

Review and Prospect: A Study on Function of Chinese Communist Party's Ideological and Political Education

LU Jingkun^{[a][b],*}

^[a]PhD candidate. School of Marxism, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

^[b]Associate Professor. School of Politics, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by Youth Found Project of MOE (Ministry of Education in China) Humanities and Social Sciences in 2012: A Study on Category of Ideological and Political Education and Its Establishment of System Approved (No.12YJC710028).

Received 10 November 2013; accepted 4 January 2014

Abstract

The function of ideological and political education is the representation of "what can the ideological and political education do". On the basis of origin-tracing study on the literature of Chinese Communist Party and some typical monographs and papers, this paper makes an attempt to comprehensively grasp the process of the formation and development of Chinese Communist Party's ideological and political education theory as well as its present research situation. Meanwhile, it also tries to analyze what should be developed further in future research on function of Chinese Communist Party's ideological and political education.

Key words: Chinese Communist Party; Function; Ideological and political education; Source of theory; Theoretical prospect

LU Jingkun (2014). Review and Prospect: A Study on Function of Chinese Communist Party's Ideological and Political Education. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 6(1), 20-25. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/j.hess.1927024020140601.4145>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.hess.1927024020140601.4145>

INTRODUCTION

Ideological and political education is a social activity conducted by a certain class, political party or social group who follows the law of development of people's ideology and moral ethics and makes advantage of some ideology, political views and ethics to influence their members in a purposeful, planned, and organized way, so that the members will form certain ideology and moral ethics needed by society and class (Zhang, Zheng, & Luo, 2006, p.50). The function of ideological and political education function is a good representation of "what can ideological and political education (originally) do". After analyzing and combing Chinese Communist Party's literature and some representative monographs, people will be enabled to grasp the whole process of the formation and development of the theory of ideological and political education, as well as its current research status and future trends. All these could provide valuable resources and foundation for the further development of study on the function of Chinese Communist Party's ideological and political education theory and also could give full play to the theory.

1. "LIFELINE" THEORY

It is a fine tradition and real advantage of Chinese Communist Party to attach great importance to the ideological and political education. In the beginning of the establishment of the Party, many early Chinese communists went deep into factories, and rural areas to organize trade unions and farmers' associations. Besides, they also engaged in education of Marxist theory for the masses of workers and peasants by virtue of night schools

and publications, waking up their class consciousness, mobilizing and organizing them to participate in the revolutionary movement. In order to ensure the nature of the revolutionary army, the Chinese Communists established systems of Party representative and political commissar which were responsible for political work in the army. These systems have enabled the revolutionary army commander not only to know how to fight, but also know who they are, for whom they were doing, and whom they relied on. All these are closely associated with the nature of revolutionary army. Considering the importance of political work in the arm, people tended to use the metaphor—"lifeline" to explain the position and role of politics in the revolutionary army. In the guidance letter given by the Central to the Central Bureau of Soviet Area and Fujian and Jiangxi Provincial Party Committee in Soviet Area in July 1932, the word "lifeline" was initially used to describe the importance of political work in the revolutionary army. The letter pointed out,

Political work plays a decisive role in the Red Army, each combatant of which should not only be able to have adequate military technology—the weapons in hands, but most importantly, should arm the brain with weapons. Moreover, the present political work in the army should be enriched, and the central political work regulations should be implemented. It should be noted that political work is not incidental, but is the Red Army's lifeline. (Zhang, 2006, pp.78-79).

