

Research Status and Development of University Students' Political Socialization

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Abstract

This paper generalizes research of university students' political socialization as four issues, namely, the issue of formation of university students' "political self", the issue of a variety of transmission media for political culture, the pattern of university students' political socialization and the mechanism of university students' political socialization. It also summarizes and analyzes studies on these four issues in the recent years with an expectation to provide reference for further research.

Keywords: university students, political socialization, research status and development

With gradual deepening of the great social transformation, significant changes have taken place to people's concept of interest and concept of value and the political conviction of social members manifest the characteristics of diversification, instability and insufficient political participation enthusiasm. In the meantime, just as a lot of scholars state in their works, the phenomenon of social "anomie" in the process of reformation has caused the predominant political culture in socialism to be in doubt, which, to a certain extent, weakens the leading role of the predominant socialism political culture, cripples social cohesion, changes people's basic political concept and affects heritage of social members on the traditional political culture. Through dissemination of the predominant political culture, political socialization makes social members within the political system approve the political system, political idea, political ideal, political value and political behavioral norm within the system and resist against erosion of the non-predominant political culture so as to constitute stability of the entire political system, which makes the role and importance of political socialization continuously intensified in the contemporary society.

Meanwhile, the open social environment and social structure in which Chinese political system is constructed makes profound changes happen to the content, structure and pattern of political socialization. And it is a realistic issue we have to take a new look at how to maintain, disseminate and strengthen the predominant political culture and enhance the efficiency of political socialization.

1. Research Status of Chinese University Students' Political Socialization

This paper sorts out and analyzes the research achievements about Chinese university students' political socialization in the recent years and proposes some ideas and opinions of the author with an expectation to provide reference for study to facilitate university students' political socialization.

1.1 Study on Formation of University Students' Individual "Political Self"

For a long time, in the process of university students' political socialization, study and discussion has been generally emphasized on disseminator (educator) and acceptance object or carrier (education content), while the most fundamental issue in political socialization has been neglected, namely, the "acceptance" issue of the acceptance subject --- university students.

1.1.1 Study on Personality Development Stage of University Students Related with Political Socialization and Its Characteristics

The stage of youngster is a critical period for formation of an individual's world outlook, values of life and political view. The political view of an individual that is formed through learning and practice during the period of youngster has great relationship with all his life and has a direct effect on his characteristics of political

personality during the grown-up period. University students are an important group in social development. In the past few years, a large number of scholars have studied the issue of political socialization of university students who are at the particular stage of university development in growth of youngsters. The scholar Kai Yun held the view that, university students' political socialization has the following characteristics. Firstly, from the perspective of life course theory, the life stage of university students is the final stage in school education and what they accept in the university is systematic and overall socialized education, and ideological and political education is of great importance to university students. Then, this stage will complete the final transfer from "natural person" to "social man". Finally, university students have entered the stage of adult and the feature of their learning and accumulation of their own knowledge enable them to have stronger selectivity and interaction in the process of political socialization and have more independence in the process of internalization. (Kai, 2011) According to Qiu Pingjing, university students' requirement on legalization in the political and social life is unprecedentedly urgent. Nevertheless, as a result of criticism in their own thinking and constriction in their cognition of things, they are quite likely to go to extremes in their observation of things and in their attitude towards the society. (Qiu, 2008) Zhu Zhongxiang and Li Gonggen believed, weak political conviction, indifferent political emotion and utilitarianization of political orientation exist in the process of university students' political socialization. (Zhu & Li, 2011)

Foreign scholars emphasize influences of individual personality structure on political socialization. They thought, acquisition of a political attitude is firstly established on the basis of an individual's personality structure. For example, William F. Stone believed, personality is important to comprehension of a political behavior and identity and cognition of personality and emotional factors in personality not only determine whether an individual accepts a belief in different aspects in his political world, but also determine how he will organize these believes and form a structure of belief and attitude which constitutes an individual's orientation in his political environment.

