

Exploration on the Basic Characteristics of Centralized Political Culture and Democratic Political Culture*

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Abstract—The modernization of political culture is an important part of the whole political modernization. The modernization of Chinese political culture is actually a process of transformation from traditional centralized political culture to modern democratic political culture. This transformation is not only the natural growth process of democratic political culture, but also the conscious political culture construction. To carry out this kind of self-conscious construction, it's necessary to understand the basic characteristics of centralized political culture and democratic political culture.

Keywords—centralized political culture; democratic political culture; characteristics

I. INTRODUCTION

As China is now on the road of high-speed modernization, political modernization has naturally become the due content of China's modernization. China's political modernization is a long-term process with the goal of developing socialist democracy. Given that the premise of China's political modernization is the highly developed autocratic centralized politics in China's traditional society, the process of developing socialist democratic politics actually means a profound transformation — from the totalitarian politics implemented for thousands of years to the modern democratic politics. This transformation, naturally, is a multi-dimensional systematic project, which not only includes the democratization of the political system, but also refers to the transformation from the traditional centralized political culture of China to the modern democratic political culture. On the one hand, this transformation is a natural growth process of democratic political culture in Chinese society; on the other hand, it is inseparable from the conscious political and cultural construction of Chinese people. The premise of this kind of self-conscious construction is to have a deep understanding of the basic characteristics of the two different political cultures and their fundamental differences. Therefore, this paper attempts to

make a preliminary analysis of the basic characteristics of centralized and democratic political culture on the basis of previous research results.

II. OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL CULTURE

Political culture is a political concept put forward by Almond et al in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States to represent "various subjective factors dominating people's behavior in the political system" and were widely accepted and used.

Almond et al. used the concept of political culture only to represent the "psychological orientation of social objects". "When we speak of the political culture of a society," he said, "we mean the political system as internalized in the perceptions, emotions, and evaluations of its members." Political culture "is a set of political attitudes, beliefs and emotions popular among a nation in a specific period". It can be seen that this concept proposed by Almond et al. has a narrow extension, which only refers to the psychological level of members of the political system and does not include many cultural contents such as thoughts and theories in a broad sense. The concept was proposed to explain how people behave differently and have different political consequences in different political systems with the same or similar structure. Therefore, the function of this concept is to provide a fundamental psychological explanation for the differences in people's political behavior. Any political behavior is based on a specific political psychology; specific political psychology often leads to the occurrence of corresponding political behaviors. When a specific political psychology becomes the general psychological orientation of the members of the political system and forms a relatively stable general political behavior pattern, it can be said that a specific political culture has been formed.

Therefore, the so-called political culture refers to a general psychology-behavior pattern of the members of the political system representing their relatively stable basic political ideas, political psychological state, political motivation on the basis of which a fixed psychological pattern has been formed and the basic pattern of political

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behavior thereby generated and decided.¹ This kind of psychology-behavior pattern not only contains the micro level of individual members, but also refers to the common psychology-behavior tendency of all members of the whole political system.

No matter in the centralization politics or in the democratic politics, the content of political culture is the foundation on which the whole political formation is built, therefore has the incomparable importance. Of course, in different political forms, the content of this political culture is different or even completely opposite. Concerning this difference, Almond and Verba divided political culture into three basic types in *The Civic Culture — Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*: regional type (villager type), obedience type (subject type) and participation type (citizen type). The latter two types correspond to the centralized political form and democratic political form respectively. The so-called obedience type (subject type) political culture is a kind of psychological behavior pattern that is generally reflected in the members of the political system cultivated by the long-term centralized governance. It can be simply called the "centralized political culture". Correspondingly, participation type (citizen type) political culture, which is cultivated in modern democratic political life, is a kind of political psychology-behavior pattern reflected in modern citizens, and it can be called the "democratic political culture".

