipline is rule by law. Examining various corruption cases, the main reasons for corrupt behavior are twofold: first, the loss of ideals and beliefs, distorted worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, complete loss of self-discipline, collapse of moral defenses, inability to resist temptation, and step-by-step descent into crime; second, incomplete systems and laws or lax enforcement and discipline, insufficient supervision, creating a “vacuum” of external discipline that provides opportunities and convenience for corruption, allowing corrupt individuals to slide step by step into an abyss from which they cannot extricate themselves. Therefore, party building work must adhere to the principle of combining “self-discipline” and “external discipline,” continuously improving various effective regulations and systems, continuously strengthening law enforcement and discipline, constantly innovating models, and intensifying efforts to achieve obvious results. Through strict supervision, make those who want to be corrupt unable to find opportunities (“cannot do it”); through severe punishment, maintain high pressure to make those who want to be corrupt “dare not do it” ; and through regular “blushing, sweating, detoxifying, and treating illness,” guard against minor problems and prevent them before they happen.

The Dialectical Unity of Staying True to Principles and Making Innovations

The Great Way is simple and interconnected. Staying true to principles and making innovations represent a dialectical unity [37]. Chinese civilization has endured for millennia precisely because it balances the philosophy of staying true to principles and making innovations, maintaining both to preserve its essence. Rigidity and conservatism will eventually be abandoned by the times; blindly seeking change and novelty makes it difficult to establish a foothold. We must adhere to the principle of seeking truth from facts, proceed from reality in all things, never betray fundamentals or forget the original aspiration, change when necessary, and understand that change leads to smooth progress. “To stay true to our original aspiration and continue moving forward, we must uphold Marxism’ s guiding position, integrate the basic principles of Marxism with contemporary Chinese reality and the characteristics of the times, promote theoretical innovation and practical innovation, and continuously advance the sinicization of Marxism” [1]. We must stride forward, continuously make new theoretical creations based on new practices, and use evolving theory to guide evolving practice, so as not to lose our bearings in the rhythm of change. We cannot use Western standards to interpret Chinese philosophy; instead, we must learn from and draw on the strengths of Western culture while adhering to the subjectivity of Chinese culture. We must not cut our feet to fit the shoes but tailor the clothes to fit the body [39]. Examining the problems that have arisen in some countries, there are many reasons, but an important one is confusion between “staying true”and “making innovations,”blindly seeking change without

regard for national conditions and people' s will, thus losing their foundation.

Staying true to principles and making innovations— “making innovations” means innovation, reform, or change. The only constant in the world is change, and the only thing that must not change is the original aspiration. As *Lüshi Chunqiu* states, “Governing a country without laws leads to chaos; adhering to laws without adaptation leads to absurdity; absurdity and chaos cannot sustain a nation. As times change, so should laws.” Staying true is not about preserving the status quo, let alone being conservative. In a constantly changing society, we must assess the situation and advance with the times, staying true to principles while making innovations. General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly pointed out: “Take our country—the Chinese nation is a nation full of innovative spirit. Our ancestors long ago proposed: ‘Though Zhou was an old state, its mandate was to renew itself.’ ‘The movement of heaven is vigorous; the superior man constantly strives for self-improvement.’ ‘If one can one day renew oneself, do so every day.’ It can be said that the spirit of innovation is the most distinctive endowment of the Chinese nation” [38].

Staying true to principles and making innovations— “staying true” is the foundation. In *Records of the Grand Historian: Book of Rites*, Sima Qian emphasized “following laws and staying true to principles,” abiding by the right path. The “right” represents the Great Way, encompassing both moral integrity and objective laws and correct theories. Philosophically speaking, it is the essence and laws of things. Everything proven correct by practice and valuable experience gained from countless successes and failures are considered the “right path” or “middle way.” The foundation of “staying” lies in ideological consciousness and theoretical thoroughness. General Secretary Xi Jinping’ s series of important speeches continuously expound on the fundamentals the Communist Party of China upholds and the “Four Confidences.” “Marxism is the fundamental guiding ideology of our party and country. Deviating from or abandoning Marxism will cause our party to lose its soul and direction” [1]. When some fundamental things are abandoned or become specious, what follows is often not the freedom and happiness we desire but chaos and disaster.

To realize the Chinese Dream of national prosperity, national rejuvenation, and people’ s happiness, we must follow the Chinese path, promote the Chinese spirit, and gather Chinese strength [40]. The greatest characteristic of the Chinese Dream is that it treats the nation, the ethnicity, and the individual as a community of shared destiny, closely linking national interests, ethnic interests, and everyone’ s specific interests, embodying the Chinese nation’ s sentiment of “family, country, and world.” As long as everyone integrates their life ideals into the great dream of national and ethnic rejuvenation, stays true to the original aspiration, and maintains principles while making innovations, they will converge into a powerful force to realize the Chinese Dream.

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Author Biography

Fu Xiaolan is a professor and doctoral supervisor. She serves as Director of the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS); Dean of the Department of Psychology, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences; Deputy Director of the State Key Laboratory of Brain and Cognitive Science; President-Elect of the Chinese Psychological Society (CPS); and Secretary-General of CPS. Her research focuses on cognitive psychology and related applications. She has led or participated in over 30 research projects, published more than 300 papers in Chinese and English, presided over or participated in formulating 9 national standards, obtained 3 patents, and chief-edited books including *Heart·Coordinate: Contemporary Masters of Psychology, Emotional Psychology*, and the *Translation Series of Masterworks on Electronic Society and Contemporary Psychology*. E-mail: fuxl@psych.ac.cn

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