In February 1934, the General Political Department of Red Army held the first national political work conference, where Zhou Enlai put forward, "political work is the lifeline of the Red Army. You are leaders. The victory of every battle could not be achieved without you and without political work" (Zhang, 2006, pp.78-79). On January 10, 1938, Zhou Enlai emphasized in the "Political Work of Military Army" again, "the political work of revolution is the lifeline of national revolution", "Revolutionary work based on revolutionism is the lifeline and soul of all revolutionary forces" (*Zhou Enlai's anthology (Volume I)*, 1984, pp.92-94). In the meeting of senior cadres in northwest Bureau in April 1944, Tan Zheng, deputy Minister of the Central Military Commission and General Political Department, made a presentation entitled "Report on the Work of the Military and Political Issues". This report summarized the successful experience of political work gained since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, especially since the agrarian revolution and Sino-Japanese War in a systematic way. In addition to this, it also further clarified the nature, direction, status, role, task and methods of political work in the army through the combination of theory and practice. The Report is another important literature in Chinese Party's political work history following the Resolution in Gutian Meeting, and is the cornerstone of Communist Party's ideological and political education theory which went towards maturity. When modifying this Report, Chairman Mao added in

his own hand, "the political work led by the Communist Party in the revolution is the lifeline of the revolutionary armed forces" and stressed, "revolutionary army is not real army without political work" (Li, 1984). In the period of socialist construction and socialist reform, the Chinese Communist Party attached great importance to giving full play to the fine tradition of political work, so the "lifeline" theory has expanded from the military field to the work of economy and all other areas of work. By the end of 1955, Mao Zedong, when writing comments for the book *Socialist Climax in China's Countryside*, not only for the first time clearly put forward the scientific concept, "political work is the lifeline of all economic work," but also stressed that, "political work is the lifeline of all economic work. It is particularly true when the social and economic system undergoes fundamental changes" (*Mao Zedong's anthology since the founding of the People's Republic of China (Book V)*, 1991, p.497). In January 1958, Mao Zedong made a further elaboration in the "Sixty Working Method (Draft)" about the relationship between ideological and political work, economic work and technical work, and reiterated the "lifeline" theory. He pointed out, "ideological work and political work are the guarantee of the completion of economic and technical work. They provide services for the economic base. Ideology and politics are both commanders in chief and the soul. As long as there is a little dereliction in our political and ideological work, the economic and technical work will certainly go astray" (*Mao Zedong's Anthology since the founding of the People's Republic of China (Book V)*, 1992, p.53). After the end of Cultural Revolution, the "lifeline" status of ideological and political work received great attention again. In June 1981, "Resolution on a Number of Historical Issues since the Founding of Chinese Communist Party" was approved in Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Central Committee, which completely put forward the scientific proposition—"Ideological and political work is the lifeline of economic work and of all other work". It marks a new height achieved by the Party in understanding the "lifeline" function of ideological and political education.

After comprehensively reviewing the history of the Party's revolution, construction and reform, the author finds the important reason behind the constant victories achieved by Chinese Communist Party such as mobilizing and leading the people to win the revolution, complete construction and reform and opening-up in a most extensive scope—effectively conducting ideological and political education for the masses at all stages in history. Hence ideological and political education is an important weapon to win continuous victories. It is not dispensable but is essential and necessary. The "Lifeline" theory of the ideological and political education is a visual expression of its irreplaceable role. But it should be noted that owing to the limitations of the times and the development of the

discipline, the “lifeline” theory which is used to vividly emphasize the importance of ideological and political work leaves traces of being sentimental and subjective, making it seem more experiential and less academic theoretical. After 1980s, ideological and political education became an independent discipline. And along with the birth and development of the discipline in its own right, the “lifeline” theory has gradually been replaced by the “position and role” theory which put ideological and political education into a certain hierarchical structure of society organism, reviewing “what the ideological and political education can do” by means of other things.

2. “POSITION AND ROLE” THEORY

Since the birth of discipline—ideological and political education in 1980s, there are a great number of monographs and papers discussing the “position and role of ideological and political education”. In 1983, Zhang Weiping and Zhang Junnan jointly wrote the book *Introduction to Ideological and Political Work*, which is not only a masterpiece in the budding stage of ideological and political education, but also is the first book to discuss the position and role of ideological and political work. The book is composed of eight chapters, systematically expounding the ideological and political education theory. In the second chapter—“position and role of ideological and political work in the Party’s work”, the authors proceed from the perspective of history and reality to discuss the position and role of the ideological and political work in the Party’s work in three sections, pointing out the necessity to fully understand and grasp the position and role of ideological and political work from a holistic strategic point of view. The authors believe that the position and role of ideological and political work is mainly reflected in the following three aspects:

First, ensuring the socialist nature and direction of economic and all other work; second, unifying and improving people’s awareness of working for socialist modernization; preventing and combating the erosion from various non-proletarian ideologies in revolutionary army so as to guarantee people’s healthy thinking (Zhang, & Zhang, 1983, pp.33-34).