1.1.2 Study on Internal Psychological Mechanism of University Students' Political Socialization

University students' political socialization is completed with combined action of their own internal mechanism and external indoctrination factors and the internal psychological mechanism is the key to university students' political socialization. Chen Xianggui (2011) thought the internal psychological mechanism of university students' political socialization is embodied by the three levels and four processes of cognition. The three levels of cognition are obedience, identity and internalization and the four psychological processes of cognition are attention and perception stage, selection of the comprehension and thinking stage, acceptance stage and consolidation and explicitness stage. In order to stimulate the internal psychological mechanism of young people's political socialization, it is necessary to pay attention to the important effects of "attention" psychological factor, political and cognitive capacity and political practice. In the meantime, it is also necessary to adhere to consistency of the content in political information disseminated by external educational factors and continuity of the stimulation. (Chen, 2011)

Liu Long applied the acceptance theory into study on university students' political socialization and thought political socialization was an active process of reflection, selection, comprehension, explanation, integration, internalization and externalization of the acceptance subject (university students) relative to the acceptance object (political culture) under the drive of demand. In essence, it reflected the relationship of cognition and practice between the acceptance subject and the acceptance object. (Liu, 2006) Wang Haiping generalized rules in acceptance of political socialization as interest identity rule, rational identity rule, emotional identity rule and value identity rule, and especially emphasized in this process of acceptance, acceptance was a dialectical process with continual development and deepening from interest identity to identity of value concept. (Wang & Sun, 2002) Wang Yi, Wu Xiaoming and Chen Guoliang generalized rules in acceptance of political socialization as demand rule, differentiation rule, emotional rule, environmental rule and repetition rule. (Wang, Wu & Chen)

1.2 Study on a Variety of Transmission Media for Political Culture

Political education and political socialization are conducted by different institutions. The research field about approaches and measures of political socialization basically approve that the following five aspects are the five major approaches of university students' political socialization: family, school, mass media, society and peer group. In the following, we are going to give special emphasis on political the dissemination media of culture that plays a predominant role in university students' political socialization.

1.2.1 School

As for the role that school plays in university students' political socialization, a large majority of researchers believe that, school education plays a quite important role in young people's political socialization. According to

Li Hongjuan and Guo Weigui, although people often hold a doubt attitude towards the micro effect of school education, generally speaking, it is beyond all doubt that school education occupies a central position in the numerous media in political socialization. The guiding effect of modernized school education in modern democratic politics is of indispensable importance to formation, maintenance and development of democratic system and to integration of the national countries. Specifically speaking, school plays its function of political socialization by means of implementation of education policies, textbook and curriculum, teachers and the cultural atmosphere in the school. (Li & Guo, 2010) Hui Bing and Zhang Yingkui thought, although young people's political socialization was mainly realized under the influences of family, social association and mass media, school was still one of the important occasions for their political socialization during the youngster period and its education mode, organization mode and education idea would all affect the anticipated target of young people's political socialization. (Hui & Zhang, 2005) According to Nie Xiaoguang, during different historical periods and in different countries, the important effect of school education in political socialization had its "universality" and how to carry out education of political socialization among citizens had had a long history in western countries. In addition, as one of the approaches to political socialization, school had the most obvious distinction from other approaches that the effect of school in its effect in political socialization had its explicit "directionality". (Nie, 2003) Zhao Hong and Shao Lili held the opinion that, as a formal education institution, school had a critical impact on citizens' individual political socialization and was an important link in citizens' political socialization. The unique characteristics of school education in citizens' political socialization included characteristics of organization, systematicalness, dissemination and education, which other media were incomparable. (Zhao & Shao, 2006)

As for the subject of political socialization --- university students, the particularity of this group lies in that although there are multiple factors involved in their political socialization, it is without doubt that they only have more opportunities and approaches to participate in political socialization during the period of university. The ideological and political education course set up in the university is the major channel for university students' political socialization and a series of social practical activities they conduct in the university are an important link for their political participation, whereas campus culture plays an unconscious role in cultivation of university students' political socialization personality. Nevertheless, about the current situation of political socialization education in the school, it is unanimously acknowledged by researchers that it still requires improvement and how to innovate and optimize the approach in school political education at the current stage is a focus of attention. According to He Weihua, implementation of democratic management on the campus of the university helped to promote university students' political socialization and democratic management in the university was mainly reflected in "whether school decision making takes advices from students, some decisions and events announced by the university, the working style of college and department leaders and the social practical opportunities offered by the university to students", etc. (He, 2009) Implementation of democratic management in the university also feeds a positive and healthy campus culture. Yan Weifeng et al thought that as an important component of campus culture, social practice and university students' social association activities played an important role in university students' political socialization and a variety of theme activities that were arranged thoughtfully were the highlight which "could stimulate students' love in the socialism country and the Communist Party of China and make them firmly have confidence in constructing the socialism with Chinese characteristics." (Yan & Pei, 2007) The ideological and political theory course in the university is a major channel for university students' political socialization education, which is without doubt. However, with approaching of the globalization times and with the development of the times of the contemporary university students group, the traditional ideological and political theory course has faced austere challenges. Therefore, more and more researchers choose to turn their focus of research to how to improve the teaching efficacy of the ideological and political course. Given the phenomenon of ambiguity in political identity among contemporary university students, Yan Suzhen believed, in order to really play the major channel effect of the ideological and political course, we had to innovate the teaching mode by combining contemporary university students' characteristics of the era to realize transition of political socialization education from "inculcation" to "internalization" and, meanwhile, combine organically classroom teaching and social practice. (Yan, 2009)

