

The Mechanism Behind Individuals' Choice of Group Interests and Personal Interests

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ABSTRACT

In the review of the formal theories, the view of the relationship between group interest and personal interest is diversified—the gap of the empirical study on its existed for a long time. Therefore, the purpose of the paper was to explore the tendency and mechanism of individual choice between group interest and individual interest. Employing questionnaires collected both online and offline, the paper collects solid data to support the view. The questionnaire designed four dilemmas to judge the individual choice tendency of group interests and personal interests and collected the data of demographic variables to observe whether the individual background would influence the choice. The result showed that the choice of group interests always overwhelmed that of individual interests, and the choice tendency did not change with the change of any demographic variables. It suggested that the mechanism behind the individual choice of group interests and personal interests is the trade-off of the benefits one could get in each option, regardless of the group or personal meaning of the choice. This paper should attract the attention of some group regulation makers because it is an important topic to explore the mechanism behind the individual choice, which affects the effectiveness and rationality of their rules.

Keywords: Group interest, Personal interest, Moral dilemma

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Shalom, the core meaning of individualism is giving priority to personal goals over the goals of the in-group. The core meaning of collectivism is prioritizing in-group goals over personal goals [1]. Group has been valued since ancient times. Therefore, the group has become a moral standard imperceptibly. Group interests are related to morality in the decision-making process. In contrast, individualism is only a balance and choice of individual interests, usually regarded as selfish.

Classical psychological theories are used to explain the derivation of group interests and personal interests. In psychoanalytic, Freud proposed that the superego can be opposite to the ego; that is one of the reasons why the conflict is caused. Jeanne concluded that the superego is like a substructure of the ego [2]. Martin considered that in Freud's theory superego comprises many aspects of the character, and they are often being grouped. Also, he wrote that superego is modified by the ego, which is the

foremost part of solving the oedipal conflict [3]. Meanwhile, morality is imposed by parents, teachers, and others on the children so that they learn the group upon the individuals[4]. People at a young age may do as they have learned.

In a collectivist culture like China, group interests are often put higher than individual interests. This is based on there is only one interest called group interest in the society, and everyone relies on this. After Reforming and Opening, groups are divided and reorganized into different groups for the same objective, which can be called "benefit". It is hard to choose between group interests and individual interests because different interests benefit the person in different aspects, while nobody knows which is the best choice. For example, you are good at social communication. One day, your boss tells you that you are the best one to represent the company and attend an important conference, but you have reserved to take your parents to the hospital many weeks before. Everyone has his or her own choice; someone puts family higher than company while others

do the opposite. Individuals often make decisions without analysis about what they get and what they lose, the selection is almost out of the subconscious.

In previous studies, few references have specifically studied the conflict between the individual choice of group interests and personal interests. In order to fill this gap, the research studies individual choice when there is a conflict between collective interests and individual interests. The mechanism behind the choice between group interests and personal interests is a point to study in this paper. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the factors that can influence people's choice about individualism and collectivism. Whether people will change the main idea in the future is also a topic to discuss.

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants

In Chinese, 414 individuals participated in the questionnaire, of which 150 participants were interviewed offline, and 264 were online participants. All participants were of normal mind and participated in the study voluntarily and anonymously.

In order to collect sufficient information, no conditions of investigators were limited, such as age, gender, occupation. The residence of the respondents in this questionnaire includes 29 provinces in China - Shanghai, Guangdong, Anhui, Beijing, etc. Participants are divided into five age groups: under 18 years old, 18-25 years old, 25-40 years old, 40-60 years old, and over 60 years old; It is divided into six groups according to educational background primary school, junior middle school, senior high school, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral. It is worth mentioning that the age distribution of the participants in this questionnaire is 12-60 years old, of which 47.9% are 18-25 years old, with education ranging from primary school to postdoctoral, of which 63.8% are undergraduates. There were 294 female and 113 male respondents in this questionnaire, and the number of female respondents was significantly higher than that of male respondents. Overall, the participants of the questionnaire run through the whole social group. However, adult female undergraduates account for nearly half of the population.

2.2 Materials

This study focuses on the moral dilemma of the group and personal interests from four different angles of dormitory, class, company, and society, and studies the reasons behind it by investigating individuals' different choices. In order to study the factors behind individuals' different choices, this questionnaire also designed demographic topics to collect participants' information including age, gender, and occupation information.

