

# Phylogenesis and Embodied Self-Reflexivity of Mind —Based on George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism

Zhen Huang

College of Humanities, Tongji University, Shanghai, China  
Corresponding author. Email: huangzhen\_jen@163.com

## ABSTRACT

The social psychology of George Herbert Mead shows that society is the source of mind and self-emerging from the biological matrix, and mind and self are indispensable for the complex types of social organizations seen by human beings. It is precisely because of advanced language ability and developed mental mechanism that individual humans can adopt others' attitude toward themselves through role-playing, and then enter their own experience as an object to promote themselves to become their own object, so as to allow the emergence of reflective consciousness and reflective intelligence. Through this theoretical basis, we can find a more appropriate method, which is expected to develop a more systematic and complete science about mind, self and society.

**Keywords:** *Phylogenesis, Sociality, Embodied mind, Self-consciousness, Symbolic interaction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In George Herbert Mead's works, human beings are a specific species, and people's behaviors are mostly based on a clear definition (or intelligence formula) of the world of experience, intersubjective relationships, and individual self. Mead tends to emphasize the social existence of human beings, and social existence (or social process) is considered the primary basis for the emergence of reflective intelligence. In addition, the relationship between man and oneself is first realized and objectified through the relationship between self and others. Consciousness is assumed to be an integral part of this process. It is constantly tested in the relationship with human needs and nature and potential as the object of meeting needs. In this way, human beings are more likely to creatively place themselves in the position of other reference points, systems and object perspectives, and view the world from the perspective of others.

## 2. IMMEDIACY OF SENSATION AND SOCIAL BEHAVIORISM

Mead presupposes the basic social nature of human beings, and adds that only through human sociality can individual organisms become individual subjects. [1] Therefore, the individual subject is presented as an active, intentional and social existence. Mead emphasized that sociality is a process that pervades the entire nature, not

just human society. The concept of sociality has two aspects as its foundation in natural evolution: on the one hand, the private perspective of an organism is not single, and sociality means the existence of multiple perspectives of membership at the same time; On the other hand, the private perspective of an organism is connected with the "present" given, and it involves the projection of the "present" to the "past" and the "future". Therefore, sociality also means the "emergence" of the present, that is, the "reality exists in the present". Mead argued that the perspective is a real "natural slate", which is generated from activities and makes the form of activities more and more complex. Therefore, perspective is not just a subjective psychological phenomenon, nor is it an arbitrary point of view held freely, but a product of continuous activity. [2] In short, the subjective experience of the individual subject on time and events is reflected in the passage of nature, and the passage of nature provides the conditions for the development of human social forms.

As Mead said, the self-reflexive ability is consistent with the concept of practice, involving the basic and essential activities of species to solve problems and meet needs. In other words, human life is not only the continuation of life, but also cannot be understood as a certain static demand or instinct and a certain process of adaptation. Because the mind is never passive, in every perceptual experience, the mind of the perceiver is actively shaping the perceived things and reconstructing

the experience world under the action of selective perceptual stimulation. Obviously, human society is a constructive process, and new things are constantly appearing in the experience of organisms. In the process of experience, it is the novelty of human behavior that makes historical changes and social evolution possible. However, this does not mean that people can produce as they please. Mead emphasized that behavior and cognition are limited by the world of existence, and also by the relationship between human needs and the situation that appears in the “present” time. This means that the material world constituted by “meaning” responds to individuals in a continuous time series, which has a normative meaning. And Mead's discovery of life and history also eliminated the a priori definition of human nature. Mead pointed out that “experience” constitutes an organism, and individual organisms are born in an already meaningful world. The construction of “meaning” includes reflection on “past” behavior and prediction of “future” behavior, but “meaning” is not only a spiritual element, but also a part of the interaction between organisms and the environment. In a nutshell, “meaning exists in social behavior before consciousness or meaning consciousness appears.” [3]

The so-called selective perceptual stimulation is due to the sensitivity of life forms. For example, in the inanimate process, the closest to selection is catalysis; [4] Or in the behavior of some single-celled organisms, there are signs of acceptance and rejection. Therefore, Mead clearly pointed out that even these lower creatures have this lowest level of consciousness. Although some organisms are considered to have a conscious relationship with nature, they have no thoughts because they cannot communicate with each other through linguistic ideographic gestures or important symbols with common meaning. In contrast, the human organism is different in nature, because the relationship between human and nature is a self-conscious and reflexive relationship. Therefore, Mead used the theory of evolution to synthesize a wide range of data to give a coherent overview of the entire life panorama from the origin of life on earth, the evolution of new species to the emergence of human language, thinking, self-consciousness, and behavioral abilities. In this way, this emergence theory can be used as a synthesis point of human individual consciousness, overall social consciousness and natural process itself.