In 1986, the book *Principles of Ideological and Political Education* edited mainly by Lu Qingren was published. It comprehensively expounds the basic principles of ideological and political education through the use of knowledge on pedagogy, psychology, ethics and other related disciplines, which thus is regarded as a sign of the formation of ideological and political education. In the chapter—“The position and role of ideological and political education”, two sections are listed to respectively state the position and role of ideological and political education from social and personal dimensions. Compared with all the previous statements about ideological and political education that were too general and abstract, the

book moves a step forward. Besides, “the position and role of ideological and political education” was also talked about in the book *Principles of Ideological and Political Education* edited by Zhang Yaocan in one chapter. But “Position” and “Role” are dealt with individually. As we all know, although there is certain correlation between the position and role of ideological and political education, they are not on the same level. “Position” is the place of ideological and political education in the social life; while “Role” refers to the impact given by ideological and political education on society, collective groups and individual persons. Therefore, “Position with “Role” cannot be equated. Respectively stating the “Position” and Role” thus could reflect that people’s understanding of them is more profound than that in the previous days. Later, such books as the one chiefly edited by Lu Qingren—*Principles of Ideological and Political Education* (1991) and *New Introduction to Ideological and Political Work* (2003) wrote by Wang Shuyin all adhere to the concept of stating the “Position” and “Role” of ideological and political education individually. In 1999, the book *Principles of Ideological and Political Education* edited by Qiu Weiguang and Zhang Yaocan was published by the Higher Education Press. The book fully demonstrates the latest achievements of the study on ideological and political education in that period, reflecting the prevailing development of ideological and political education theory, which thus is listed as “Teaching Materials Facing to the 21st Century” by the Ministry of Education. In the sixth Chapter of the book, the position and role of ideological and political education is expounded in details. The authors notes that the “Position” of ideological and political education should be established from a macro perspective, that is, it should be understood and established from the overall situation of changes in the social structure and social development. In the process of socialist modernization, ideological and political education plays such roles as guiding role, securing role, educational role, coordinative role and motivational role. In addition, the understanding of relation between “Position” and “Role” of ideological and political education is deepened in the book, which points out:

The position and role of ideological and political education are closely linked to each other. Its strategic position determines the extent of its role to play, and its extent of role to play could help achieve the appropriate position in society (Qiu & Zhang, 1999, p.121).

This proposal indicates that whether raising or derogating the position of ideological and political education will inhibit the role of ideological and political education, and only accurately understanding and grasping the position of ideological and political education in the socialist modernization will its role be ensured. At the same time, effectiveness of ideological and political education under the new situation should be enhanced, for

only when the role of ideological and political education is fully demonstrated its position in the social organism could be established and consolidated.

Therefore, it is undeniable that replacing “lifeline” theory with “position and role” theory a huge step forward. But it should be noted that role of ideological and political education is double-edge sword, for its impact on others could be positive and negative. However, when addressing the role of ideological and political education, all the above-mentioned books state positive impacts on society and individuals. In this sense, it is neither realistic nor dialectical. Moreover, when illustrating the position and role of ideological and political education, authors all show significant biased views, thus the statements are so subjective and experiential that they fail to objectively explain “what the ideological and political education can do”. With the development of the study on position and role of ideological and political education in the 21st century, “function” theory which discusses about “what the ideological and political education can do” from its inherent characteristics begins to replace the “position and role” theory.

