

# Study on Zhou Enlai's Outlook on Life and Its Contemporary Value

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Received: March 11, 2012

Accepted: April 17, 2012

Published: July 1, 2012

doi:10.5539/ass.v8n8p166

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n8p166>

## Abstract

Zhou Enlai, in his whole life, served the people wholeheartedly, struggled for the lofty cause of communism, disregarded fame and wealth, dedicated selflessly, strove constantly for self-improvement and kept positive and optimistic. All of the above reflect Zhou Enlai's outlook on life. Today, studying his outlook on life has important value for contemporary university students in China to steer their own life better and establish Marxism scientific outlook on life.

**Keywords:** Zhou Enlai, outlook on life, contemporary value

Zhou Enlai, one of the outstanding leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC), was a great proletarian revolutionist, statesman, military strategist and diplomatist. Besides, he was an excellent Marxism theorist, propagandist and activist. The reason for Zhou Enlai becoming such a great man is closely related to his outlook on life. The basic components of Zhou Enlai's outlook on life are his life purpose of serving the people wholeheartedly, his life ideal of struggling for the cause of communism, his life value of being indifferent to fame and fortune and selflessly dedicating and his life attitude of striving constantly and being positive and optimistic. Under conditions of the new era, making an in-depth analysis and a scientific grasp about Zhou Enlai's outlook on life has great significance for contemporary university students in China to establish scientific outlook on life.

## 1. Basic Components of Zhou Enlai's Outlook on Life

### 1.1 Life Purpose of Serving the People Wholeheartedly

When he was very young, Zhou Enlai expressed his idea of becoming "the public servant of the world" in his prose "Sheyang Yijiu". In Nankai school, Zhou Enlai often spent his spare time helping those students with poor academic performance to make up their missed lessons. He thought that people in this world could not live by themselves only like animals and vegetations, but must rely on the support and participation of the public, therefore, "such things like service was inevitable for human beings". (Zhou Enlai, 1998, 47) When he graduated, the comment about him in the classbook was that Zhou Enlai always tried to do best as long as his friends needed help or he met affairs about the public welfare. Young Zhou Enlai's ardour for the public welfare laid the basis for establishing his life purpose of serving the people wholeheartedly after he grew up. After becoming a Marxist, Zhou Enlai considered that a communist should serve the people like a willing ox, that is, "to serve the people sincerely and honestly", "upon the coming of the century of the people, to work hard like a willing ox, to unite other communists and to die for serving the people." (Zhou Enlai, 1980, 241)

In his life, Zhou Enlai and the people heart linked to heart. He concerned about the sufferings of the masses, especially after becoming the Prime Minister, he always had the well-being of the people at heart. In 1958, the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River occurred floods which had been rarely seen in history, at that time, Zhou Enlai was in a meeting in Shanghai, but he announced immediately to stop the meeting after receiving the report. Then, he arrived in Zhengzhou, inspected the situation of the disaster and pulled the tightrope with the majority of railway workers. On the day subsequent to Xingtai Earthquake (March, 1966), he ignored the danger of aftershocks and rushed to the disaster areas to condole with the victims of the earthquake. During the "Cultural Revolution", Zhou Enlai always wore a badge of "Serving the People", turned the tide and spared no efforts for the interests of the country and the people.

Serving the people wholeheartedly is the fundamental aim of the Communist Party of China (CPC). As a

prominent leader of the party, Zhou Enlai made serving the people as his life purpose and set an example for others, so he was called a model of serving the people in the party. Serving the people was the supreme life pursuit of Zhou Enlai and he served people with utter devotion and painstaking efforts. His life was a life of serving the people selflessly, tirelessly and wholeheartedly.

### *1.2 Life Ideal of Struggling for Communism Perpetually*

During his teenage years, Zhou Enlai had great ambitions. In 1911, when he was studying in Shenyang Dongguan Primary School, the principal asked the students about their purpose of attending school. Many students gave secular and humble answers such as "to help father", "to glorify the family" and so on, Zhou Enlai, however, gave a resounding answer "to make contributions to the rise of China".

