

The Form of National Identification in China in the 20th Century

Qianni Pan^{1,*}

¹Wuhan Britain-China School, Wuhan, Hubei 430000, China;
Corresponding author e-mail: qianni.pan@protonmail.com

ABSTRACT

The social upheaval in modern China gave birth to the modern enlightenment intellectual class, and also imposed dynamics on people's national identification, especially the intellectuals. The process of identification forming is discussed based on the understanding of Chinese and Western culture and the choice of Chinese culture outlet. The form of national identification in China in the twentieth century has brewed the development trend of structural changes in modern Chinese culture. The socialization practice theory was applied into historical area, through sense breaking, sense giving and sense making, to illustrate how the identifications of Conservative and New School formed. Considering the social events as the background, western culture as the seeker, it was the culture shock that broke the original sense, and the constant culture input that gave the new identification. When the sensory processing was successful, the advantages of Western culture were recognized and accepted, thus forming a closed identity (new school). However, if the sense making relatively failed, there would be ambivalent identification (Conservative).

Keywords: National Identification, Westernization, Standard Chinese Culture, Sense Breaking, Sense Giving, Sense Making

1. INTRODUCTION

National identification is one of the primary issues for intellectual history in contemporary China. From the Tang dynasty (A.D.618), China achieved world-leading prosperity and centralized itself in the world (i.e., Sino-centrism). Chinese people gradually formed a sense of superiority that only Cathaysian was orthodox and civilized, while other nations were barbaric [1]. However, during the late Qing dynasty and the Beiyang Government (A.D.1840), China was invaded by the western countries and faced with the shock and impact from the west with the "impact-response" instant relation [2]. Local government and scholars realized the importance of modernization and political reform. Nevertheless, the sequences of reform were not satisfying. Consequently, Chinese people underwent anxiety and confusion about the salvation of the country. Their attitude towards national identity had been distorted and reversed tremendously and the form of a self-degrading manner appeared.

At that period, when national power declined, Chinese techniques and regime systems were overwhelmed by a foreign power. Tradition culture and national identity were challenged. As for the tradition, whether the Chinese should insist on it or replace it with westernization was the major issue. Conservatives and New School held distinctive positions in terms of self-identification. Conservatives believed the Chinese should persist in their own culture and system. New School believed the cultural characteristics were out-dated, which hindered the development of the nation. Conservatives were mainly made up of traditional

gentries, while New School was composed of intellectuals who used to study abroad. To some extent, the background of the intellectuals determined the divergence of the Conservative and the New School.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to discuss the process of identification forming in the context of the organization at the society. The article is illustrated through the socialization practice (sense breaking, sense giving, and sense making), which imposes dynamics on the cognition.

2. CONSERVATIVE AND NEWSCHOOL

The conservatism was represented by Rulun Wu, an enlightener, who put forward that "With the prevalence of the western culture, no one will pay attention to national culture and history. Witnessing the remains of Confucianism and Zhou culture disappeared like Greek culture or Babylonian literature is a sorrow. [3]"

Hongming Gu, Yaquan Du and Shuming Liang [4] believed the differences between west and east culture were attributed to the characteristic of nations (from the geographic, historical aspects, etc.), instead of the characteristics of times who believed the Chinese culture was lagged behind western culture due to the slower progress of growth. And they claimed the decline of the national power was caused by the loss of cultural characteristics. Thereby, in order to make China rise in the field of culture and to recover its lost characteristics, a restoration of standard Chinese culture was imperative. This belief aroused not only national confidence but also cultural complacency. Conservatives did not admit the backwardness of China's inherent culture and opposed to

the criticism and transformation of Chinese traditional culture.

New School believed the differences between East-West culture were attributed to the characteristics of times rather than characteristics of nations. This attribution was easy to lead to a total negation of the national culture. Its beliefs spread. From Shi Hu, who directly proposed his statement "Accept the world culture of science and technology and the spiritual civilization behind it, let that world culture contact our old culture fully and freely, and take advantage of its vigor to break down the inertia of our old culture [5]" to Xujing Chen, Xin Zheng, and Enrong Feng's claims "If we aspire to absorb western science, we have to absorb other aspects of western culture [6]", nearly all of these perspectives could come to a conclusion that "Westernization from the base and root is the way out for our nation [7]", believed by Foquan Zhang. A radical reform that followed the pattern of westernization would lead to the revitalization of the Chinese nation.

