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## Socialization and Education\*

Socialization is an important subject in the study of the sociology of education. But the concept of socialization does not appear in textbooks on education. From the viewpoint of the sociology of education, however, the principal function of education resides in socializing individuals. The process of an individual's socialization is in fact the process of education.

### The meaning of socialization

Generally speaking, socialization refers to a process in which an individual accepts a given set of cultural norms and becomes a member of a given society. Every society has its unique pattern of social behavior. The process by which an individual learns the behavioral patterns of the society he lives in, thus transforming himself from a natural man into a socialized man, is called socialization. This process of socialization is a lifelong course, a continuous movement that never stops.

To put it concretely, socialization comprises roughly the following four areas: First, acquiring cultural values and social norms. Culture is the sum total of material and spiritual wealth created by mankind in the course of social development. Culture is a social phenomenon, and every society has its corresponding culture. Cultural values can be construed as beliefs, customs, traditions, public opinion, and sentiments commonly held by every member of society. They are a major element of socialization.

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Cultural values are supported by social norms. Social norms refer to ways of conduct that members of society have to observe. Social norms are the basic premise ensuring the normal life of society.

Cultural values and social norms restrain people's conduct and regulate the relations between an individual and society, between an individual and an organization, between individuals, and between organizations.

Second, bringing one's personal goals in line with the needs of society.

The goals mentioned here include both one's lifetime career and specific goals that one seeks to achieve. One's pursuits are always linked to one's behavioral direction. Socialization refers to bringing one's personal goals in line with the needs, customs, and restrictions of society.

Third, gaining the qualifications for membership in society and commanding the skills needed in the pursuit of one's goals.

For one to adapt oneself to society and achieve one's goals it is imperative that one acquire all necessary skills. As society moves forward and social life becomes more complex, there is an increasingly higher demand on the necessary skills a member of society should command. In a society with highly developed technology, education serves as an indispensable channel through which technology and skills are imparted.

Fourth, learning to identify one's identity and one's proper role on every occasion.

Every person is positioned in a network governed by certain social relations. Society requires everyone to behave himself according to the needs and norms stipulated and anticipated by the said social relations. One is required to understand clearly the position and role one has on every possible occasion.

Bourgeois sociology and bourgeois educational sociology interpret the process of socialization merely as a process in which individuals accommodate themselves to society. Marxist sociology and Marxist educational sociology, however, are entirely different. They hold that socialization is not only a process in which man learns to accommodate himself to society but also a process in which man transforms society and pushes society forward. Man transforms society, and at the same time man

also transforms himself.

From the contents of socialization in the few areas discussed above, we can see that all parts are inseparable from education. In this perspective, education is an instrument of socialization. From another perspective, however, the process of socialization covers a wider range than the educational process. Many methods can be used in socializing an individual, and education is only one of them.

### **Theories of socialization**

There have been a great variety of theories of socialization advanced by bourgeois sociologists in the West. They propose different viewpoints, even though they are all based on idealism.

George Herbert Mead, an American pragmatic sociologist, held that in the process of socialization, a child is learning the facts along with their social significance. At the same time, the child is inevitably indoctrinated with a series of attitudes toward the facts. Consequently, the child acquires a social ego. Thus, as Mead saw it, the so-called socialization is nothing but the shaping up of an ego.

Sigmund Freud, founder of analytical psychology, divided ego into three parts: Id, ego, and superego. Freud stressed the socialization into societal norms and considered the socialization of a child as imprinting in the child's mind his superego. Nonetheless, Freud also believed that constant restraint may adversely affect the normal progress of socialization, and an excessive sense of guilt is likely to produce painful mental disease or abnormal conduct.

Doctrinists of relative symbolism hold that language is the chief content of socialization. It is language that makes it possible for people to communicate their ideas, share common attitudes, and understand each other's position and function. Therefore, it constitutes the foundation for the socialization into one's social obligations.