3. “FUNCTION” THEORY

In academia, Chen Jing is the first person to put forward the proposition—“function” of ideological and political education, and believes that the function of ideological and political work is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

Ensuring the accomplishment of Party’s general task and the adherence to the socialist direction; promoting socialist reform and construction; coordinating the various relationships and conflicts among people; improving people’s ideological and political quality and, nurturing new talents; combating with the wrong ideology and actions (Shen, 1986).

As it can be seen from the above statements, the understanding of ideological and political education’s function still remains on its position and role. Later, Luo Hongtie put forward the “obligation” theory of ideological and political education, and subsequently elucidated its “social obligation” in his book—*Research on ideological and political education*. After reviewing the development of “lifeline” theory, the book indicated that “The social obligation of ideological and political education is security obligation and service obligation” (Luo, 1996). Obligation is what certain professions or jobs are supposed to, able to, and actually do. “What is ideological and political education supposed to do” is people’s subjective expectation, thus belonging to the field of “what do you want ideological and political education to do”. In this sense, it is totally different from “what could ideological and political education originally do”. Besides, “what does the ideological and political education actually do” means its effect and impact exerted to other things, which

have been already played out and are subject to many subjective and objective constraint factors. Therefore, it is also distinctive from “what could ideological and political education originally do”. Based on the fact that “obligation” theory already contains the meaning of ideological and political education’s function, it can be seen as a transition from the “position and role” theory to “function” theory. In the new century, the study on the ideological and political education’s function has been increasingly deepened. The book *Principles of Ideological and Political Education* edited by Zhang Yaocan and Chen Wanbo in 2001 classified the social function of ideological and political education into sub-functions including security, guidance, cohesion, motivation, adjustment, transformation and others, meanwhile trying to summarize the characteristics of these functions. In 2007, The book *Principles of ideological and political education* revised by Chen Wanbo and Zhang Yaocan further divided the function of ideological and political education into individual function and social function, and discussed about the their relations and specific performance. They were convinced that

Individual function means the influence and effect of ideological and political education on individual’s overall development, which finds full expression in survival function, development function and enjoyment function, and that social function refers to its impact on social politics, economy, culture, ecological environment, which finds full expression in social political function, economic function, cultural function, and ecological function (Chen & Zhang, 2007, p.58).

The brightest spot of the book is to explore how to give a full and effective play to social and political function of ideological and political education, especially to social function while stating the relationship between the individual function and social function. It pointed out that the impact of ideological and political education on social life is made by means of cultivating high-quality talents, thus promoting the social, political, economic and cultural development. Therefore, the achievement of social function must be dependent on the full play of individual function. Distinctive from the previous books which either avoided talking the realization of ideological and political education’s function or only elucidated some general and abstract ways of realizing its function, the book pointed out that the achievement of the function could start from the “development of individual persons”, which not only seized the key point, but also had profound significance. Therefore, the book is regarded as “the most profound and representative work discussing the function of ideological and political education at present” (Luo, 2012, p.67).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the academia has conducted in-depth research on the basic connotation, essential characteristics, scope of role, and main contents, approaches of making

influence as well as development evaluation of ideological and political education, which has also garnered fruitful results. However, there is still some room to improve. First, it includes the study on the connotation of ideological and political education's function. At present, there is a hot debate on "what is the function of ideological and political education", and no consensus has been reached. So a lot of explanations come out, such as "purpose theory", "role theory", "competence theory", "result theory", "value theory", and so forth. Although these explanations are similar in content, their methodology of definition is different. For example, some of them make direct quotations from the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* or *Dictionary* added with the cover name—ideological and political education to explain the "function"; some of them borrow the definitions of the "function" from sociology, pedagogy, mathematics and other disciplines directly, and use them to define the "function" in ideological and political education without any change. Such definition and explanation lack logical analysis and deduction, so they could only be regarded as superficial understanding of the connotation of ideological and political education's function from different perspectives. Then it is clear now that later research on this topic should make deeper analysis of and distinction between "function", "purpose", "task", "effect", "value", "competence" and other related or similar concepts, on the basis of which and in accordance with the needs of the establishment of this discipline, the connotation of ideological and political education's function will be revealed truly. The second point needed to improve is about the content and classification of ideological and political education's function. According to the writer's counting, there are more than twenty categories of function in the academia including security function, service function, educational function, guidance function, motivation function, cohesion function, adjustment function, coordination function, transformation function, cognitive function, development function, control functions, persuading functions. Faced up with such a bunch of functions, people could not help wondering: does ideological and political education really have so many functions? Even it really does, but is there any logical relation between these functions?