In April 1915, Zhou Enlai wrote in "On Ambition" that humble ambitions were harmful because persons with such ambitions only wanted to "get money" or "obtain official positions", thus, people ought to have great and noble ambitions. In 1917, Zhou Enlai went to Japan to study the knowledge about "how to save the poor in the world". At that time, the Marxism doctrine and other different schools of socialism doctrines flocked to Japan simultaneously. Zhou Enlai came into contact with Marxism and successively read "Essence of Socialism", Kawakami Hajime's "Poor Monogatari" and some magazines such as "New Society", "Liberation", "Reform" and so on. He also read some articles which introduced "Anarchy Socialism", "Guild Socialism" and "Japanese Village Socialism". (Literature Research Office of the Center of Communist Party of China, 2007, 28) May Fourth Movement (May 4, 1919, in China) changed the life path of Zhou Enlai. During the six months in jail, he studied the Marxism theory systematically, and his belief in communism gradually germinated. In 1920, Zhou Enlai went to Europe to take part in work-while-study program. He started "comparing all sorts of doctrines", (Zhou Enlai, 1988, 41) and finally, he identified Marxism as the most scientific doctrine and established the belief in communism in terms of ideology. Meanwhile, Zhou Enlai took concrete steps to join communism organizations. In spring, 1921, through the introduction of Zhang Shenfu and Liu Qingyang, Zhou Enlai joined a communism group in Paris which was a launching group of the Communist Party of China (CPC), becoming one of the first party members of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In a letter that Zhou Enlai wrote to a friend who was a member of Consciousness Society in the domestic, he indicated a firm belief in the revolution, namely, "the doctrine I believe in will not be changed and I will propagandize it firmly." (Zhou Enlai, 1988, 46) Since then, Zhou Enlai dedicated all his energy and wisdom without any reservation to the cause of communism. No matter how sinister the environment was or how serious and complicated the struggle was, Zhou Enlai put his personal safety, risk, honor, gains and losses aside and was unswervingly loyal to the great cause of communism.

### *1.3 Life Value of Being Indifferent to Fame and Fortune and Selflessly Dedication*

When he was studying in secondary school, Zhou Enlai advocated making great achievements, but he despised angling for praise. At that time, Zhou Enlai was excellent in character and learning, scintillating with wit. He was also an activist in various activities. However, he was never arrogant, hard-edged, domineering or greedy for power. He thought that people should cherish their reputation, regard their reputation as "their second life of life" and never have an idea of seeking for reputation. When recalling the past, Pan Shilun, an old classmate of Zhou Enlai in Nankai School, said passionately that: "At that time, the components of members who participated in the Union of Students were very complex. In addition, many members were pushy, hard-edged and scrambling for power and wealth, but Zhou Enlai was not so. He took the trouble, spared no pains and worked hard, steadfastly had the idea of "being an anonymous hero." (Jin Chongji, 1998, 49) Zhou Enlai threw himself wholeheartedly into the cause of communism. He was pro-active, strenuous and industrious in work, but he never sought for fame and fortune, only concentrating on work.

Zhou Enlai not only looked down upon personal fame and fortune, but there were merely two words "dedication" and "people" in his life dictionary, not "demand" or "self". Since his youth time, he had deemed that a person could not live egoistically by separating himself from the collectivity and he must depend on the public's support in order to keep a foothold on the world. As a result, Zhou Enlai was willing to do such things as serving the public dumbly and he never begrudged his own time and energy in this respect. He often talked to friends around about that young people should keep the survival of the nation in mind and devote himself to the people, the nation and the country without pursuing personal enjoyment merely.

Zhou Enlai devoted all his time and energy selflessly to the revitalization of the Chinese nation, the prosperity of the country and the happiness of the people. That is, he gave out his all till his heart stopped beating, not bucking for any fame or fortune.