1.2.2 Network

Emergence of network arouses researchers to give more attention to this newly burgeoning medium, especially youngsters' political socialization under the backdrop of network. Huang Xiaoye made an analysis of influences of network on university students' political socialization with Goffman's frontstage and backstage theory in role playing. (Huang Xiaoye, 2005) Wang Quanyin (2007) (He Weihua, 2009; Hui Bing & Zhang Yingkui, 2005), Wang Fang (2008) (Nie Xiaoguang, 2003), Wang Rongfa (2009) (Zhao Hong & Shao Lili, 2006), Yu Kun (2009)

(He Weihua, 2009), Xu Jianjun (2010) (Yan Weifeng & Pei Chunyan, 2007) Wang Zikun & Sun Bo (2011) (Yan Suzhen, 2009) believed that generation and development of network technology promoted transition of the carrier of political socialization and built a brand-new paradigm in contemporary university students' political socialization: "transition from finite 'node-to-node' to infinite 'node-to-surface', transition from rigid inculcation to active participation, transition from one-way linear to interactive multi-dimension and transition from traditional political man to modern political man".

1.2.3 Peer Group

Study by foreign researchers on the effect of peer group in political socialization has started earlier. For example, Maurice Duverger thought, the effect of peer group in political socialization was no less than that of family and school. With its voluntariness, autonomy and homogeneity as the cohesiveness, peer group became a particular group for social members to simulate a political rule and shape the political psychology. "It seems that peer group is an actual society in the eyes of the group members and they here lead a life worthy of its name, while family and school have a compulsory, hypocritical and external feature." (Huang, 2005)

Domestic scholars Zou Jingqin and He Yusi held the view that peer group was a small environment in social members' life and played an important role in their political socialization. Especially under the circumstance where the traditional family structure declines day by day and modern education institutions becomes gradually improved, both frequency and strength of communication between social members and peer group is continuously strengthened, which clearly indicates that the influence of peer group has been intensified. (Wang, 2007)

1.2.4 Political Social Participation

Practical political social participation is an important mode for university students to realize political socialization and through practical political participation, they are able to consolidate and enhance the political cognition, which helps university students to form a political attitude that conforms with the political standard and enables them to be well aware of their position and role in the political system.

According to Huang Ping, social practice placed university students in a real social environment which made their behaviors approach, up to the hilt, to a real political socialization level, introduced numerous test subjects which resolved difficulty in operation of an individual's behavior evaluation and made it possible to test university students' political socialization level. (Wang Fang, 2008) Hong Manli (2006) (Wang Rongfa, 2009) and Qiao Xuefeng (2009) (Yu Kun, 2009) thought school "should create conditions for university students to actively dedicate themselves to the fervent social practice, know and understand the society in practice, update their political opinions and political views with their own experiences, and diminish their gap with the realistic social and political life so as to build up themselves in practice."

1.3 Theory on Patterns of University Students' Political Socialization

Political socialization is classified into two modes. One mode is the direct political socialization mode, which can be simulated through the following several approaches: socialization in advance, political education and political experience. And the other mode is the indirect mode, that is, the content a citizen obtains about political culture is through non-political socialization which does not have a political tendency at the very beginning, but will affect the attitude of the individual towards politics in the future. Since the indirect mode has no political tendency and is more likely to be accepted, researchers place their focus of research on the indirect mode.