Among the bourgeois circles of sociology and educational sociology it was Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist and educational sociologist, who exerted more influence than others on the development of socialization theory.

By Durkheim's time, France had already entered the stage of imperialism. All the class contradictions, political conflicts, and spiritual crises inherent in imperialism had come out into the open. The ideas of human liberation which were promoted when capitalism was ascendent no longer suited the needs of the imperialist era. Maintaining the security and long-term stability of capitalist society called for a new theory capable of explaining the relations between man and society. The political and theoretical basis for Durkheim's standpoint on socialization was rooted in this situation. He therefore emphasized how the maintenance of a stable order in a capitalist society is possible. He was led to develop theories on the functions of social structure and on the objectivity and compelling nature of social facts. According to Durkheim, society is a self-regulatory system. No individual factor can affect the nature of this system. Accordingly, it means that society is larger than the sum total of its groups and individuals. Social influence restricts the behavior of the groups as well as the individuals. As he sees it, how the compelling nature of social facts acts upon man's behavior manifests itself as the process of socialization. Only by accepting social facts and displaying the process of such facts in one's behavior can one be regarded as having been socialized.

Durkheim's theory on socialization has as its premise the negation of the theory that heredity decides everything. In the book *The Division of Labor in Society*, he writes: "The hereditary parsimony preserves a great value, but it no longer represents any more than a steadily restricted part of individual fortune." "Because the past is not transmitted with blood, it does not follow that it is reduced to nothing. It remains fixed in monuments, in traditions of all sorts, in habits inculcated by education" (*On the Division of Social Labor*, pp. 444 and 443).

Durkheim maintains that the key to socialization lies in an individual's connection with society. About society, Durkheim says: "It is not a simple juxtaposition of individuals who bring an intrinsic morality with them, but rather man is a moral being only because he lives in society, since mortality consists in being in solidarity with a group and varying with this solidarity" (*ibid.*, p. 560). In his view, a child is like a blank sheet

of paper and society compulsorily stamps on it different elements to bring the child's behavior in line with the needs of society. He nearly attributes all social phenomena to morality, and in his eyes, socialization means, by using the compulsion unique to social phenomena, stamping the younger generation with the brand of social norms so that the norms can become internalized into their personality.

The developmental trend of socialization, as Durkheim sees it, can only tend to render individuals into specialized organs of society as the division of social labor continues to move forward. He holds that the higher the level of social development, the greater the significance man's specialization will bear. As men's interdependence increases, they are more able to maintain the stability of their society. It is by using the theory of developing the division of social labor that Durkheim demonstrates and explains his viewpoint: "But does the division of labor by making each one of us an incomplete being bring on a diminution of individual personality? . . . Why would there be more dignity in being complete and mediocre, rather than in living a more specialized, but more intense life? . . . But, in more advanced societies, his nature is, in large part, to be an organ of society, and his proper duty, consequently, is to play his role as an organ" (*ibid.*, pp. 565-66).

What, then, is the most effective means of ensuring socialization? Durkheim regards education as the most effective means of socialization and the compelling nature of social facts over man's behavior as a reliable guarantee for socialization. By applying a sociological point of view to explaining the role of education, he believes that the purpose of education is to form socialized men. Educational undertakings play the role of transforming in a most effective way children of nonsocial character into people with individual personalities needed by society and able to live a collective life. However, the various biological instincts one is born with contradict the social instincts one is going to acquire through education. Only the supervision of social facts can restrain the passion and desire aroused by man's biological instincts and channel them toward the internalization of social norms.

As an influential figure in the theoretical field of social-

ization in the West, Durkheim advocated many views of socialization that deserve our approval. He negated the theory that heredity decides everything and proposed the viewpoint that social facts constitute the decisive factor in transforming biological individuals into members of society. He recognized that the socialization process bears an historical character, namely, it changes and develops with the change and development of society. And he pointed out the role of education as an effective means of socialization. All of these, undoubtedly, are fairly objective and constitute the rational portion of his socialization theory. Nonetheless, we will clearly see the limitations of Durkheim's view when we apply a Marxist point of view to understand the socialization process.

