

Reflections on and Regression of the Functional Attributes of Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract

At present, the research on the ideological and political education function has formed a tendency of generalization. Scholars keep bringing up new functions one after another, but they forget to reflect on the logic of these functions. It is the inevitable development process of the rationalism to reflect on the logical attribute of the ideological and political education function, regress to main position of the cultivation of “human” in the ideological and political education function system by demonstrating the relationship between the educational function and social function and scientifically define the connotation and essence of the ideological and political education function.

Key words: Educational function; Main function; Derivative function; Ideological and political education

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INTRODUCTION

Since the ideological and political education became an independent discipline, it has always drawn much attention of the theorists to how to define the social function and educational function of ideological and political education. As a discipline of moral education, education is undoubtedly the inherent purpose in the ideological and political education, but the role of ideological and

political education to social development can't be ignored. How is the relationship between educational function and social function of political and ideological education? It is the premise of scientific definition of the function connotation and essence of ideological and political education to reflect on the old function theory and regress to scientifically rational theory and reconstruct the logical system of the ideological and political education function.

1. SCIENTIFIC DEFINITION OF THE MAIN FUNCTION OF THE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

The functional system is an important sub-system of ideological and political education system and the content, type, feature, role and development of the ideological and political education function are the important category of the research on functional theory. “Ideological and political education function is the external manifestation and concentrated demonstration of the essence of the ideological and political education, as well as the ‘legitimacy’ foundation that supports the existence and development of the ideological and political education” (Zhang, 2006, p.155). This conclusion has won the unanimous consent of theorists. What are the functions of the ideological and political education? How do the functions come into being? There is still controversy on these issues. Since scholars bring up new functions one after another, it gives a sense that the research on the ideological and political education seriously lacks rationalism. As of January 2015, according to the incomplete statistics by the author, there are up to 50 kinds of functions researched and analyzed in various monographs and periodicals. However, after rational reflection, we can't help but wonder there are really so many functions in this discipline? As a discipline, what is the main function of the ideological and political education?

Society as a system is mainly composed of economy, policy, culture and other fields and the social development needs all the fields to work harmoniously into a good social order, which is the only way to promote the development of the society. Ideological and political education can maintain social and political stability and development, promote economic prosperity and progress and achieve culture flourishes. However, the ultimate goal of human beings is not to keep social order, but to develop ourselves. Social order is only the external condition to support our survival and promote further development. Human development is the social order people to exist, and to achieve external conditions for further development. Humans maintain social order only for looking for and creating a social environment to promote full, free, comprehensive and harmonious development of humans. Thus, the ideological and political education function should not be confined to maintaining the existing social order. More importantly, we should create an environment that can be conducive to our survival and development and promote our full, free, comprehensive and harmonious development.

However, since the reform and opening up, in order to maintain stable social order, the ideological and political education has constantly focused on social problems so as to address the social problems emerging one after another: mind emancipation education was carried out to address stubbornness in ideology; education on the Four Cardinal Principles to address the political belief crisis; education for spiritual civilization to promote the spiritual civilization progress; education on social morality, professional ethics and family virtues to change the frequent uncivilized and immoral phenomenon; education in patriotism and traditional culture to resist foreign cultural invasion; education in collectivism to address the unreliability of the generations after “1980s” and “1990s”... such utilitarian application or the target to solve various social problems eagerly makes the ideological and political education vacillate among various complex functions and into a problem-solving approach. It results in that there is no focus and no overall consciousness in ideological and political education which only serving as “band-aid”.

Of course, there are two aspects of the ideological and political education, namely “changed” and “unchanged”, which should be integrated with each other. Only with the “change” aspect, the ideological and political education is able to get rid of the backward and rigid old path and the fate of being alienated and even abandoned by the society; only with the unchanged aspect, the ideological and political education can get rid of following the policy to heel and being alienated by the society as the interpreter of the government decree and the conveyance of the superiors’ command. The five thousand years of Chinese history have long proved that there should be “changed”

and unchanged aspects in every discipline. Only it changes with the times and the situations on the basis of maintaining the inherent foundation unchanged, it can cling to its nature in the complicated and ever-changing society and give play to its functions.

Ideological and political education not only is influenced and limited by social and environmental factors, but also makes contribution to social development which is to cultivate qualified personnel for the society. However, the social requirements for the talent quality are not consistent, but even full of contradictions and conflicts. In this regard, how does the ideological and political education ensure its exertion of function to be conducive to social development and progress? To do this, it must ensure that this function should always be the main function of the ideological and political education which remains the everlasting starting point and the ultimate goal of the ideological and political education: educating personnel. Only grasping this starting point and the ultimate goal, the ideological and political education can maintain balance between the changed aspect and unchanged aspect. Only clearly and properly grasping the changed aspect and unchanged aspect in the society, it can clearly and reasonably develop with the changes of the society.