#### *1.4 Life Attitude of Being Unremitting, Positive and Optimistic*

Zhou Enlai was very hardy at a rather young age. When he was 10 years old, for the elder were unable to see about the household chore and his mother and adoptive mother died one after the other, Zhou Enlai had to shoulder the heavy burden of handling the housekeeping and taking care of the feudal big family which was on the brink of collapse. He relied on pawn and borrowing to make ends meet and bore tenaciously the poverty and hardship of life. As Zhou Enlai said later, "I understood the hardship of life when I was very young. At that time, for my father often went out to make a living, I began to be in charge of the family's daily necessities and make social contact as I was 10 to 11 years old." (Historical materials of the Communist Party of China, 1982, 5) With regard to setbacks and difficulties, Zhou Enlai chose to face bravely. What's more, he made excellent achievement in the adversity. When Zhou Enlai was studying in Nankai school, his family was very poor. As the situation was quite difficult, his tuition often could not be paid timely. Nevertheless, he could keep versatile in the difficulties and hardships and be excellent in character and learning. From December, 1926 to August, 1927, Zhou Enlai continuously led the workers' armed uprising which happened in Shanghai three times and the August 1 Nanchang Uprising, all of which demonstrated his indomitable will.

Zhou Enlai had his own summary about life attitude. He once said that : "During the past three decades, I took part in the revolution and did some work at certain moments and in certain departments. Meanwhile, I made many mistakes and encountered some frustrations. But I never discouraged because the confidence in the revolution and the revolutionary optimism inspired me. This power came from the broad masses of the people." (Zhou Enlai, 1984, 60) In the most difficult situation of "Cultural Revolution", Zhou Enlai painstakingly shored up such perilous situation and struggled to turn the tide. Even in the last days of his life, Zhou Enlai still showed a firm, calm, positive and optimistic mental state and struggled against the relentless disease resolutely.

Zhou Enlai's life was a life of revolution, a life of fight, a life of suffering countless hardships and a life of self-improvement and being positive and optimistic. Zhou Enlai always made unremitting efforts and kept positive and optimistic whether he was in victory or failure, in daily life or work and in serious illness or dying.

## **2. Contemporary Value of Zhou Enlai's Outlook on Life**

The country will be prosperous if her young people are promising and the country will be powerful if her young people are invigorative. Contemporary university students who are the elite of young people and very valuable human resources are linked to the future of the country and the prosperity of the nation. Whether they can set up correct outlook on life and take the realization of the life value consciously into the action of achieving great rejuvenation of Chinese nation or not directly relates to the survival of the party and the country, the rise or fall and the success or failure of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the realization of the goal of great rejuvenation of Chinese nation. As a preeminent delegate of proletarian revolutionists of the older generation, Zhou Enlai established a scientific outlook on life gradually during his teenage years. Understanding the basic components of Zhou Enlai's outlook on life profoundly can bring very important revelation to contemporary university students.

### *2.1 Serving the People Wholeheartedly*

Serving the people wholeheartedly is the basic requirement of Marxism scientific outlook on life, the requirement and expectation that our party and people placing on university students in the new era and the inevitable requirement of setting up scientific outlook on life and practicing the socialistic core value system. Socialistic society puts people's interests in top priority and regards serving the people wholeheartedly and promoting social progress as the highest honor. "Honor to those who serve the people, shame on those who are divorced from them" highlights the importance of the thought of serving the people.

Under the current condition of market economy, the interests present a diversified and individualized trend which shelters and weakens the interests of the people. Some university students treat people's interests as an empty fiction and their consciousness of serving the people is very apathetic, namely, they take their own interests into account while they give little or no consideration to the people's interests, thus, serving the people certainly becomes nothing but empty talk.

Starting from his young age, Zhou Enlai had been keen on such affairs as "serving" the public and practiced serving the people wholeheartedly in his whole life, besides, he often proudly said he was "a servant of the people", "an odd-jobman of the people" and "a head waiter of the people", appearing in front of people with the identity of ordinary laborer. Before he died, Zhou Enlai enjoined that his bone ash should be scattered into the rivers and the earth as fertilizers because he thought it was also a way to serve the people. In his opinion, a person should serve the people before and after death.