Durkheim's socialization theory is mechanical and one-sided. This is directly related to his political goal of upholding the decayed system of capitalism. Pursuant to this goal, he bestows on existing society a significance of absolute dominance over the individual and places the individual in a totally passive position bereft of any choice. As a result of socialization, an individual can only turn out to become an effective social organ maintaining the functions of the existing society.

True, social environment plays a decisive role in the process of transforming biological individuals into members of society. Marxism unequivocally affirms that man's essence is "in its actuality the sum total of all social relations" (*Selected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, p. 8). Nevertheless, for social realities and the various relations in society to be transformed into elements of an individual's essential structure in no way relies on the so-called irresistibly compelling nature of social facts; rather, it goes through the transformation medium of social practice and activities in which man maintains contact with the social environment. If one ignored the major significance of the subject's active participation in social activities, one would be unable to understand correctly the entire process of an individual's socialization, still less to incorporate the process into a scientific organizational order.

In the article "On Feuerbach's Program," Marx clearly indicates that "social life is in essence practice" (*ibid.*, p. 18). When expounding on the relation between man and society, Marx

consistently stresses the necessity of not pitting society against man as something abstract. That man is being a man is because he acts in the capacity of an existence in society. The materials needed for his activities and even the language used in his thinking are all provided by society. His being and his activity itself are social in nature. Only in the course of social practice in which an individual personally participates can he develop his social character and personal qualities.

The development of man's social character goes alongside the development of social practices. Furthermore, the development of man's social character also promotes the development of social practices themselves. With regard to the change in man's essence and the development of social practices, Marx observed in *The German Ideology*: "No matter whether for the purpose of a universal generation of such a communist ideology or to attain the purpose itself, we must bring about a universal change among the people. This change can only be realized through a practical movement, through revolution. That the revolution is imperative is not only because there is no other way to overthrow the ruling class but also because the class that overthrows the ruling class can only get rid of through revolution all the outmoded and dirty things. Only then can it become a new foundation for society" (ibid., pp. 76-77).

According to the Marxist viewpoint, in the process of an individual's socialization, aside from the subject's hereditary quality and the restrictions placed on him by the social environment, it is necessary to have the subject's positive participation in the activity of social practice as well as a sense of consciousness that controls the subject's behavior in the process of the activity. The consciousness is indispensable and, to a large extent, it will affect the shaping of the individual character within the process of socialization. The subject's practical activity, which Marxism emphasizes, is fundamentally different from either the "ego," as advocated by Mead, or the "super-ego," as advocated by Freud. To analyze the relations between man and society from the perspective of the Marxist theory of knowledge, we shall see that the two, from whatever angle, form a dialectical relationship of mutual dependence and mutual promotion.



What the process of individual socialization stresses is the aspect in which society conditions the development of man. Despite the extreme complexity of the relationship between man and society, the history of social development has proven that the relationship is a dialectical one. However, it cannot be denied that in the process of an individual's socialization society commands the principal aspect of the contradiction. Society not only conditions the shaping of social man but also restricts man's subjective initiative and his capacity in propelling the development of his life in society. Therefore, the essence of socialization is the way that society uses a unique pattern as it forms individuals to become its members.

Furthermore, Marx identifies the law of social development and projects the direction in which society moves by applying the viewpoint of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. From the angle of the division of labor, he recognizes how man develops. He links the division of labor with the revolutionary nature of production by large-scale mechanization and posits the theory that the society's need to socialize man and the trend of its development calls for an all-round development of man's social belonging. This is an immutable law of historical development. As a social man, one should, as a lifetime goal, aim not only at accommodating oneself to society but also at propelling society forward. This is precisely the standpoint of the dialectical materialist theory on socialization.