This questionnaire focuses on four moral dilemmas about group interests and personal interests. The first moral dilemma was about the choice between students getting scholarships for all the roommates in the dormitory and failing in the exam. In this moral dilemma, individuals in a dorm were seen as a group. The second moral dilemma was set in the class scene. Respondents need to choose between improving the class average score in exchange for group honor and taking their ranking first. In this moral dilemma, individuals in one class were a group. The third moral dilemma was the famous agency problem. Respondents need to take the role of a manager and choose between maximizing the company's interests and maximizing personal interests. In this moral dilemma, the individuals of a company were a group. The fourth moral dilemma required the interviewee to put himself into the role of a prison guard. He had got two choices: the first choice was to let his benefactor go and let him continue to harm society, and the second choice was to shoot him according to his duty.

2.3 Procedure

The online questionnaire is sent through the "Wenjuan Xing" platform, and the data collection cycle is one week. Offline participants were randomly interviewed by members at the entrance of subway stations, schools, and commercial streets. The questionnaire includes 10 multiple-choice questions to collect the qualitative data of the respondents. Additionally, the four multiple-choice questions of moral dilemma also have optional blanks for respondents to write down their ideas in words, which is also one of the data sources of this survey.

2.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative methods emphasize individual differences, nuances, and processes that are difficult to capture quantitatively, while quantitative methods use statistical methods to compare within and between samples [5]. In this study, qualitative data refers to the reasons for individuals' different choices for a moral dilemma, while quantitative data include individuals' different choices, age, occupation, gender, marital status, and educational background.

2.4.1 quantitative analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. Each of the following quantitative analysis methods was tried to use three different data for analysis: online survey data, offline survey data, and online and offline total data. The difference due to different data selection could help to compare whether individuals have different choices in different investigated States, to make a more accurate and scientific explanation in the following text.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the

objective conditions such as age, education of participants. Respondents were divided into groups with different characteristics according to the result of the analysis.

To have a view of individual choice tendencies difference in the four moral dilemmas, the analysis used cross-analysis. The commonness or dissimilarity of the choice of individuals who choose the same option in one moral dilemma in another moral dilemma contributes to the analysis of the recognition of group interest of participants in various conditions.

This paper calculates the correlations on the age, gender, and the choice of participants, through the correlation data, part of the factors affecting the individual choice between group interests and personal interests could be found.

3. RESULT

The overview of the choice about the individual choice between the group and individual interest was

displayed below (Table 1). In every dilemma, individuals tended to choose group interest rather than individual interest from observation of the data. At the beginning of the study, the cross analyses between the choice of each moral dilemma and the demographic variables in each questionnaire were tested, including the chi-square tests and symmetric measures. Unexpectedly, none of them was significant. See Table 2.

In order to further analyze the data, the demographic data analysis of which chose all for group interest is carried out (49 samples), which were compared with the results obtained from the total sample.

According to figure 1, 4 group interest samples referred to the sample which chose to be satisfied with group interest in all dilemmas. The charts clearly showed that the trend between the two groups of samples was almost identical. In addition, in all the data of states the party in favor of the group, there were 6 men and 43 women, 13 married and 36 not married, 24 tend to enjoy group activities and 25 tend to enjoy with themselves.

Table 1. Choice of 4 dilemma

	Dilemma 1	Dilemma 2	Dilemma 3	Dilemma 4
group interest	239	228	266	251
personal interest	175	186	148	163

Table 2. Cross tab

			Group interest	Personal interest	Total
The first dilemma:	1.0	Count	131	108	239
		% within dilemma 1	54.8%	45.2%	100.0%
Dormitory as group	2.0	Adjusted Residual	1.3	-1.3	
		Count	85	90	175
		% within dilemma 1	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
Total		Adjusted Residual	-1.3	1.3	
		Count	216	198	414
		% within dilemma 1	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%