Although the era has changed, the public-servant consciousness of serving the people is not out of date. How to learn to serve the people wholeheartedly from Zhou Enlai in the new era? Generally, it needs carrying out systematic education and practical activities about the socialistic outlook on honor and shame and striving to guide university students to regard loving the motherland and serving the people as their life criteria and become the qualified builders and reliable successors of the cause of socialism. Contemporary university students themselves should strive to set up life purpose of serving the people wholeheartedly, resolutely resist and oppose the ideas and behavior which violate the interests of the people and strive to practice the socialistic outlook on honor and shame and bear "honor to those who serve the people, shame on those who are divorced from them" in mind.

### *2.2 Pursuing Lofty Ideal of Communism*

No matter in which era and under which social condition, lofty ideal is always a powerful spiritual force which inspires people to be aggressive, tenacious and unremitting. Contemporary university students are the future of the country and the hope of the nation. They ought to pursue lofty ideal of communism, which is not only the basic requirement of establishing the scientific outlook on life and the ardent hope that the party and people placing on them, but also the necessary requirement of practicing the socialistic core values.

On one hand, at present, the international communism movement has been in a low ebb and some hostile forces still exist. On the other hand, with in-depth development of the socialistic market economy, the sectors of economy, the types of organization, the ways of obtaining employment, the interest relations and the ways of allocation have been increasingly diversified in our society. Under the influence of profound changes of the international and domestic situations, there exist fuzzy political beliefs and life ideals to varying degrees among university students. Namely, some of them have no progressional goals and lack the motivation of learning; part of them even hold such erroneous views as "the ideal is to pursue interests, the prospect is to pursue money"; some of them attend school not for the rise of China but for their own interests and their ideals and beliefs show an utilitarian and self-serving tendency.

As Zhou Enlai gradually configured lofty ideal in adolescence, he walked out a fate road different from many peers'. For the rise of China, to the east, he went to Japan, to the west, he went to Europe. In Japan, Zhou Enlai got in touch with Marxism for the first time. Later, experiencing the baptism of May Fourth Storm, the contemplation on the life of six months in prison, the on-the-spot investigation in Europe and the comparison on various new trends of thought, Zhou Enlai gradually decided to tread Marxism road. During the period in Europe, Zhou Enlai studied some basic works of Marxism systematically and carefully, understood the essence of them and firmed the belief in Marxism. After repeated comparisons and careful considerations, Zhou Enlai eventually confirmed communism ideal and fought for it in his whole life.

At present, how to learn to pursue lofty life ideal from Zhou Enlai? It should be intensified to beat the Marxism theory into the head of university students. Besides, educators need to clarify the reasons why we should believe in socialism and communism, to arm and educate university students with the latest achievements of Sinicization of Marxism, to strengthen the education about the socialistic core value system, especially about the communism ideal and to help them to establish lofty ideal of communism. At the same time, contemporary university students should seriously learn the Marxism theory, understand the scientificity and truth of the human nature and social development laws revealed by Marxism, convince that socialism and communism is the inevitable result of the development of human society according to Marxism and make the realization of the cause of socialism and communism as their life goal.

### *2.3 Actively Dedicating to the Cause of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*

University students is a group which has strategic meaning to a country and their life value orientation will have a far-reaching impact on the survival and development of a country. The party and people have placed the earnest expectation on contemporary university students who shoulder the important task of building China into a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and realizing the socialistic modernization. What's more, the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation needs them to struggle for. The youth of contemporary university students will be more wonderful only if they make sincere devotion to the motherland and people.

Being positive is the mainstream of the life value of contemporary university students. A survey report shows that 80.7% of the students praise highly dedication but object to being self-centered; 90% of them think it is very significant to participate in volunteer activities. (Ji Xiujun & Yu Guanshi, 2007) However, their pure consciousness of dedication is weakened. Some students emphasize self-design and self-development excessively and lack the sense of responsibility to their motherland, the enthusiasm to their collectivity and the tolerance to others. On their learning directions, they have clear preference to such practical courses as computer,

law, public relations etiquette, foreign economy trade and so on; on their choosing occupations, some students think that they had better go to the coastal areas, the foreign-funded enterprises and the most profitable places to find jobs.