Zhao Haili thought that the indirect mode "has the property of intermediate link and it merely makes training and preparations for political participation relative to the relationship with authority. However, this link is indispensable and it has a close connection with the direct mode of political socialization." (Xu Jianjun, 2010) According to Wang Zongli, optimization of the political socialization of Chinese citizens should contain the following several aspects: firstly, combination of explicit political socialization and implicit political socialization; secondly, combination of formal political socialization and informal political socialization; thirdly, combination of political output and publicity education of special political institutions; fourthly, combination of individual learning and social indoctrination. (Wang & Sun, 2011) Yang Henan thought realization of university students' political socialization should combine indoctrination and counseling in terms of political cognition and stimulate university students' subject consciousness in political participation. (Duverger, 1987)

1.4 Study on Mechanism of University Students' Political Socialization

Mechanism theory on political socialization is a theory that studies whether a whole set of mechanism (integration of institutional arrangement and dynamic structure) can be designed and carried out in the process of political socialization and under the conditions of independent development and voluntary selection of

individuals, incomplete information grasped by the education designers and relative decentralization of decision making.

The academic field has not had profound study on the mechanism of political socialization. Professor Li Yuanshu discussed the issue of dynamic mechanism in political socialization. According to him, “analysis of the dynamic mechanism in political socialization is to reveal all kinds of contradictions implied in social political interaction, the movement rule of these contradictions in the process of social political interaction and their facilitation effect on the three basic processes of political socialization.” (Zou & He, 2011) On that basis, he further concluded, the following were contradictions of four aspects that were implied in social political interaction: initiative and constraint of individual behaviors, adaptability and conflict between an individual and the society as the subject of political socialization, diversity and uniformity between all social structures within the system of the subject and continuity and development of political culture. Movement of these contradictions pushed formation and development of political socialization.

Lou Shuhua believed, mechanism of political socialization mainly contained participation mechanism, dynamic mechanism, stimulation mechanism and innovation mechanism. (Huang, 2008) According to Kai Yun, university students’ political socialization was a systematic and dynamic process and was a kind of mechanism, which contained the target of university students’ political socialization, the political culture, media of university students’ political socialization, selection and internalization of university student individuals, effect of university students’ political socialization, malposition and differentiation between the target and the effect and adjustment of malposition and differentiation. Kai Yun further mentioned that, factors that impeded achievement of the target of university students’ political socialization were mostly implied in the numerous nodes of the mechanism of university students’ political socialization. Thus, adjustment on the mechanism of political socialization seemed especially important to improve university students’ political socialization. (Hong, 2009)

It is generally believed that the mechanism of political socialization has its own structural elements, that is, it is a complex whole of institutional arrangement, dynamic structure and the interactive mode of the two. Discussion of the mechanism of political socialization needs to gradually resolve the following specific problems: the internal structure, operation mechanism, operation process and realization condition of the mechanism of political socialization, and the evaluation, feedback and adjustment of the operation effect of the mechanism of political socialization.

2. Disadvantages of Research on University Students’ Political Socialization

Generally speaking, research of university students’ political socialization has been continuously deepened. Study on the personality development stage related with university students’ political socialization and characteristics of this stage has accurately grasped characteristics of university students’ personality development and affirmed the important influences of political socialization during the period of university on an individual’s concept of politics. This paper further discusses issues existing in political socialization at this stage. Nevertheless, emphasis is not enough on the relationship between university students’ personality disposition and political socialization and there have been seldom any interdisciplinary research on the relationship between an individual’s personality disposition and political socialization, which is an important manifestation for further study on university students’ political socialization. Besides, researchers have also made a profound analysis in the internal psychological mechanism of university students’ political socialization and summarized the acceptance psychological rule in the process of university students’ political socialization, especially application of the acceptance theory into analysis of the internal psychological mechanism of an individual’s political socialization, as from the perspective of an individual, political socialization is a process of receiving individual acceptance and internalizing political culture, but it is still open for further research for specific practical operation.

Researchers also gradually detail their study on all kinds of transmission media for political culture, and they not only focus on the traditional transmission media for political culture, but also generally pay attention to the influences of newly burgeoning media on university students’ political socialization. It is consistently believed by researchers that school is a major occasion for university students’ political socialization and the ideological and political course in the school is a major channel for university students’ political socialization, but it still lacks a relatively systematic mechanism how to play the due role of the ideological and political course and how to establish a vigorous environment in the university to promote university students’ political socialization. The researchers have also fully expounded influences of network on university students’ political socialization and analyzed the mode of influences of network on university students’ political socialization, but most of them put particular emphasis on profound influences of network on the direction and content of an individual’s political