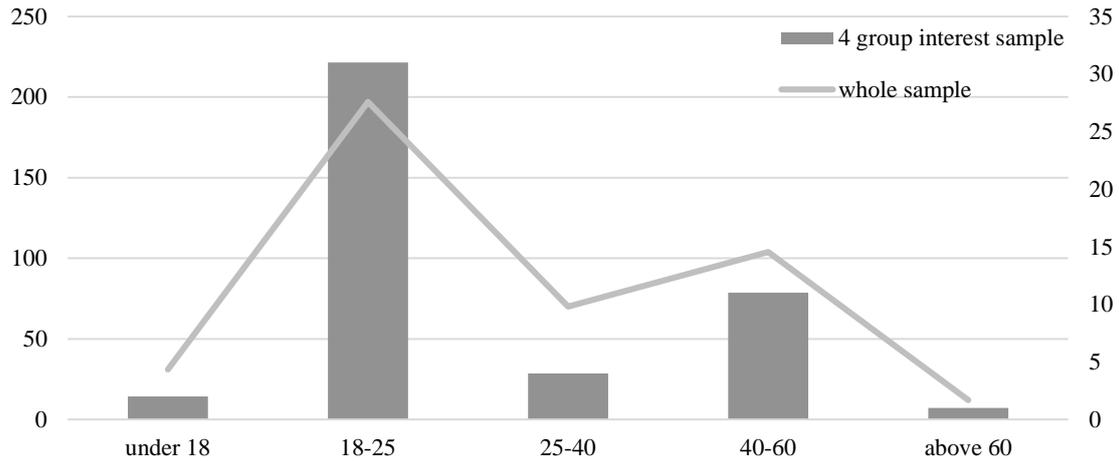


Figure1. The Age Distribution of 2 group

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Major findings

According to Piaget, morality is imposed on individuals from groups or parents [4], which means the child may attach more importance to the group. Therefore, there should be a negative correlation between age and the number of people choosing collective interests. In addition, the team also predicted the relationship between other factors and individual choice: Men often participate in group sports activities such as basketball and football, so they pay more attention to group interests than women; Because junior high school and senior high school students have been in classes and schools for a long time, their collective sense of honor will be more robust; Older people will pay more attention to their interests because they have more experience.

However, the results of the research show that almost all the initial predictions made by the team are invalid. This shows that the choices about group interests and personal interests are similar to those of people in the whole society, regardless of the basic background.

The overview result of the questionnaire showed that 239 chose group interest, 175 chose personal interest in the first dilemma; 228 chose group interest, 186 chose personal interest in the second dilemma; 266 chose group interest and 148 chose personal interest in the third dilemma; In the fourth dilemma, 251 people chose group interest and 163 people chose personal interest. It can be seen that the overall trend in the choice of individual interests and collective interests is that the number of choices of collective interests is greater than that of individual interests. This result is unexpected because the prediction before the beginning of the study is the choice of individual interests would overwhelm the choice of group interests. The reason why people choose collective

interests rather than personal interests will be the object of the following discussion.

Interestingly, in the reasons collected by participants, some starting points for individual interests and groups in the same dilemma are similar. Take the first dilemma as an example, individual who choose group interests believe that the benefits brought by the honor of excellent dormitories are far greater than the losses brought by failing exam; some participants who chose personal interests said they believed that the loss brought by failing was far greater than the benefit brought by the honor of excellent dormitories. These two ideas bring different choices, but it is surprisingly similar. The inference could be drawn from this: participants choose group or individual not only because of "collective honor", but also because of "total interest". Individual interests and group interests are dialectically unified. In essence, individual interests and group interests are interdependent and inseparable. Therefore, it is completely wrong to put the group on the opposite of the individual [6].

In these four dilemmas, group interests and personal interests are also inseparable. Here are some simple analyses of the 4 dilemmas. In the first moral dilemma, if the dormitory won the honor of an excellent bedroom, for individuals, it is a glorious deed that can be written into their resume, increasing the opportunities in job seeking, what's more, there will also be the material reward such as the scholarship. In the second moral dilemma, if participants report those who cheat collectively, their short-term interests will increase but reduce the group interests. However, they may be excluded by the class groups, thus affecting their remaining school life. In the third moral dilemma, if the manager chooses to maximize the company's interests, the long-term development of the company is conducive to the manager's future salary and ensure the stability of the work; If the manager chooses to maximize his interests, although it is conducive to job-

hopping, the new salary will not necessarily reuse the manager after discovering what he did in the last company. In the fourth moral dilemma, if a prisoner is shot and killed, while the group interests rise, it also ensures that his family and friends are not endangered by the drug lords who re-enter the society and protect his interests from being infringed.