In the process of China's political modernization, although the regional political culture is also of importance, the traditional Chinese political culture is mainly reflected in the centralized political culture. And the modernization of Chinese political culture is the transition from centralized political culture to democratic political culture. Therefore, this paper focuses on the different basic characteristics of these two kinds of political culture.

III. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CENTRALIZED POLITICAL CULTURE

Centralized political culture is the psychology-behavior pattern of the members of the political system under the centralized politics. In this pattern, members of the political system have a clear cognition, emotion and value orientation of the existing order of the political system, such as roles, structure, authority, norms and their own responsibilities and obligations in the output of the political system, while their value orientation towards the input of the political system and their own self-orientation as political participants are very low. The relationship between members and the political system is essentially a passive subordination relationship. People in this political culture "often passively accept the rule, and because they realize that they cannot

¹ Here, the author has a broad definition of political culture, including the political behavior pattern determined by the political psychology. Because the basic pattern of political behavior is determined by the relatively stable political psychology of the behavior subject, the two are closely related and it is difficult to completely separate them. Moreover, the actual political behavior represents the political psychology, and behavioral outcome which is divorced from the reality cannot fully reflect the inner psychology of the behavior subject.

have influence on the government, they passively obey the government regulation in real life. They neither have any expectation for the political system, nor do they neither want to have the ability to participate in political life. In this culture, people see themselves as subjects, not as citizens in government."

Specifically, centralized political culture embodies the following characteristics:

A. Irrational Features of Psychology and Behavior

Members of the political system as subjects, have their political cognition, political emotion, value orientation and concrete political behavior more out of non-rational factors than rational ones. These non-rational factors include: religious belief, such as belief in the divinity of the ruler and the ruling order; personality worship, believing in the moral and ability advantages of the ruler; moral passions, such as loyalty and devotion to the ruler and country, or the Utopian belief in the divine purpose of revolution and domination, etc.

B. Worship and Reverence for Authority

Due to the above non-rational factors, members of the political system have a kind of blind worship and reverence for authority. They believe that the ruler is far superior to them in religious status, moral quality, ability and quality, so they have a strong sense of trust and worship for their authority. Hence, they are in awe of the ruler. They often blindly obey the ruler's orders without thinking, even if the obedience will lead to the loss of their own interests. They believe in and worship the ruler and his authority, so they neither doubt the rule, nor seek to limit the power of the ruler, nor try to participate in the political process.

C. Sense of Inferiority, Negativeness and Passive Obedience

Corresponding to the worship and awe of authority are the doubts and diffidence of the members of the political system about their ability to influence the political process. This lack of confidence can come from the sense of inferiority and lowliness of ordinary people, or from the powerlessness of a closed political system that excludes participation by ordinary people. In a word, members of the political system under the centralized political ideology are passive in participating in and influencing the political process and results, and lack initiative and enthusiasm. They are used to passively obeying the vast majority of orders delivered by the system.

D. Holistic Values and Obligation-based Concepts

In the ideology of centralized politics, there is more emphasis on a kind of holistic value rather than encouraging the concept of individual-based. The state and political system are regarded as the existence of metaphysical values which are independent and beyond individual interests. The dominion and the position of the ruler are divinely ordained or ordained and are therefore above individual value. The purpose of politics is not the individual of the moment, or even the person of the moment, but the construction of the

glory of god, an ideal utopia compatible with the heavenly law or the future. Under such a holistic political view, the consciousness of individual rights is suppressed. In political life, the primary is not the rights and interests of individuals, but the responsibility and obligation individuals undertake for the political system. Only when individuals fulfill their obligations to the political system can they obtain their own existence value and significance.

IV. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CULTURE

Significantly different from the democratic political culture is a participatory political culture which emphasizes individual rights and political participation. In this political culture, members of the political system "have a strong and clear cognition, emotion and value orientation towards the political system as a whole and its input and output, they have a positive understanding and a high evaluation of their rights, abilities, responsibilities and the effectiveness of their political behaviors as members of the political system". Members of society believe that the political system is related to their own interests, so they believe that participating in politics is not only their own right, but also a means to safeguard their own interests. As a result, the general public is actively asking to be involved in the political process in order to influence political decisions and is fairly confident in their ability to participate and influence the political process.