In fact, there is overlap among all the above-mentioned functions, and some of the functions are apparently put forward after researchers have had an understanding of the reality, thus in this sense these functions are taken for granted to be those of ideological and political education. However, the inherent attributes of ideological and political education itself has determined its "limited function", that is, ideological and political education is not subject to humans' subjective control. Besides, its functions are not visible, tangible, and specific objective physical objects, so identify its functions could

only be identified through indirect understanding of its effects and impact on society and individuals in specific historical conditions. Therefore, it is another area that needs to be further developed that knowing the logical mechanism and mindset of "acquiring abstract laws through complete representations" and "knowing the complete representations through the play of abstract laws". Furthermore, there is a need to reanalyze, sort out, and process all the functions of ideological and political education which are grasped in specific historical conditions in order to obtain functions which contain "many comprehensive laws", "unity of diversity" and could "enable the whole process to produce final conclusions". What is more, the logical relationship and structures between all the functions could also be classified and explained. The third point needed to improve is the research on how to make ideological and political function effectively. To some extent, the final academic destination of study on ideological and political education's function is to put forward feasible and approaches and methods to promote its effective performance, so as to better guide the practices of ideological and political education. However, as far as the current study is concerned, it still remains on the level of revealing and explaining the connotation, classification, and content of ideological and political education; few study is conducted on how to ensure effective performance of ideological and political education. Besides, almost all the current studies are on factors and reasons constraining the function of ideological and political education with focus on macro and basic descriptions. So, all the researches are not to explore the inner mechanism and development laws of the function process of ideological and political education. They are not convincing and are difficult to achieve the expected effects. In this sense, there is still large room to make improvement. The followig study and research should be conducted on an empirical basis and with the assistance of abstract thinking to figure out the phases required to go through when performing ideological and political education's functions. Besides, it needs to analyze what factors are included in the process, and what extent that these factors could exert to ideological and political education's performance. Apart from this, conflicts and laws in the performance process should also be studied. Last but not least, profound and practical approaches to improve the performance of ideological and political education remain to be explored based on an objective assessment of its function.

REFERENCES

- Chen, W. B., & Zhang, Y. C. (2007). *Principles of ideological and political education*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Li, J. B. (1984). An important thought with long-term significance. *Guizhou Daily*, (12), 12 .

- Luo, H. T. (1996). An tentative study on the function of ideological and political education. *Ideological Education Research*, (4).
- Luo, H. T. (2012). *A research on revolution of theoretical system of ideological and political education*. Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press.
- Mao Zedong's anthology since the founding of the People's Republic of China (Book V)*. (1991). Beijing: Central Literature Publishing House.
- Mao Zedong's Anthology since the founding of the People's Republic of China (Book V)*. (1992). Beijing: Central Literature Publishing House.
- Qiu, W. G., & Zhang, Y. C. (1999). *Principles of ideological and political education*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Shen, J. (1986). An study on the function of ideological and political work in new era. *Jianghuai Tribune*, (4).
- Zhang, W. P., & Zhang, J. N. (1983). *Introduction of ideological and political work*. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House.
- Zhang, Y. C. (2006). *History of Chinese Communist Party's ideological and political education*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Zhang, Y. C., Zheng, Y. T. & Luo, Y. T. (2006). *Modern ideological and political education*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Zhou Enlai's anthology (Volume I)* (1984). Beijing: People's Publishing House.