### **The function of education in the process of socialization**

As we know, the process of socialization is one in which an individual, based on man's unique physiology and in light of the nature and the developmental needs of the society in which the individual lives, cultivates his social character, develops his skill for social life, enriches his understanding about the facts of human life, and accommodates himself to the environment and transforms it. In this process, the socialization of man is not only conditioned by the nature of society but also restricted by the level of historical development of the society.

In primitive society, slave society, and feudal society when

productivity remained at a low level, human culture and knowledge were underdeveloped, and man's experience in life was far from abundant. Therefore, the requirements for how an individual could accommodate himself to society were minimal. Socialization in this period had certain common features. The content of socialization was to focus on the internalization of the norm of social conduct and the acquisition of a general skill to earn a living and a mode of behavior. The manner of socialization was in keeping with the characteristics of the natural economy, namely, the individual fulfilled his socialization through his practice in real life and through his free contacts with other members of society. As society in this period was underdeveloped and moved forward at a snail's pace, there was no need for the individual to possess large amounts of culture and knowledge or sophisticated skills to earn a living. It was not necessary, either, for the individual to equip himself with the capacity of adapting himself to the changes in social development. Therefore, it was relatively easy for one to go through the socialization process. The socialization was mainly a natural process fulfilled by a young person through mimicking others within the context of other outside influences.

School education appeared toward the end of slave society. However, during the entire historical stage of feudal society schools had not yet become a universal institution for the overall socialization of young people.

In China, the content of school education was mainly ethical codes and moral principles, the orthodox thoughts of the ruling class. These were themselves behavioral norms in keeping with the political program of the feudal class. In Western countries, religious forces occupied the dominant position. Schooling was invested with a heavy religious color. The purpose of education was to train able people for the feudal ruling class rather than help the educated quickly fit themselves into the general needs of life in society. The feudal estate system imposed restrictions on candidates for education. Only a few offspring of the ruling class were qualified for schooling. In addition, due to the differences in strata, the students received different levels of education. Therefore, we should admit that at that time, the socialization of the younger generation as a whole was basically a

natural process of socializing life.

The higher level and speed of social development set an accelerated, stricter demand on the socialization of individuals. Only by turning the natural process of socialization into an organized and systematic course of activity can we bring under scientific control the speed and content of man's socialization so that it can keep up with the pace of the advancement of history. Social practice has proven that school education is the ideal, organized course to realize the universal socialization of individuals. In 1763 and 1794 Germany and Prussia promulgated respectively compulsory education decrees. They were followed by the state of Massachusetts in the United States in 1852, Britain in 1870, and France in 1881 and 1882, all of which adopted legislation to make universal primary education of children compulsory. Since then educational institutions have taken upon themselves the function of a universal socialization of each new generation of society. Parallel with this, the form and content of socialization have undergone a qualitative change.

Before the schools assumed the function of universal socialization, the process of an individual's socialization mainly took place in one's home. To a large extent, the socialization process was spontaneous. In addition, as every family had its unique features and different conditions, the socialization level of the new generation could hardly keep up with the requirements of social progress, much less provide conditions to facilitate the development of society. Since the schools undertook the job of socializing the new generation, the process of an individuals' socialization has undergone a transition from an unorganized spontaneity to an organized, purposeful course of activity. This organized, purposeful process of socialization requires that the entire course be planned and guided by scientific soundness so as to help realize the all-round socialization of an individual in the shortest possible time.

In modern society, the total knowledge of society and science grows at an amazing speed. One characteristic of contemporary society concerns its determination to maintain the speed of its developmental level and its social production of scientific knowledge. As knowledge grows at an extremely fast pace, it is

inevitable that the aging process of knowledge also quickens. Therefore, in society today the socialization process of an individual has become a lifetime career for the individual continuously to accommodate [in society] and create new life. But in the course in which the individual matures both physically and mentally, a preparation period for the individual to grow into a member of society, the socialization process is even more important for the individual. This is because, undoubtedly, such a process will form the foundation for the individual's socialization in his adulthood. Consequently school education has undergone a fundamental change in its function of socialization in modern society. The change finds expression not only in the changed audience of education but also in the higher and more complex demand of socialization set on those being educated.