socialization. Still, it still calls for an effective answer and requires further research how the network affects university students' political socialization, to what extent the network impedes formation of university students' political personality and how, how to reduce and even eliminate the negative impacts of the network, how to draw on advantages and avoid disadvantages of the network to build a perfect network ecological environment for contemporary university students' political socialization. Study on the influences of peer group on university students' political socialization reveals and emphasizes university students' pursuit of personality and rationality and independence which increases day by day, and their resistance against the constraint and control of the school and the family, inclined to the fact of peer group life and communication and analyzes that the peer group constitutes the social environment for university students, and hastens the psychological causes for the belonging psychology and group psychology of university students, which indicates that peer group has important influential power on university students' political socialization. However, it is still open for further discussion how to form a positive group political life atmosphere, build a perfect group political environment and direct excellent students in playing a leading role in the group.

The researchers have also noticed the issue of mechanism of political socialization, but studies by both foreign and domestic scholars on the mechanism of political socialization are still at a starting stage. Deep study on the mechanism of political socialization is lacking and knowledge in and grasp of the internal mechanism and features of the process of political socialization is still at a perceptual stage and there has not had any systematic and mature mechanism theory of political socialization. Furthermore, these studies about the mechanism of political socialization respectively come down to all aspects and levels of the mechanism of political socialization, but there has not had any global or systematic study on the mechanism of political socialization. Therefore, it is impossible to display the entire appearance and integrity of the individual mechanism of political socialization and the possible trend and related conditions of development in the future.

Besides, the scholars have also specially expounded and demonstrated the importance of social political participation to university students' political socialization. They consider it necessary to vigorously advocate and positively launch social practical activities and provide effective approaches for realization of university students' political socialization, but an empirical study is lacking in study of specific approaches and methods of social participation and in evaluation of the practice of participation. The study on the modes of university students' political socialization shows that compared with the traditional indoctrination, the mode of the indirect penetration has obvious superiority in enhancing the effect of political socialization. However, further empirical study is still necessary on how to realize indirect penetration in practice.

3. Thought on Study of University Students' Political Socialization

University students are the hope of the nation and the future of the country, so it is of critical importance to the national development and the growth of the young people how to enable university students to successfully realize political socialization and to be the central power that adheres to the socialism path. This is a systematic project and a dynamic process, a kind of mechanism, so the school, the public and the society should all go into action. With development of the times, we have to study the internal psychological mechanism of the acceptance subject on the standpoint of the acceptance subject, motivate the political demand, grasp the acceptance psychological rule, promote university students to have a rational analysis, understanding and selection of the content of political culture, voluntarily identify and accept the political culture, and direct the university students in self-education, independent thinking and playing their initiative and creativity so as to achieve a higher level of socialization.

Then, we have to place high emphasis on integration of the carrier and channel of political socialization. At the time of fully tapping the mass media's function of maintaining and disseminating the ideology, we should also strengthen standardization and management of the public publicity channels of broadcast, TV, newspaper and network, construct a batch of networks with great influences and with integration of theory, thinking, knowledge, interest and service, and attempt to grasp the initiative of public leading. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to innovate political practical participation pattern, develop and improve the political life atmosphere of university students' association group and build a perfect political group environment. All kinds of political socialization institutions should coordinate and cooperate, send out consistent, common and unanimous political information to make the predominant political culture disseminated and deepened and enable the predominant political concept to be continuously accumulated and intensified from shallow to deep and from weak to strong.

Finally, it is discovered that, considering the mode and method of university students' political socialization, the method of indoctrination still occupies a preliminary position. However, the researchers have also emphasized the superiority of the indirect mode in enhancing the effect of political socialization. Thus, the study in the future

ought to be focused on innovation of method, that is, approaches and channels about how to convey social values with an implicit mode, how to explore an artistic penetration mode that is likely to be accepted by students in the school life, campus environment, relationship between teachers and students, personality of teachers and rules and regulations of the school, and how to enable university students to unconsciously and gradually form a certain political concept. The current political socialization ought to be combined with both the domestic and foreign situations in the new situation, and enable university students' political socialization to be more close to reality, to life and to students by considering their ideological reality. It is necessary to attempt to improve the attraction and influence of university students' political socialization modes, mobilize the internal enthusiasm and initiative of university students, enable improvement of "political self" to become a strong internal demand of the university students, practically improve the overall quality of university students and lay a solid foundation for realization of the nation's prosperity and strength, the national flourishing and the comprehensive development of human being.

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