The reason why Conservatives placed standard culture as the most important factor to revitalize the Chinese nation was that people were restrained by the Chinese traditional cultural system. The traditional Chinese system took the Confucian guides and disciplines as the core and the maintenance of the traditional patriarchal ethical order as the value goal [8]. The pursuit of national spiritual autonomy (pride and confidence), and the mission of protecting the national culture to inherit (patriot) were rooted in the Confucian elitism. For conservatives, it was hard to abandon the consciousness of national cultural community, and it was also impossible to carry out effective rational control and thorough self-criticism on Confucian ethics, even from an emotional point of view. The conservatives scholars' faith in culture was the most critical element for national survival. Besides, they believed that the decline of modern China was largely due to the decline of culture.

On the contrary, New School believed the traditional culture was retained too much. Foot-binding, polygamy and gender inequality - these old and barbaric traditions should be forsaken as early as possible. When western theories and technologies were introduced to China in the late Qing dynasty, New School scholars aimed to enlighten the locals and to help achieve unity at the culture and politics levels. However, the ideas contradict at home and abroad always existed due to distinct cognition: religion, science, weapons, culture, etc. The argument between traditional Chinese and Western medicine was a typical example. The complete imitation towards the west (the realistic needs of seeking development) was against the national identification (the emotional sustenance and spiritual needs). Therefore, two undercurrents of culture never stopped their confrontations during the formation of self-identification. Whether it is more necessary to maintain sovereignty spiritually or to achieve the imitation of Western for social improvement became a controversial question. Hence, the thoughts, actions and self-identification of intellectuals were bound to be differentiated, though they were all searching for ways out.

3. NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

"Identification is the process of emerging identity [9]". The socialization practice theory will be applied to the historical area: national identity, in this article. Regarding Chinese as an organization forming self-identification, all the social events from the late Qing dynasty to the 1930s should be considered as background factors.

Sense breaking is defined as "involving a fundamental questioning of whom when one's sense of self is challenged...[creating] a meaning of void that must be filled [10]". This socialization practice occurred naturally during the culture shock. During the Qing dynasty, the spiritual world of the vast majority of Chinese intellectuals has been locked in by the constant Confucian thoughts for thousands of years. The chain of defeats, the destruction of the nation, and the exploded arrogance and comfort faced by the Qing dynasty were all unexampled shocks. And the steady-state pattern of traditional Chinese society was under the constant impact. The western culture, which was in preponderant status, broke the sense of "superior" culture and civilization of intellectuals. Therefore, the original identity was shaken, and the value system, ethics system, the traditional culture were doubted. It eventually resulted in the national identification's sucking into a vacuum.

Sense giving refers to the attempts to guide the "meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality [11]". However, when it is applied to this historical topic, the sense giving does not have the tendency of attempting or guidance meaning. Society has an impact on forming national identification, both intentionally and unintentionally—sense giving process functions passively under the natural promotion of society and ideologies. And culture clashes these multiple effects. As China opened plentiful trading ports, communication tools (translation, publishing) were imported. The thoughts and civilization from the Occident were input continuously and strongly, with little resistance. Virtually, the superior western culture played a role as a thought leader or seeker, to some extent. Although the group (the whole Chinese, especially intellectuals) experienced knowledge awakening (sense breaking, and sense giving), the group was still in a relatively closed social environment, being subjected to a highly organized hierarchy. In the process of sense giving, natural programming and the formation of strong intra organizational bonds promoted the national identification, and it began to be shaped differently. Distinct and cohesive groups were formed further.

Under the culture output pouring the intellectuals, who accepted the western theories and system more completely, New School reached a relatively encapsulated sense-making. And they finally formed a stable identification. This maturity of the national identity and thoughts could nearly ensure logical self-consistency. For the conservatism, the step of sense giving did not process well due to the emotional dependence on a traditional culture. Therefore, finally, at the sense-making step, the ambivalent identification formed. Both of the identity formed by the New School and the Conservative could be illustrated by the model, which was shown in figure 1

