

On the Energy Field of Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract. Based on the field theory in physics and in order to improve the effectiveness of ideological and political education, this paper analyzes the energy field of ideological and political education. Energy field of ideological and political education belongs to the education field. It overlaps moral field and cultural field in some aspects and differs from them in other aspects. Composed of energy source, energy field force and energy field factors, energy field have three function mechanisms: psychology and emotion; information and culture; environment and institution. It could be divided into positive and negative energy. The creation of ideological and political education energy field could get the thinking way of “subject and object dichotomy” in present ideological and political education research out of dilemma, broaden the study horizon and innovate education methods.

Introduction

To improve the effectiveness of ideological and political education does not only mean reforming education and teaching, and strengthening the inculcation and guidance of the core value, but also mean giving full play to the initiative of individual and paying attention to the radiation effect of their thoughts and behaviors. In fact, in the process of ideological and political education, all education factors and all subjective and objective conditions form an unity of interdependence. Within the unity, various positive and negative energies influence each other and transform back and forth, which leads to the formation of a dynamic balance. In light of the energy theory borrowed from natural science and with the aim at enhancing the theory research about the effectiveness of ideological and political education, this paper makes a tentative study of the energy field of ideological and political education and reveals the internal mechanism.

Is the Application of Field Theory into the Field of Ideological and Political Education Possible?

As an everyday concept, “field” refers to a particular space for human activities, such as the stadium, square and so on. However, as an academic concept, it first appears in physics and generally refers to a special form of material existence. Although it is invisible and untouchable, it is real and possesses certain energy, momentum and transfer speed. According to the field theory in physics, the size of field changes with the changes of the field source, the interaction among the field sources depends on correlation and difference of the structure and function of the field sources, and the effect of interaction among field sources are always subject to the interference by other fields in the environment.

“Field theory” in physics provides a new thinking mode for humanities and social sciences research. This thinking way leads people to “combining various elements and their groups into a system in their analysis. The elements get their meaning and function through system and the element property is decided by the relationship between elements and the two-way interaction between the components and the structure”. [1] The field thinking mode is identical to Marx’s thinking mode of relationship. It shares a lot of similarities with system theory, but the basic differences lie in the following aspect: field theory breaks through the thinking limit of the whole and the parts and takes “field” as a dynamic and open existence without clear boundary, while system theory takes holism as the basic starting point, with particular emphasis on the links and interactions between the whole and the parts. Therefore, field theory is more suitable to the study in the field of humanities and social sciences.

Since the late nineteenth century, field thinking has been gradually widely used in the field of humanities and social sciences, bringing about a lot of new achievements. In the field of sociology, Bourdieu took “field” as the core concept of his sociological theory, and smoothly realized his academic dream: transcending the thinking way of “subject and object dichotomy”. In the field of psychology, the German psychologist Lewin borrowed the thinking way in the physical field to analyze the integrity and dynamic of situations and put forward “psychological field theory”. In the public administration field, America Fawkes (C. J. Fox) and Miller (H. T. Miller) put forward the “public energy field” theory in light of physical field in order to avoid the theoretical defects of determinism theory and probability theory. In China, in recent years, scholars put forward “economy field”, “information field”, “moral field”, “thinking field”, “education field”, “culture field” and so on. It’s clear that we have achieved great success since we applied the field thinking into the field of humanities and social sciences. The success is closely related to its transcendence of the thinking way of “subject and object dichotomy” and is inseparable to its mighty explanatory function for the context.

So, is it possible to apply the field thinking into the field of ideological and political education as well?

Firstly, the application of field thinking into the field of ideological and political education conforms to the trend of scientific research and development. Although human society comes from the nature and has a distinctive development pattern and existence way, it is still the humanized nature, and is the objective material system in nature. Marx and Engels created the Marxism doctrine through criticizing and inheriting human’s outstanding cultural heritages including the natural sciences. Therefore, it is a trend to borrow the accuracy of theory studies in natural sciences to study and research the human society. The ideological and political education research should also follow this trend.

