The Application of Narrative Research in International Relations

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ABSTRACT
If mainstream international relations theory is a history of the gradual release of the actor's agency and the progressive development of the "human", then the narrative studies in international relations is a fundamental return to the concern for the actor's self and agency. This paper summarizes the current application of narrative research in international relations from level analysis, especially at the local government level, to further improve the analysis of the application of narrative research in international relations.

Keywords: *Narrative research, Narrative turn, International Discourse Studies, Narrative agenda.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of narrative turn in the study of international relations, the role of narrative and its ontological significance have become one of the important research agendas in current international relations. At present, there are more and more relevant studies in the discipline of international relations from the perspective of narrative, which can be roughly divided into four levels of research: International System Narratives, National Narratives and Issue Narratives, as well as the recent research on Narratives at the local government level.

2. NARRATIVE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Narratology began in the twentieth century and in its almost century-long development has never moved beyond the study of the novel. As the narrative nature of various ideological activities in social life (e.g., legal, political, educational, psychological, etc.) became more and more evident, a "narrative turn" in various disciplines began to emerge. The most prominent of these is the narrative turn in historiography in the 1970s and 1980s. In this regard, Louis Mink systematically summarized the basic points of the narrative turn in historiography in his book Historical Understanding. The influence of the narrative turn then spilled over into history and the humanities as a whole. However, there is no systematic consensus on the definition of narrative, but there is a common understanding: narrative means 'storytelling'.

David R. Maines argues that people are homo narrans, that all socialized people are storytellers, and that narrative is therefore an essential attribute of human society. In fact, the 'narrative turn' in the humanities has forced narratology, with literature and fiction at its core, to open up its boundaries and emerge from the cocoon of fictional narrative to become a broad narratology, in order to seek the universal laws of narrative research.

So what is narrative? The definition of narrative in the broad sense of narrative is universally enlightening, as it is for the study of international relations. Narrative, in the broad sense, is the organization by a subject of events involving characters into a symbolic text that can be understood by the recipient as having a temporal and meaningful orientation. Secondly, Bruner sees narrative as the various ways in which people 'tell events'. Carr argues that narrative is not only the way people describe events, but that narrative itself is part of the story. The broad definition of narrative, although brief, actually contains three main elements of narrative, namely the material, the narrator and the receiver. Narrative material is primarily the material of events or stories that have not been processed by the narrator and are the most authentic events. This is similar to the base text in the basic construction of narrative, which is a collection of alternative materials, a non-text that has not yet been reproduced by the medium, a 'real thing that happened'. Therefore, narrative materials are the "library of alternative combination of relevant elements" for narrators to narrate. Narrators will make choices according to their own conditions and purposes, form

narrative texts with time and meaning dimensions, and spread them to the recipients, thus affecting the cognition and behavior of the recipients. In international relations studies, narrators are usually political subjects with narrative intentions, such as states, international organizations and domestic political elites, who selectively weave existing narrative materials (usually historical events and collective memories) in accordance with their own ideology, organizational culture or institutional environment, thus forming narrative texts with a temporal and meaningful orientation and influencing the recipient (the audience to whom the narrative is directed).

3. INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM NARRATIVES

The international system narratives are narratives on the structure of international relations and its nature. Roberts believes that narrative helps us explain how structure appears, maintains, changes and transforms over time, and how the agency of actor is embedded in the process of structural change.[1] Systemic narratives focus on how the world is narrated and constructed, who are the players in it, and how it operates the process of construction. Structural issues such as those concerning the War on Terror have been a major focus of international systemic narrative studies. The most representative study on narrative of international system is Erik Ringmar's comparative study on international relations system. Using the metaphor of social performance to compare and contrast the development of international systems, he argues that the international community can be seen as a world stage, with different actors in different international systems putting on different performances. To further compare the characteristics and performances of international systems, Ringmar attributes the different characteristics of international systems to the fact that each has a different framework. In every international system, there is a master framework that frames what can and cannot happen within the system, as well as the context in which it takes place. However, it is not enough to have a framework. A Script is needed to understand what is going on each stage. A script provides an individual or organization with roles, goals, clues to understanding, instructions on how to act, and how to proceed. Scripts tell us who we are and who they are, how we relate to each other and what we are expected to do with each other.[2] Different narrative styles will further construct and influence the development of the international system.

4. NATIONAL NARRATIVE STUDIES

The second level of narrative studies in international relations is national narrative, that is, what is the story of a country or nation and what values and goals it possesses.