A Process Model of Identification

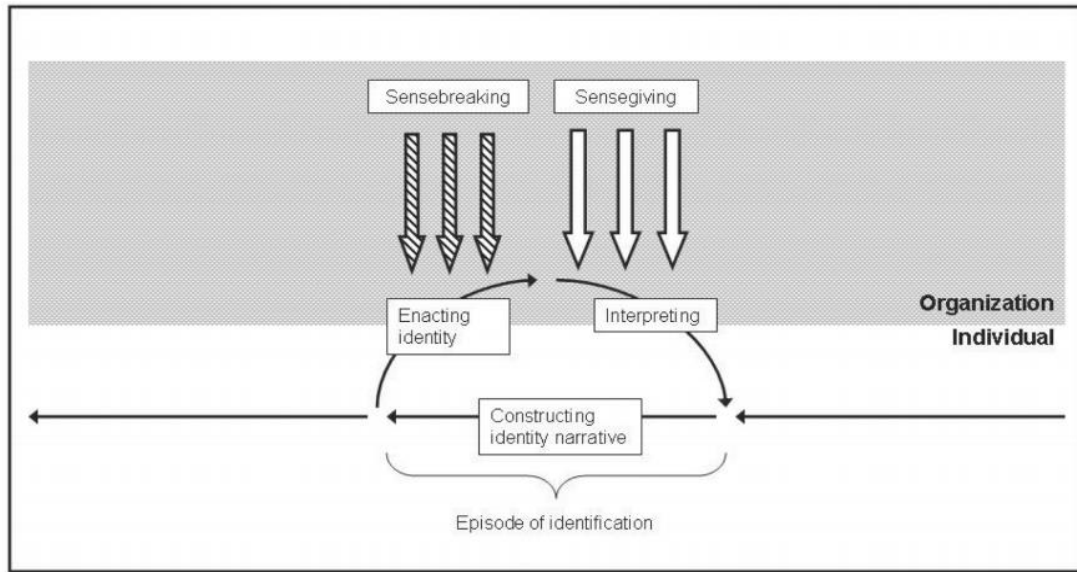


Figure 1. Organization (background) imposed sense breaking and sense giving to individuals [12].

Social validation is usually necessary for new identities to take root and grow [13]. When the national self-identity faces the external shocks and impacts, reflections are processed unaffectedly, and then they form further ideologies and actions. All those reactions that impose into the society enact in varied ways. The continuous validation could be provided by sense giving process, aiming at verifying the feasibility of its methods. Whether successful or not, the revolutionaries and intellectuals would both encourage the building and exploration of identity characteristics.

The formation of identification develops in the form of sets, as shown in figure 2, from narrow to broad. The national spiritual autonomy and patriotic enthusiasm are the core of identity. The national crisis, internal corruption, and the external impacts that the nation were faced with, are the content of identity. And the formation of identification is replenished by behaviors of identity: adhering to the cultural standard, or attempting and intending to execute westernization.

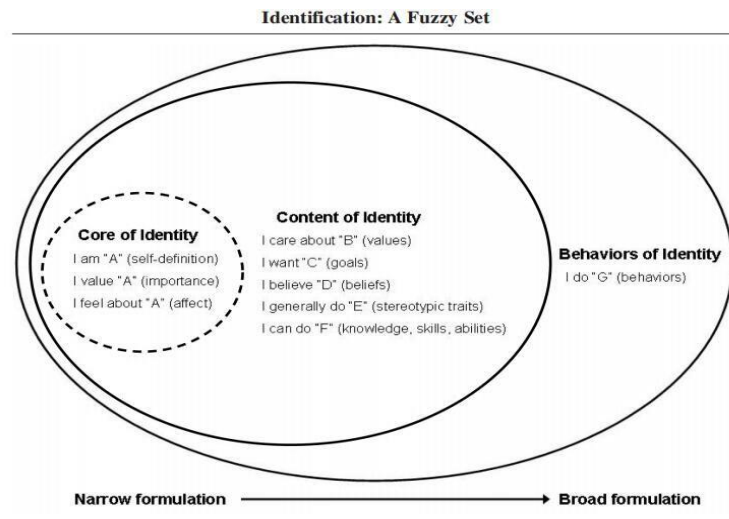


Figure 2. Three main components, core, content and behaviors from framework to detail determined and formed the identity. [14]

4. CONCLUSION

During the process of identification forming, the contradictory and complex mentality of the intellectuals showed apparently. The scholars in the late Qing dynasty were restricted by their historical views, ethics and other cognitive limitations. Therefore, they expected these new information and techniques from the west could help to cope with the emergency and to strength national power. Moreover, how to deal with the issues of "awakening China" and "rejuvenating China" has been affected by the realistic demand of pursuing national spiritual autonomy since the late Qing Dynasty. The reason for the divergence of Conservative and New School was that they have different views on traditional Chinese culture. The Conservatives believed the Chinese culture was retained too less, resulting in insufficient development. The New School claimed the Chinese culture was retained too much, and eventually resulted in culture decline. Regarding the culture shock as sense breaking, and the pouring cultural input as sense giving, the identification formed either ambivalently or stably while using the socialization practice theory. These complicated mentalities not only profoundly affected the social changes and the process of modernization of society, but also provided with ways for discussions on the value and the modern adaptation of Chinese culture.

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