According to the previous study [7], seeking the maximization of interests is the internal driving force to promote individual moral choice, due to the realization of interests in the market economy has the nature of the win-win or multi-win, moral choice is in line with their interests. This explains why the participants made such a choice.

4.2 Extension of the Findings -- Based on Marxism

Marxism holds that the contract of the group is generalized in social communication, which is characterized by the common activities of individuals in the group. Group interests are the concentrated embodiment of personal interests and an important means to realize personal interests, because only in the team can individuals bring their ability into full play [8]. This theory puts forward that need is the essence of mankind, so personal choice is based on their interests in any case. Meanwhile, needs and interests are the fundamental motivation for people to participate in all activities [9]. Theoretically, individual interests and group interests are closely combined [9]. That means, if individual interests are not recognized and respected in the group, individual motives will not be mobilized, and even social unrest will occur, which will endanger the group interests at the same time. Generally speaking, legitimate personal interests help to realize group interests, which in turn help to better meet personal interests.

Although these models are idealized in theory, in real life, personal interests and collective interests will inevitably conflict. For individuals, the best way to make reasonable choices in these conflicts is to weigh the direct advantages and disadvantages of things for themselves, and finally choose a choice that can bring them the greatest benefits. Meeting collective interests will promote the improvement of individual interests. On the contrary, choosing maximizing personal interests may also promote the growth of collective interests.

4.3 Limitations

This study has potential limitations. Firstly, this study was conveniently sampled, and nearly half were students, which may affect the representation of the results. However, the questionnaire is delivered online and offline without a difference, and the people who fill in the questionnaire are not controlled. Therefore, the sample data are close to the real social groups as much as possible.

The second limitation depends on the methodology of the survey. Respondents do not have much time to fill in the questionnaire, and the questionnaire requires respondents to substitute themselves into four different situations to think about problems. However, this can also ensure that most respondents make choices based on their first impression, which is not different from reality, which also increases the reliability of the data analysis to a certain extent.

Further research could expand the sample size and obtain a sample closer to the current social situation. In the improvement of the questionnaire, respondents can also be grouped according to different demographic variables. Respondents in each different group will meet different dilemmas, which are usually closer to the daily life of these respondents.

4.4 Implications of the research

The relationship between individual interests and group interests has been an object of discussion since ancient times. Philosophy regards individual interests and collective interests as a pair of contradictions.

Through the analysis results of empirical investigation, research finds that in the whole social group, the individual's choice of group interests and personal interests does not change with the change of age, gender, and educational background. This finding has a far-reaching impact on the discussion of the relationship between individual interests and collective interests.

In the final analysis, the influencing factors of personal decision-making found in this research are the balance and judgment of personal interests, which explains some of the mechanisms behind the choice of personal interests and collective interests in society. This paper can also provide thinking direction for individuals who need to choose between collective interests and personal interests in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

Before this paper, there were many conflicting views on group interests and personal interests. Some psychologists believe that the sense of collectivism is imposed on children by parents and society, so children would pay more attention to collective interests, and adults would pay more attention to personal interests. Chinese political scientists have proposed that group interests are always higher than individual interests. In order to explore the reasons behind the individual choice of collective interests or personal interests, research designed questionnaire-based research. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect the data of the selection trends of different characteristic groups on group interests and personal interests, as well as the data of some demographic variables. The results of the questionnaire

showed that individuals' choice of group interest and personal interest does not change with the changes of demographic variables such as age and gender. On this basis, the paper further discussed the reasons behind people's choices. Group interests and personal interests affect each other; the individual choice of group interests and personal interests is a trade-off of the individual's actual interests. In other words, the mechanism behind the individual's choice between collective interests and individual interests is no matter whether the option is personal interests or collective interests, as long as the final choice will be more beneficial to the individual, the individual will choose this option.

This paper should be concerned by some company managers, educators, or political scientists to understand the psychological mechanism of individual choice, to better formulate rules, and realize the common development of individuals and collectives. This is not only effective for a collective but also indispensable for maintaining the balance of the whole society. The research on the influencing factors of individual choice between group interests and personal interests found in this paper fills the gap of academic research in this field and provides arguments and a research basis for follow-up researchers. This paper has a lot of follow-up research space, such as collecting samples from different countries and regions to analyze the impact of cultural differences on interest choice.

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