The Characteristics of Democratic (Participation) Political Culture are as Follows:

A. *Secular and Rational Psychological Behavior Pattern*

People no longer believe that politics and governance have a sacred foundation, and they believe that politics and the state, rulers and authority are produced for practical reasons and do not have any sacred nature. The role and purpose of the political system (state, government) is to safeguard the individual and overall interests of its citizens. Most of the political actions of members of the political system are motivated by personal interests, and morality, religion, ideals and passions no longer play an important role.

B. *Distrust and Non-blind Obedience to Political Authority*

Whether from which presupposition (evil of human nature or self-interested economic man), members of the political system have decided that rulers and officials are not to be trusted, so suspicion, oversight and regular rotation are necessary, not least to limit the power of the state. They no longer completely trust and blindly obey the decisions and orders of the political system, but think deeply and weigh them. If they realize that these policies and orders harm their own interests, they will seek for change or compensation. In addition, the idea that everyone is equally capable of reason and the idea that everyone is equal makes people no longer feel that the governor is more intellectually and morally superior than they are, and therefore no longer blindly believe in his governing ability.

C. *Consciousness of Individual Interests and Rights*

The interests of social members are highly differentiated, and everyone has a clear understanding of their own interests. The protection and realization of such interests became the basic motive of all their political acts. This gave rise to a sense of the sanctity of individual rights and a high sensitivity to the preservation of their integrity and independence, especially from the encroachment of government power and is highly sensitive. On the basis of this individual right standard concept, the instrumentalist concept of the state came into being, and the political system was regarded as an instrumental existence established to protect and realize individual rights and interests, so it no longer had any independent value and significance. The whole purpose and significance of the existence of political system is to promote the realization of individual interests of citizens.

D. *Strong Confidence in Their Ability to Influence Political Processes and Policy Outcomes*

This confidence comes from the belief that everyone is equally capable of reason. It is precisely because of this concept of equal reason and the sense of equality originated from liberalism that people no longer feel that they are inferior to the rulers in terms of ability, so they require sharing political power and participating in the political process. This strong confidence combined with a suspicion of the moral superiority of the rulers produced the fifth characteristic democratic (participation) political culture:

E. *Members of the Political System Have Strong Political Activity and Enthusiasm, and Have a Strong Sense of Political Participation*

They realize that only by participating in the political process can they fully and effectively safeguard their vital interests. Therefore, members of the political system are very active in politics and participate in the political process at all levels, trying to influence the policy results. In most cases, such participation is manifested as the expression of vital interests, and more deeply as the involvement in the formulation of specific policies. The political participation of members can be carried out in the form of individuals, but most of the time it is organized as interest groups to take advantage of this organizational advantage for political participation.

V. CONCLUSION

Political culture is the conceptual and cultural foundations of any political ideology. Since the first emperor of Qin, China has established a unified centralized autocratic politics. Especially since the Ming and Qing dynasties, this imperial despotism reached a peak. This centralized autocratic politics also created a centralized political culture characterized by the worship of imperial power, the decline of rights, negative humbleness, and passive obedience. The long-time cast of this kind of political culture upon the thought world of the Chinese nation finally had led to the decline of Chinese traditional political civilization and even

the whole Chinese civilization. Today, the task of China's modernization is to realize the overall rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In this career, it is one of the most important tasks to realize political modernization and democratization and construct modern political civilization. The core of modernization is human modernization. It is of utmost urgency to understand the characteristics of different political cultures, and then get rid of the autocratic dross of centralized political culture, realize the transformation of political culture to democracy, and cultivate the modern civic personality with a strong sense of rights and political participation to realize the construction of modern political civilization and the overall innovation and revival of Chinese civilization.

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