In modern society every occupation is characterized by a high degree of specialization. And the occupational structure in society is rapidly changing with the endless emergence of new industries and continuous decline of old trades and professions. This makes it necessary for a member of modern society to acquire not only highly specialized knowledge but also the capability to adapt himself quickly to newly changed professions. The socialization function of school education is therefore not limited to a general, common socialization, namely, to provide the citizens in society at large with the necessary skills to make a living, and the patterns and norms of their behavior. In addition, it has to help individuals acquire the highly specialized vocational skill and also the ability quickly to adjust their knowledge make-up to cope with the change in their professions.

#### **Function and problems of China's education in the present socialization process**

In addition to the fact that the developmental level of society directly determines the socialization function of education, the different nature of society and its different cultural traditions set different demands on the socialization of individuals living in the particular society. Therefore, the socialization function performed by schools in different countries or localities also

differs.

A person, whoever he is, must live under a given production relation, and the development of his social nature can in no way exceed the production relation's control. Marx once pointed out that a man is what he produces and how he produces. To appreciate the relations between society and the individual and between the development of society and the development of an individual from the perspective of dialectical materialism and historical materialism should serve as the basis for our inquiry into the issue of socialization in the real life of China's society and the function performed by China's schools in the process of socialization.

Socialization of any individual is carried out not only under the direct influence of the mode of production, the macroscopic social environment, but also under the direct control of microscopic environments of an individual's activity which are restricted by the macroscopic environment. These microscopic environments include one's family, school, the organizations one maintains contact with, and the mass media. Among them the school can be regarded as the most effective microscopic environment for individuals' socialization. Judging from the current level of development in China, family education can no longer meet the demands of an individual's socialization set by society. And the socialization function performed by one's associated organizations, like that of the family, is also spontaneous and voluntary. As for the mass media, whose development in China is still at a rudimentary stage, they have yet to acquire the capability of providing a systematic socialization of individuals. Only educational institutions, as a type of social organization, have the capacity to provide an organized, systematic all-round socialization of the individuals according to the strict demands of society. In this sense, school education at China's present stage is the crucial factor deciding the level and nature of an individuals' socialization and the success or failure of the socialization process.

In light of the difference in age and mental development of those receiving education and pursuant to the different requirements on socialization at different stages of social development, school education can help the individuals gradually acquire the

basic knowledge and skills necessary to make a living in society, learn to observe the basic social norms of conduct, foster the ability to choose correctly their lifetime careers, and develop the various capabilities for them to adapt themselves to the roles they play in society and to create new social lives. As a process one must undergo in order to make the transition from an immature individual in society to a mature, independent member of society, school education is the most effective and most economical process of socialization. In light of the science of pedagogy, educational institutions can bring up to the maximum extent an individual's ability to participate in and create social life, thus pushing society forward. This is one special feature that marks school education apart from other means of education.

School education is the bridge through which an individual can move forward from his or her family to society. Whether or not the overwhelming majority of young people, having received this basic education, can quickly adapt themselves to the needs of an independent life and bring into play their various roles in society as its members is the gauge to measure the success or failure of the socialization function of schools in a given period of time.

In view of the specific conditions of China's progress in socialist construction today, we can look into the socialization function of school education from two angles: its inadequacy and improvement.