However, Zhou Enlai, in his whole life, devoted all his efforts to the causes of Chinese people's liberation and the construction of the country and sacrificed everything for the party and people. He integrated himself into the party, the country and the people, reaching the realm of ecstasy. Zhou Enlai once said he must work hard, work crazily and give his all till his heart stopped beating. Then, he matched his words with his deeds. From being enthusiastic about the public welfare in the juvenile period to attending to numerous affairs everyday as a premier (sparing no pains to work for 15 to 16 hours every day), Zhou Enlai selflessly dedicated his all life. Just as Mr Zhuang Hanliang, a leader of Malaysian Chinese, ever said that: "He had made contributions to his country and had done something for the people from school-days, during 26 years as the prime minister, he ignored his own interests for the interests of the public, attended to numerous affairs everyday and contributed his all to the country and people till he passed away. So he could be compared with Zhu Geliang who was a prime minister in Xi Shu dynasty in ancient China." (Xinhua News Agency, 1978, 13)

In the new era, in order to learn such kind of pure, selfless and consecratory life value from Zhou Enlai, we should conduct the diversified life values with the socialistic core value system, improve university students' ability of distinguishing a variety of ethos and values, help them correct and dispel the non-mainstream values appearing in their growth process, enable them to identify and accept the life value in which the socialistic core value system is the main content and transform such life value into their self-conscious pursuit. Under the guidance of Marxism, contemporary university students should try hard to learn the socialistic core value system, clearly define their life value orientation and code of conduct according to that system, make the needs of the country's construction as their responsibility and go to where the motherland most needs them without any remorse to make contributions.

#### *2.4 Correctly Dealing with the Prosperity and Adversity Appearing in Life*

The growth path of contemporary university students in China is almost very smooth, and most of them have grown up under the excessive care and praise of the parents, just like the flowers in greenhouse without suffering the baptism of any rainstorm. Such growth experience results in the endurance ability of some university students are very weak and they will lose confidence and choose to escape once they meet difficulties, what's worse, they will feel that the world is very gloomy and the future is very uncertain when they meet setbacks.

Zhou Enlai was able to grow into an outstanding proletarian revolutionist and an important leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the reasons of which had a close relationship with his strong will and his life attitude of being positive and optimistic, self-improved and unyielding. No matter how difficult the situation was, Zhou Enlai took the bull by the horns, did not bow to the setbacks and difficulties, actively worked for the interests of the people, struggled optimistically and gave his all till his heart stopped beating. Deng Yingchao had been Zhou Enlai's intimate fere for half a century, so she understood him most and had ever appraised him that: "Before any hardship, any risk and whatever kind of criticism, attack or setback, he had never discouraged. He always maintained a firm faith and standpoint and insisted on striving and struggling until he stopped the last breath." (Deng Yingchao, 1994, 185)

Zhou Enlai suffered various ups and downs and hardships, but he had always been positive and optimistic. As China has been in the primary stage of socialism at present and she will keep such a state in a long time, the economic situation is still relatively backward and it is inevitable to encounter various difficulties, setbacks and failures in the process of social development and personal progress. Contemporary university students should set up optimistic life attitude, look at reality from a dialectical perspective, understand the relationship between ideal and reality correctly, learn to look at issues comprehensively, dialectically and historically, be full of confidence in the cause of socialism, exercise their own will in practice, enhance mental endurance, overcome various difficulties in learning and in life and always keep resolute, unyielding, vibrant and optimistic.

### **3. Conclusion**

Just as Han Suyin said in the preface of "Zhou Enlai and His Century" that : "Young men yearn for heroes and those characters who can reveal the essence of life to them." (Shi Zhongquan, 1993, 215) Zhou Enlai is such a great man who reveals the true meaning of life to contemporary university students. His scientific outlook on life explains the purpose of life, indicates the ongoing direction of life, shows the true value of life and points out the deserved life attitude to contemporary university students. Zhou Enlai's outlook on life shows very significant contemporary value.

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