Secondly, the ideological and political education and field theory in physics share a lot in common, which is mainly reflected in: (1) the educators and the educated in ideological and political education field influence each other, which is similar to the interaction of the field sources in physics; (2) just as the size of field force in physics field is decided by field source, the degree of the field force in ideological and political education is proportional to the political quality of the subjects of education of ideological and political education; (3) the effect of ideological and political education is decided by compatibility between the educated and the selected education content, methods and means; (4) the realization of the aim of ideological and political education is the result of the interaction among the subfields and the interaction between ideological and political education field and other fields.

Last, there are some ideological and political education researches reflecting the characteristics of “field thinking”. For example, Zhang Hao’s On the Construction of Ideological and Political Education Field, Luo Zhongyou’s master thesis The Study of College Faculty’s Ideological and Political Education from the Perspective of “Field” Theory, Yu Linping’s The Study of College Students’ Ideological and Political Education from the Perspective of “Field” Theory, Hu Lihong’s How to Grasp the Field Thinking in Ideological and Political Education. They are theoretical achievements in this area. Although there isn’t any clear concept of ideological and political education energy field in their work, some have put forward innovative ideas, which show the vitality of the application of field theory into the field of ideological and political education.

What is the Energy Field of Ideological and Political Education and What is the Working Mechanism?

“Energy” in humanities and social science is “the realization of what previously exists only as potential”. [2]The combination of field concept and energy concept means the extension of time and space, in which energy functions potentially and actively. Ideological and political education energy field is composed of field source, field force and field factors. Energy field source is the radiation source which plays the leading role in the field. There are two main categories: one category is the field sources of customs, social relationships, everyday life atmosphere, and moral and political events, which spontaneously influence ideological and political education; another category is the

field sources of school, family, workplace, community and so on, which consciously have functions of ideological and political education. Ideological and political education field sources directly or indirectly influence education objects in the form of “force”, which includes education, expectation, infection, edification, hint, evaluation and so on. That is so-called energy field force. Human is the most active factor of the energy field. Like sunspots, it can burn up from any and all points. Energy produced by burning extends in the form of wave and then influences the entire field as a whole as well as other potential fire points.

There are some complex interrelationships and obvious differences between the energy field of ideological and political education and other fields discussed in current academic circles, such as education field, moral field, culture field and so on. First of all, the energy field of ideological and political education belongs to the education field category. Ideological and political education itself belongs to the education and energy is a kind of exchange form between the educators and the educated. Secondly, the ideological and political education field and moral field overlap partly. The main content of ideological and political education is moral education, but ideological and political education is not limited to moral education. Compared with moral field, ideological and political education energy field emphasizes content extension and the initiative of educators and the educated more. Thirdly, there are some differences between the ideological and political education field and cultural field. The culture is undoubtedly an important form of ideological and political education. However, ideological and political education does not only mean making good use of existing culture, but also mean guiding the development of culture, creating a new culture and improving the ideological and political education energy field

From the aspect of its mechanism, the ideological and political education field can be roughly divided into three forms: the first form is psychology and emotion field. When the content of ideological and political education becomes identical to the subjects’ thoughts completely, a kind of appealing attraction can be produced, triggering emotional and psychological activities of the educated and spreading among the group of people. The second form is information and culture field. In the ideological and political education energy field, culture plays the role of cohesive force, the centripetal force and appeal force, and information influences people’s ideological trends and behaviors. From this aspect, the force of culture and information embodies the energy. The third form is environment and institution field. Human is a product of education and the environment. If the environment education is a kind of soft constraint, the institution is the collection of rigid rules and behavior principles, providing the framework for people’s social behaviors. Through the above three mechanisms, in other words, three subfields, ideological and political education energy field transmits energy to the surrounding education objects three-dimensionally, influencing their thoughts and behaviors.

From the aspect of its nature, the energy in the ideological and political education field can be divided into positive energy and negative energy. Positive energy refers to the sum of active power and emotion that is consistent with the guidance of ideological and political education. The negative energy is the opposite. Generally speaking, the ideological and political education positive energy takes the mainstream culture as carrier, and the negative energy takes the subculture as the carrier. Ideological and political education energy field is reflected in the conflict and integration of mainstream culture and sub culture. Therefore, in order to grasp the dominant power in the educational activities, the ideological and political education workers must be familiar with the subculture. At the same time, they must try their best to restrain and guide the development of the subculture in order to reduce the negative energy.