2. LOGICAL ARGUMENT OF THE DERIVATIVE FUNCTION OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

Ideological and political education is not a purely physical system, for it involved with the human factor. Since it is a system reflecting the intent, purpose and value pursuit of human, thus it is a man-made system for human beings. As previously mentioned, the ideological and political education is a kind of social practice to cultivate people. Why does it cultivate people? What kind of people does it cultivate? How does it cultivate people? This “trinity” constitutes a logical clue of research on the function of the ideological and political education function. Based on the logic clue, the ideological and political education can indirectly affect the economy, politics, culture and other factors by cultivating people. The influence of the ideological and political education on social development is its social function, the generation of which is always dependent on educational function, thus it is the derivative function of the ideological and political education.

“Economic function” is namely “the positive function of economic development obtained by the educatees who take the initiative to participate in economic construction mobilized by the ideological and political education” (Chen & Zhang, 2007, p.66). This positive function can

only be achieved through an intermediary link, which is the highly qualified people who will promote economic development after being cultivated. The economic function of the ideological and political education has inherently showed indirect and derivative feature, so it is a derivative and regenerative function. In other words, the ideological and political education here directly manifests the work to cultivate and shape people or to mobilize the initiative of people. Therefore, logically speaking, it precisely embodies the educational function and the economic function is derivative function based on the educational function. When Zou Liuyun analyzed the economic function of the ideological and political education, he defined the economic function as a function conducive to cultivate highly qualified workers, promote scientific and technological progress and improve the management level (Zou, 2007). However, when he expounded the “cultivation of highly qualified workers”, he mainly focused on the analysis of the overall quality of workers by discussing the impact and role of the ideological and political education on the physical and psychological quality, ideological and ethical standards and scientific and cultural level; in his discussion of “promoting scientific and technological progress,” he discussed that the ideological and political education indirectly promotes scientific and technological progress by spreading the scientific philosophy, popularizing the awareness of modern science and technology and conducting the education in ideal and belief and values education; in discussion of “improving the management level”, he elaborated that the ideological and political education indirectly improves the management level through spread humanistic spirit to make the managers have the humanistic quality and cultural concept of management. In fact, throughout the academic discussion on the economic function of ideological and political education, although there are minor differences in the specific style or manner of writing, they are all similar in substance. They all believe that the ideological and political education indirectly promotes economic prosperity and social development by training and improving the quality of producers or workers, establishing various ideas beneficial to economic development and progress and mobilizing the initiative and enthusiasm of the workers. Here let’s leave aside the question whether the improvement of the quality of people will be sure to promote economic prosperity and social development. The potential and realistic problems related to the realization of function are also an extremely complex issue. However, the above analysis can intuitively shows that the ideological and political education is not able to promote the social and economic development directly, which must be realized through an intermediary link, which is the highly qualified people who will promote economic development after being cultivated. Thus, the economic function is only

the derivative function of the ideological and political education, while the educational function is its main function.

“Political function” refers to “the function of the specific educatees who obtains ideological and political quality after cultivation in promoting the political development” (Chen & Zhang, 2007, p.65). The book named *Education Principle in Political Thoughts* (Higher Education Press, 2007) has expounded the political function following the analysis way similar to that used in the analysis of economic function. Namely, the ideological and political education improves the political identification through publicizing the guidelines and policies of the Party and socialist ideology, confirm the beliefs of the people through publicizing Marxism and the Four Cardinal Principles and guiding the political behavior of the people through comparative analysis of the construction situation of democracy. Here, the ideological and political education function in fact presents the function of cultivating, shaping and improving the people and the educational function of cultivating qualified “political person”, so the political function is also only an indirect derivative function.

“Cultural function” refers to the “active role of the ideological and political education in promoting social and cultural development. Some researchers define the cultural function as the function of the culture which improves the overall quality of the people through further developing the potential of the knowledge and skills of the people, cultivating the taste of the people and enhancing the self-discipline in morality of the people, promoting the overall, balanced, full and free development of the people.”(Zheng & Dong, 2008). However, the cultural function defined by him can hardly act as a cultural function, for he treated the culture as a kind of “field”, an educational context and condition and conducted analysis of function of improving the individual ideological quality. Here, the ideological and political education function has changed its direction, for it is no longer the function of ideological and political education on culture, but the function of culture on human. Moreover, as the book named *Education Principle in Political Thoughts* (Higher Education Press, 2007) argues that the cultural function of the ideological and political education manifests as cultural communication, cultural selection, cultural creation and other functions, which, in particular the cultural creation, are realized through cultivating the people with certain cultural quality and creative spirit. Therefore, cultural function is only the derivative function of the ideological and political education and its main function is and only is the educational function.

