Let scientific culture become the basic feature of social culture

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Scientific culture is usually perceived as the culture of the scientific community. It includes the specific rules, norms, spirit and values shared by the scientific community. However, from the perspective of cultural functions, the influence of scientific culture is by no means limited to the scientific community; in fact, the specialization of science is not necessarily a barrier to culture, as scientific culture has long been rooted in and nourished by social culture and is also subject to the constraints of social culture.

1. Scientific culture is an inherent component of social culture

Compared with the long history of human evolution, the history of science is relatively short. However, during this short period, science has gained a notable place and has profoundly shaped human society, from the structure of relationships and codes of behaviours to thinking patterns. Science has become an integral part of modern society and a driving force for the evolution and progress of modern society.

China has embraced modern science for only a hundred years. The ‘Western learning spreading to the East’ movement allowed science to take root in China. A set of institutions and systems underpinning the scientific endeavour has been gradually established and has been used for social development. The slogans ‘science and technology are the primary productive forces’, ‘developing the country through science and education’, ‘scientific outlook on development’ and ‘innovation-driven development strategy’ indicate that science is an important engine for the development and functioning of Chinese society; it is closely connected with China’s politics, economy and culture.

To participate in global competition and international dialogue successfully, China should develop a social culture that is understood and recognized by Western culture and demonstrates its own cultural confidence. Although traditional Chinese culture remains the bloodline of China’s social culture, the social culture today is increasingly shaped by science. We can no longer look at science and society in isolation; nor can we think about scientific culture and social culture in a fragmented way. In a broader sense, scientific culture has been formed by the social context and is an inherent component of social culture.

2. Scientific culture as the basic feature of social culture is an indicator of advanced culture

Scientific culture is an inherent component of social culture. Its position, forms and functions in social culture are the variables that determine the level of modernization and advancement of social culture. Thus, making scientific culture the basic...
feature of China’s social culture can advance the Chinese culture.

The spirit of reason that defines scientific culture helps move society towards a rational and fact-based reality. In China today, social culture has not yet caught up with the development of science and technology. Therefore, we should nourish the social culture with a scientific culture. This can help to replace habitual obedience with rational thinking, so that the social culture can truly balance instrumental rationality and value rationality and boost the level of social civilization and public happiness. It can also help to overcome blindness and impetuosityness, so that the social culture can promote further development in science and technology on the basis of facts.

The methodologies of scientific culture can help the public to raise questions and solve problems in an orderly and effective manner. A set of scientific research methods has been established for the development of the natural sciences. With the guidance of scientific culture, scientific methods and empirical evidence can be deeply rooted in people’s hearts. This can encourage society to adopt an objective attitude when facing the myriad problems that China is bound to face on its journey towards building a modern socialist country and help people solve those problems with an inquisitive, evidence-based approach.

The critical mindset of scientific culture can push for the elimination of backward and outdated ideas from society. Entering a new historical period, the critical spirit is still the driving force for the progress of China. The critical mindset in scientific culture is purposeful and methodical. It can drive out the ‘bad money’ with ‘good money’, eliminate backward concepts that are out of step with the advance of modernization and old thinking that hinders the progress of society, and create a positive, truth-seeking, friendly and innovative social atmosphere.

To make scientific culture the basic feature of China’s social culture, it is necessary to infuse social culture with the essence of scientific culture, such as the rational spirit, the empirical spirit and the critical spirit. Thus, the social culture can better serve the country’s strategic development, give a boost to economic development and people’s living standards and play a prominent steering role in the construction of China’s socialist modernization.

3. Leading the trend of social culture with scientific culture

Given the existing barriers to interaction between scientific culture and traditional social culture, efforts must be made to bridge the divide so that scientific culture can be fully released to society from within the scientific community and set the course for a renewed social culture. We can achieve this by the following measures.

First, strengthen the communication of scientific culture by focusing on promoting the spirit of scientists. The spirit of scientists embodies the core values of scientific culture and is an ideal vehicle for integrating scientific culture with social culture. The human faces of scientists and stories about their lives are a window through which the public can get close to and understand science. Promoting the spirit of scientists can help people better understand and accept scientific culture, thus realizing the role of scientific culture in influencing people’s thinking and behaviour.

Second, promote public understanding and participation in science comprehensively and build the public’s trust in science. At present, the Chinese public is very receptive to cutting-edge scientific and technological products, but scientific culture is yet to be accepted by the whole population. The public still largely sees science as an import from the West that is only relevant when attached to Chinese traditions. The reason for this is the public’s lack of understanding and participation in science. We need to give the public more opportunities for exposure to science, encourage and guide the public’s participation in science, technology and innovation, and respond with tolerance to the public’s questions and dissatisfaction with science, so people can accept and embrace scientific culture.

Third, add more content with a humanistic spirit and values to science education to strengthen the roots of scientific culture. Education provides a solid foundation for the advancement of science and technology and is a critical link in efforts to improve scientific literacy for all. Science education is now an integral part of the basic education system but it should not be limited only to scientific knowledge. Instead, it should incorporate humanities content and values, thus planting the seeds of scientific culture in social culture and making it a mainstream and basic feature.
Scientific culture is an important component of modern social culture and gives it energy and vitality. Making scientific culture the basic feature of social culture is conducive to fostering a social environment in line with scientific, technological and innovative progress. That integration also helps to establish the cultural confidence of a China that is capable of engaging in international dialogue and provides the cultural impetus for the Chinese dream of national renewal.

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