The Theoretical and Practical Significance of Proposing Ideological and Political Education Energy Field

Firstly, it helps break the method barrier of “subject and object dichotomy” in current ideological and political education research. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has repeatedly emphasized: it is a narrow and incomplete concept to have a division of subjectivism and objectivism. He points out that this opposition develops around three questions: theoretical research and empirical research; research methods focusing on symbolic form of social life and research methods focusing on the

material object of social life; analysis in micro level and analysis in macro level. [3] Bourdieu holds that this opposition goes throughout the field of social sciences study. In fact, it also accords with the present situation of research on ideological and political education in China. Although these two methods have both provided important insights to the social reality, to use them separately is one-sided and is “an obstacle to building an overall social reality”. [4] In order to study the social reality more comprehensively and more objectively, Bourdieu presents a relational thinking mode. “The relational thinking extracts objects of study from the daily hypothesis and the daily context reflecting practical interest of social life, and then turns them into the objects of scientific knowledge”. [5] To encourage researchers to explore the potential and invisible relationships rather than so-called “feature” given by common sense category is Bourdieu’s thinking way of constructing field theory. Based on Bourdieu’s field theory, this paper puts forward the concept of ideological and political education energy field, which undoubtedly has certain significance in solving the thinking predicament of “subject and object dichotomy” in the current ideological and political education research.

Secondly, it contributes to the horizon expansion of ideological and political education field. There is a very common phenomenon in current ideological and political education: the educators on the platform speak eloquently, while the educated below are cheerless and sleepy. Therefore, many researchers and educators put forward a lot of suggestions about promoting the activeness of the educated, innovating education content, mode and method, and optimizing the environment of ideological and political education. Although these suggestions are very systemic, some of them miss the point. This paper holds that the fundamental reason for this phenomenon is that the educators’ positive energy is not absorbed by the educated at all, but is eroded by some negative social events. Considering this reality, this paper puts forward the concept of ideological and political education energy field with the aim of diverting the attention of the educators and the educated from material, energy and information exchange in the education field to the core problem of energy exchange. Only by converting material exchange and information exchange to energy exchange can we reach the aim of ideological and political education. Energy field influences the effectiveness of ideological and political education with the multi-dimensions in space, whole process in time and wide penetration in methods, thus having strong power of behavioral constraints, mental cohesion and dynamic stimulation to the educated.

Last, it contributes to the innovation of ideological political education methods and approaches. British scholar Richard Whiteman holds that everyone has both “positive energy” and “negative energy”, and the right guide needs to be chosen to activate the positive energy and then to spread positive emotions to the surrounding people. [6] The essence of ideological and political education is that through collecting the positive energy in the education field and weakening the negative energy, we could activate positive energy of the educated and achieve the goal of ideological and political education. We are required to re-examine the whole process of ideological and political education and innovate its methods and ways. First, we should strengthen ideological and political education field source. In a society filled with a lot of conflicts and negative energy now, we should give full play to the leading roles of school, family, work and community. At the same time, we should make good use of positive energy in some spontaneous field sources such as cultures and customs, social relationships, everyday life atmosphere, moral and political events and try to form the education field collecting positive energy. Secondly, we should enhance the fitness of education fields. There are three ways: in order to enhance the fitness between psychology and emotion field, we could carry out the ideological and political education according to the psychological features and emotional need of the educated; in order to enhance the fitness between information and culture field, we should choose the more popular modern education means and methods while we insist on teaching by precept and example; in order to enhance the fitness between environment and institution field, we should create a good environment to collect the positive energy and curb the growth of negative energy. Thirdly, we should improve absorption capacity of energy field factor. While we are guiding the educated to converting the social positive energy into one’s behavior motives, we should guide the educated to correctly treating the negative social phenomenon and to converting the negative energy into positive energy.

Summary

All in all, to apply the field thinking way into ideological and political education does not only conform to the development trend of the social sciences research, but also accord with the reality of ideological and political education. Energy field of ideological and political education belongs to the education field. It overlaps moral field and cultural field in some aspects and differs from them in other aspects. Composed of energy source, energy field force and energy field factor, energy field has three function mechanisms: psychology and emotion; information and culture; environment and institution. It could be divided into positive and negative energy. The creation of ideological and political education energy field could get the thinking way of “subject and object dichotomy” in present ideological and political education research out of dilemma, broaden the study horizon and innovate education methods.

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