The aforementioned logical argument about the derivative function of the ideological and political education is not to deny the role of the ideological and political education in promoting the social development, but to draw an scientific conclusion through analysis on

the opinions and elaboration of the social function raised by the researchers and discerning the relationship between the social function and educational function of the ideological and political education: The main function of the ideological and political education is the educational function and the social function is only its derivative function.

3. THE CONNOTATION AND ESSENCE OF THE IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION

What is the function of the ideological and political education? The above has reflected on the main function and derivative function of the ideological and political education and has made scientific definition and logical argument for the ultimate purpose of grasping the connotation and essence of the ideological and political education.

The ideological and political education is an integral part of the education system. It not only is of great significance to the education object, but also plays an important role in other subsystems and the overall large system of the society outside the education system. To research on the function of the ideological and political education, we must recognize: on the one hand, the function of the ideological and political education is the function of the entire education system, rather than the function outside of the education system, so we can't not remove the ideological and political education from the education system; on the other hand, the ideological and political education function is also a function of special education practice, rather than the function of the entire education system, so it has its own characteristics, rule and mechanism of action and we can't confuse the ideological and political education function with the education system function rigidly. However, based on the research of the Chinese scholars on the ideological and political education function, there is much more research on the general study of the ideological and political education function than the study on it based on the system architecture; there are much more theoretical study on the ideological and political education function than the practical research on it. Promoting the comprehensive development of human beings and social harmonious development are the common function shared by the various educations at all levels (including the ideological and political education). The ideological and political education not only can give play to the educational function to promote the comprehensive development of the human beings, but also can give play to the social function to promote the social development. However, how are these functions produced? What determines the ideological and political education to produce these features instead of other functions? For these problems,

we only can obtain the reasonable explanation from the perspective of systematic analysis. Namely, we should conduct research on the ideological and political education function, define the connotation and essence of the ideological and political education, must consider the ideological and political education as a soft system. Moreover, function is an important part of the system. The function is not something out of nothing, but determined by the structure of the ideological and political education system. The elements of the ideological and political education form different structures, so it results in various functions in the ideological and political education.

Therefore, this paper believes that the function of the ideological and political education refers to the capacity and results manifested by the interrelation and interaction among the various elements inside the ideological and political education system and between the ideological and political education system and the external environment. To understand the definition, we must confirm the following:

Firstly, the ideological and political education is a category with systematic meaning. The ideological and political education function is a part of a large system of ideological and political education and determined by the different structures formed by the various elements of the ideological and political education. The various elements form the different structures and the different structures determine the multiple functions of the ideological and political education. Meanwhile, the ideological and political education functions form their own systems, which are the subsystems of the ideological and political education system. According to different classification, the functions of the ideological and political education can be divided into different sub-functions. For example, according to different functional objects, the functions can be divided into individual functions and social functions; according to different effects of the functions, they can be divided into positive, negative features and zero functions (or active functions and passive functions, positive functions and negative functions); according to the structure of the function system, they can be divided into internal functions and external functions.

Secondly, the ideological and political education is a category with dynamic meaning. Ideological and political education function reflects the interrelation and interaction among the various elements inside the ideological and political education system and between the ideological and political education system and the external environment. Interrelation and interaction will inevitably lead to movement which makes the ideological and political education function to present dynamic; at the same time, the ideological and political education function is influenced by the elements of the ideological and political education and the environment and determined by the structure of the ideological and political education in the case of the elements and environment being fixed.

With progress of times and social development, the elements of the ideological and political education and the environment will inevitably change and the structure of the ideological and political education is bound to change, therefore the ideological and political education function determined by the structure thereby exhibits dynamic change.

Thirdly, the ideological and political education function is a category with collaborative meaning. Since the ideological and political education forms its own system, the research on any sub-functions of the ideological and political education must be analyzed from the overall perspective of the ideological and political education function and any research to exaggerate or belittle any function of the ideological and political education is wrong. There is synergy among different functions of the ideological and political education, so we must insist on conducting synergistic research and analysis on different functions, synergistically to reveal the overall function of the ideological and political education. For example, in terms of the research on the internal and external functions of the ideological and political education, we should not only focus on the synergy among the different sub-functions in the internal functions, but also focus on the synergy among the different sub-functions in the external

functions, as well as the synergy between the internal functions and external functions.

In summary, the reflection and regression of the functional attributes of the ideological and political education are the logical premise of scientific grasp of the theory of the ideological and political education function. The reflection on the relationship between main function and derivative function and the scientific definition of connotation and essence of the ideological and political education can help to avoid unlimited generalization of the ideological and political education and regress to rational world of research on functional theory.

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