### **3. CONVERSATION OF GESTURES AND ROLE-PLAYING**

Mead pointed out that, on the one hand, psychic mechanism is an emerging ability, that is, understood as a function related to the life of a species. The emergence of thinking as a symbolic content enables human organisms to participate in a more complex society and production process. On the other hand, self-

consciousness is produced through the internalization of the objective meaning in language and the interactive mode (or social environment) in which each child is born. Obviously, the mind does not experience that it is separated from the world. The initial position is a primitive encounter, which precedes any form of reflection. Therefore, the goal of spiritual evolution is to have complete self-consciousness, and to a certain extent become an obedient and reflective self.

The basic structure of human language lies in the tendency of unconscious behavior as a product of natural selection, so language is a practical consciousness that exists for others. [5] Mead emphasized that the primitive emotions of all languages begin with a moan or grunt caused by a sudden change in breathing, accompanied by an indicator. At first, sound didn't even have a function, it was merely a rhythmic breathing disturbance caused by changes in the social situation. [6] When voice gestures evolve into ideographic gestures, they become the true source of all derivative forms of language itself and symbols. According to Mead's analysis, unlike other body movements, in any social interaction, language gestures allow individuals to respond to their own gestures and the gestures of others at the same time, that is, the way individuals hear and respond to their own voice is similar to that of others. Therefore, the language posture allows the individual to become an object of himself, that is, to give the individual the ability to conduct internal dialogue in his own mind, thus constituting the mechanism of thinking. Inner dialogue is carried out with the same ideographic signs as in social interaction, and language structure as a sign and sign system makes it possible to confirm the field of meaning between subjects.

The term self (or self-consciousness) is widely used here to refer to a special attribute of the human mind, that is, the ability to create and maintain symbol systems among members of a group, and to combine and preserve symbolic information. Mead regards the self as a process, not a structure. In the process of experience, the meaning of an individual's posture is shared by himself and others. Through the use of this ideographic gesture, communication occurs at a different level, that is, communication becomes a universal social activity, which involves every individual and requires every individual to respond to society in a conscious way. Therefore, communication is the universal logic of the operation of society and a condition for the self-development of social experience. In other words, communication also defines the individual and society. In the process of communication, the individual is the other first, followed by the self. Only by positioning yourself in the role of another person, the individual's consciousness will rise in experience and reintegrate into the growing self. This involves the premature birth of human babies, followed by the lack of any clear instinct at birth, and long-term dependence on caregivers. Babies form

habitual responses to objects in the environment. With the development of the cerebral cortex and the continuation of social stimulation, babies begin to realize that habitual responses have not produced the expected effects and that their actions are still blocked. In the process of perceiving the growth of the outside world, children then become objects of themselves, and they talk to themselves in the role of specific others.

In the child's "play" stage, he just continuously plays the role of others, such as parents, doctors, teachers, animals, and so on. When playing the role of the other, the child rehearses the expected behavior of the other in his own imagination, but cannot organize the various roles into a complete social behavior. However, children obtain the inner dialogue of the mind through symbolic interaction with the other. As Mead said, "When an individual is awakened to play the role of the other, he begins to play the role of the other, so that he acquires the mechanism of thinking, that is, the mechanism of inner dialogue, which is the last step in the development of communication." [7] Then the children enter the "game" stage, and the competition between individuals requires cooperation in terms of time, place and competition rules. For example, in a football game, every behavior of a participant is determined by his assumptions about the behavior of other participants. As an organized process or social activity, a team like a team is integrated into the experience of any one of its participants. In its own right, the team is the generalized others and the organization of the attitudes of those individuals participating in the same process. After childhood, in the social experience of real life beyond "play" and "game", individuals see themselves as a broader social group. "It is this kind of development that makes a society that uses communication as a medium the life process becomes possible. The spiritual life is produced here-through this process of continuous transition from one system to another, realized through the process and system structure contained in each system. This is a constantly emerging domain." [8] Therefore, organized groups or social groups that give individuals self-unification can be called "generalized others", and the attitude of generalizing the other is the attitude of the entire society. [9] Only after the individual successfully internalizes the attitude and symbolic meaning of the generalized others, the "self" will appear because he enters his own experience as an object. Therefore, according to Mead's point of view, the mechanism of human thinking, as far as the symbols of social communication used in thinking, is a kind of inner dialogue. The introduction of this communication process within the individual fundamentally changes the individual's position on the surrounding world, and gives the individual a new characteristic of "action formation", that is, the composition of human behavior is not only limited to the biological structure of the individual body, but also includes the social and cultural structure of historical individuals.