To begin with, we should examine the inadequacy from the demands that China's economic development sets on members of society in regard to their scientific knowledge, their occupational skill, and their ability to conduct creative thinking in social life as well as to what extent they can meet such demands. Generally speaking, in China today primary education has been made universal in rural areas and junior secondary education in towns and cities. Nevertheless, the necessary knowledge and skill for carrying out production in society that students are expected to acquire during their school period are far from adequate. Not only graduates of rural primary schools but even graduates of senior high schools in the countryside cannot meet the need of carrying out scientific farming and

modernizing agriculture. Senior high school graduates in the cities lack a certain graduation training. After they are employed, they have to start from scratch to learn all the occupation-related knowledge and skill. Most of the graduates of regular high schools can hardly adapt themselves to the requirements of employment. This gives expression to the major inadequacy of school education in imparting to the students knowledge about life and work skills, thus hampering the ability of individuals to adapt to society and help society move forward. The purpose of socialization is to enable an individual to fit in with the social environment in which he lives and to fulfill the duties he is obliged to perform as a member of society. China is a country with a vast territory. The development is uneven among different regions, and every locality has its unique characteristics and requirements. As far as members who live in a particular region are concerned, they must have characteristics different from members of other regions so that they can accommodate themselves to such special requirements. It is an objective reality that calls for the school education to perform its socialization function in close connection with the practical requirements of that particular place and at that particular time. However, school education in China is mechanically uniform and one-sided in terms of imparting the knowledge of production, science, and culture. This is unfavorable to the endeavor of bringing the socialization structure of the new generation as a whole in line with the life structure of various local regions. And the general school education neglects to train the students in occupational skills, and those who have received a universal compulsory education lack the occupational skills based on a certain amount of knowledge. Such being the case, they are not only unable to meet the requirements of their initial employment but still less can meet the need of changing jobs, which will frequently occur when society is highly developed.

Second, from the angle of how the younger generation, through education, can accommodate itself to the needs of China's superstructure based on public ownership, there is still inadequacy involved with regard to the socialization function of school education. Right now the central task of our educational

undertakings is to enable those who receive an education to meet the needs of constructing both material and spiritual civilizations and help the construction of the two civilizations move forward. To help individuals cultivate a social quality of socialist civilization is where the socialization function of China's school education differs fundamentally from the socialization function of bourgeois schools in the West. In his report to the Twelfth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Comrade Hu Yaobang pointed out the necessity of constructing socialist spiritual civilization along with the progress of socialist economic construction. And in unequivocal terms he explained the specific requirements of spiritual civilization in the undertaking of ideological construction. To put it in a nutshell, this requires one to bear revolutionary thinking, possess a Communist moral quality, and behave with proletarian organizational discipline. All of these should form the core of the behavioral norms and lifetime goals that Chinese citizens should attain in the course of socialization. Despite the many efforts made by the party, society, and school in this regard, and despite the things that have been improved, we cannot yet say that our school education at present has already attained the demands set by society. Some of our younger generation are still involved with quite a few problems in terms of the minimum socialist public ethics and the most fundamental concepts of organization and discipline. The problems involving teenagers and young adults in how they can accommodate themselves to the demands of spiritual civilization in society embody the inadequacy of our school education in terms of how it can provide the students with correct viewpoints and guide them in understanding the practical contradictions in society and in correctly handling them.

A correct understanding of the law of school education is a direct guarantee for schools to bring into maximum play their role in the socialization of individuals. Recognition of the law of social development and the law of socialization mirrors one's understanding about the law of school education. Only by correctly understanding and applying these two laws can the socialization process be carried out through school education without a hitch. At present, our schools lack a clear and con-



crete understanding about the demands that development of society has set upon the socialization of individuals and also the ideological content and levels required by socialization. And the manner of education also has many aspects that do not conform to the law of how an individual develops. Consequently, the people trained by schools cannot make a smooth transition to the stage of leading an independent life.

Our school education needs to be improved along the line of accommodating to and promoting the development of both society and the individual. Only by doing this can we truly bring into play the proper function of socialization and help push forward the economic and cultural development of the Chinese nation.