The self-narrative or autobiographical narrative of the state gives the state a sense of existence and meaning not only in space, but also in time with a sense of profound history and continuity of existence. Where the nation originated, when it originated, where it is now, and where it will go in the future are all ontological meanings about the existence of the nation that are given by the autobiographical narrative. Currently, there are three main categories of narrative studies on the national level in international relations: first, studies on narrative construction of national or ethnic identity. The second is the discussion on the ontological-theoretical significance of national autobiographical narratives. The third is research on the strategic narratives of the nation. For the first category of studies, national autobiographical narratives are usually manifested in national history education, mythology, religion, rituals, and ideology, among which historical education and National Myths narrative play the most prominent role in the construction process of National or ethnic identity. The research on the ontological significance of national autobiographical narrative focuses on the construction of national existence and the construction and maintenance of national ontological security. The study of strategic narratives of the state is mainly represented by Alister Miskimmon and Mattern. According to Miskimon et al., Strategic Narratives refers to a way in which political actors shape the behavior of domestic and international actors by constructing the past, present and future of international politics. Strategic narration can not only influence the behavior of actors, but also construct their identity and form the structure. Therefore, political actors usually use strategic narrative to expand their influence, control expectations and change the existing discourse environment, so as to achieve their goals. In addition, agenda setting, the search for domestic political legitimacy, mobilization at home and abroad are the goals of strategic narrative. [3]For example, if policies can be narrated as problems and solutions acceptable to domestic audiences, it is easier for political actors to establish their political legitimacy.

5. ISSUE NARRATIVE RESEARCH

The third level of narrative research in international relations is issue narrative, which is the narrative of why a policy is needed and appropriate, and how that policy is successfully implemented or accomplished. An issue on narrative is one that places the government's actions in a context to explain who the important actors are, what the conflict or problem is, what kind of action would solve such a problem, etc. Thus, the key purpose of issue narratives is that actors use them to provide a legitimate and rational "zone" for the policies they want to pursue. [4] Thus, the study of issue narratives focuses on how actors shape the discursive context of policy through strategic narratives in order to seek to achieve their policies and limit other dissenting narratives. [5]

6.   A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA: LOCAL GOVERNMENT NARRATIVE RESEARCH

At present, different theories summarize the process and motivation of local government's participation in international affairs from different perspectives, including political sociology theory, limited participation theory, and the interpretation of the System of distributing power in the context of central-local relationship. Political sociology believes that national development and improvement depend on the continuous improvement of decision-making, law and citizen participation. With the continuous advancement of globalization, local governments, as a power in the domestic society, should also make contributions to the local internationalization process, actively participate in the internationalization process, and become the accompaniment of the central government's diplomacy. It can be seen that political sociology, to a certain extent, affirms the autonomy and initiative of local governments in participating in international affairs, and regards it as an accompanying process of the central government, thus enabling a better understanding and appreciation of the process of local government participation. However, political sociology does not explain how local governments engage, nor does it explain the direction and target processes of local governments' external engagement, so there are also insufficient explanations. The theory of limited participation refers to the local government participating in foreign affairs as a kind of "limited participation actor". Under the limited authorization of the central government, the local government participates in foreign affairs, and its main goal is to maximize the interests of central-local cooperation.[6] The limited participation theory defines the role of local government in foreign affairs and lays a conceptual foundation for subsequent research. In addition, it is worth noting that the traditional research perspective of distribution power system also emphasizes the initiative of local governments to participate in international affairs, but this is a limited initiative. The distribution of central power is regarded as the external power source of local governments to participate in international affairs. The study of local government narratives argues that, as a 'limited participatory actor', although local governments need to be authorized by the central government to participate in foreign affairs, local governments are themselves dynamic and autonomous actors, able to open up space for their own practices through 'autobiographical' narratives, and to practice such autobiographical narratives in a participatory way, with the narratives and practices eventually leading to the recognition of local governments' participatory identities. Through such a process, local governments can obtain more foreign affairs engagement mandates from the central government through their own efforts, thus enabling them to expand their engagement identities and realize more local benefits. Therefore, when studying the

foreign cooperation process of local governments, it is necessary to pay attention to the analysis of the initiative and autonomy of local governments. At the same time, we should focus our research at the local government level, analyzing the narrative and practice processes of local governments in order to understand more fully the 'limited participation' behavior of local governments. [7]

7.   CONCLUSION

In the late 1980s, a "sociological turn" took place in the study of international relations, which was marked by the rise of constructivism. Discourse studies became a new research agenda in international relations in the late 1980s with the gradual development of a reflexive ideology. Mainstream systemic constructivism, represented by Alexander Wendt, brought social factors into the study of international relations, but in Wendt's theory, international society was an 'aphasic' society. [8] Mainstream international relations theory does not place much emphasis on the linguistic dimension of international relations. In fact, language in international relations is not only important, but also ontologically significant. Any practice of interaction in international relations must be successfully accomplished through language. The Discourse has strategic significance in terms of representation, labeling, and stigmatization, as well as constructing the identity of the actor, the rules, and the context associated with these. Sociality is inseparable from discourse, especially narrative.[9] In fact, the exchange and communication of meaning between people or countries in the process of interaction is presented in the form of narration or "storytelling".[10]

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

He Gang is the sole author of this paper, responsible for the conception, concept analysis, demonstration, analysis and writing of this paper

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