#### **4. "I" AND "ME": RECONSTRUCTION OF INTELLIGENT SOCIETY**

In the social self, the individual is at the same time the "I" and the "me" related to the "self". Through the two key concepts of "I" and "me", Mead has determined the different stages of social behavior, because the dynamic relationship between "I" and "me" is always formed in the social environment in which the behavior occurs. The "me" is the organized attitude of others [10], which always exists within the individual, potentially shaping every behavior; the "I" is the active response of the individual in actual situations [11], it is constructed in the present. Specifically, as an individual adopts a series of attitudes, the "me" is rooted in the expectations obtained from the interaction between the self and others in the "past". As the scope of individual social experience expands, these expectations increasingly represent not only the attitude of a specific individual, but the attitude of the entire social group, Mead described it as the "generalized others." If the "me" involves the hidden and explanatory stage of social behavior, then the "I" is the actual reaction of the individual to this interpretation process, that is, the public stage of the behavior. As Mead said, "The 'me' in the above situation must be constituted by social relations. If this situation opens the door to impulsive performance, then you will get a special sense of satisfaction, high or low, the source of this satisfaction is attached to the value of the expression of the 'self' in the social process." [12] Therefore, the "I" is a novel response to the "me" given in the social situation. And existence is not entirely given in the traditional and accustomed "me". As an individual's response to the attitude of others, the "I" is a constantly emerging, spontaneous, impulsive, and unpredictable part of the self. The novelty of the "I" is due to the social nature of all individual interactions.

Mead went on to say that in society, as long as each individual is fully integrated into the society as a whole, he has rights and obligations. [13] An individual who is aware of his own rights and obligations is not only aware of the rights and obligations of others, but also of the social unity between himself and others. The unity, stability, and order of society come from the common sharing of certain basic things, such as norms, emotions, and values. People tend to regard common values as the power to maintain social stability. On the contrary, people think that the conflict between values or the disintegration of values will cause inconsistency, confusion and instability, which reflects the tension between the internalized content of attitude and the emerging ability to reflect. Mead found that the social structure in the historical context is often repressive because it hinders the full expression of human self and limits the opportunities for individuals to integrate various expectations of the self into a unified whole. In other words, when the creative behavior of the "I" exerts and

opposes the control influence of the social “me”, conflicts potentially exist in the individual's subjectivity and social activities. [14] Then, “Social control will depend on the extent to which an individual accepts the attitudes of those in the group that participates in social activities with him.” [15] In a conflicting social behavior, the estrangement or hostile attitude between participants directly reflects their dissatisfaction with the role they are expected to play in the subsequent construction process.

Then Mead proposed that for individuals and society, a common normative order is not incompatible with conflicts that reflect their own interests or the interests of specific groups. Since the emergence of human society, various conflicting social behaviors have also promoted the occurrence of human society. Motivation for progress and change. This conflict is resolved through the individual's reconstruction of a specific social situation and the modification of a specific social relationship framework. This process also expands the consciousness of the shared group and the potential for further creative response and change. [16] The changes in the individual's self-consciousness and the changes in the broader structure of society are inseparably linked in social behavior, so social reconstruction and self (or personality) reconstruction are interrelated. “Because the trajectory of human dignity and value only exists in the individual, not in the abstract society, the function and purpose of moral behavior is to help each participant develop themselves in the process of social interaction, or help them realize their self-worth and personal achievement.” [17] Therefore, Mead concluded that the value of an orderly society is crucial to the survival of the “self”, but if there is to be a satisfactory development of a society, there must also be space for individual subjects to express themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

George Herbert Mead, as a social behaviorist, began his exploration of the mind not from the reflection of consciousness itself, but from the behavior of consciousness. The fact of the mind is a statement of experience, so spiritual phenomena (mind and self) appear in history and time. The individual completely internalizes his conversation of gestures with others in the social process, and the attitude has evolved into an “important symbol”. Among them, voice posture has gradually evolved into a language mechanism. Thinking mediated by language constitutes the thinking mechanism in the field of mind by using important symbols that have the same meaning to themselves and others. Since the self itself is fundamentally a social process and an internalized dialogue, the reasonable level of value does depend on this self-expression. Social moral progress does not lie in making the individual's nature adapt to the fixed reality of the moral world, but in constantly rebuilding and recreating the world with the

individual's progress.

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