The Political Analysis Utility of Post-structuralism

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Abstract. With the development of digitalization and globalization, the power discourse system faced by the whole world has undergone tremendous changes, and post-structuralism as a subversion of the meaning of traditional political discourse has become more and more reflected. Due to the imperfection of post-structuralist theory, the role of its theoretical framework is often questioned. Therefore, starting from the progressive significance of post-structuralism to structuralism, it is undoubtedly a critical research topic to rethink the post-structuralist framework's role in political analysis. This paper starts with the relationship between structuralism and post-structuralism and understands some of the progressive significance of post-structuralism in political research in the new era. Secondly, starting from Saussure's semiotics, this paper explores the role of signifier and signified in the derived meaning chain and on this basis, plays the role of deconstruction metaphysics and traditional ontology in the field of political analysis. Thirdly, the theoretical convergence of post-structuralism and Marxism is also a critical research path. Based on this, we can further determine the positive significance of Foucault's view of power in the effect of specific government governance. Through research, we can see that the post-structuralist framework is practical and enlightening in practice in the political field, and there is still much-unexplored potential behind it.

Keywords: Post-structuralism, Political analysis, Discourse, Signifier and signified.

1   Introduction

Post-structuralism is a trend of thought to rethink and critically transform structuralism in France in the 1980s. Most post-structuralist scholars at that time were the original structuralists, such as Derrida, Foucault, Saussure, and others. Because post-structuralism consists of a series of questions and critiques of the methodological assumptions of structuralism, attention to the development of disciplines in the field of post-structuralism also requires attention to related views of structuralism. Although there is no clear standard for the demarcation of structuralism and post-structuralism, the methodological characteristics of post-structuralism determine that their general direction is to question and criticize structuralism. Its theoretical starting point is based on the structuralist philosophy of language (Saussure) and anthropology (Levi-Strauss)

[1]. At the same time, the concerns of post-structuralists exist in a broader field. Some focus on discourse analysis, some focus on psychoanalysis, and some focus on history. At the same time, they are widely integrated with modern social sciences and increasingly focus on different social fields such as geography and education.

It is essential to analyze politics from a discourse perspective. Derrida starts from the historical origin of philosophy and puts forward "logocentrism" based on Heidegger, that is, to link the expression of Western philosophy with external reality through language and words, to construct a signified, and to connect the signifier. Layer upon layer, the metaphysics that form a hierarchical system is deconstructed. Like Derrida, who was concerned with the role of discourse in the history of philosophy, there was also Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1889–1951), for whom no given meaning was ever consistent. Saussure also pays attention to the critical role of discourse. Saussure creatively proposed a language learning system "la langue," arguing that language is just an arbitrary sign whose specific meaning is determined in a series of social and historical contexts; The post-structuralist from the critique of the historical subject and the western subject is Michel Foucault, who added the understanding of power relations to the definition of discourse, and believes that discourse or theory is power as power function emerges, thereby viewing discourse as a lineage of power by which the ruling class strengthens its power and suppresses its opponents. In addition, Foucault also proposed the critical concept of government, which broadened the perspective of the work of many post-structuralist scholars. The representative scholar who started from psychoanalysis is Slavoj Žižek, who brought Lacan's philosophy of discourse into the cultural field of philosophy and re-analyzed it, thus broadening the dimension of philosophical criticism and psychoanalysis. Žižek was inspired by Badiou, whose differing views on the role of philosophy in contemporary society were based on the psychoanalytic method Freud developed in treating clinical neuroses. This makes it possible to judge the signifier inherent in the language system from a specific psychoanalytic logic to understand the patient's unconscious signifier expression [2].

Post-structuralism in the new era is increasingly well developed. Stephenson believes that post-structuralism questions the traditional scope of politics. Post-structuralist approaches challenge models and concepts in mainstream political science, which may transcend mainstream political theory and politics—the research framework of science [3]. Jacobs proposed post-structuralist DT theory's unique analysis of the concept of hegemony and the interpretation of political action taking place in institutional contexts as an essential contribution to the study of institutional change and continuity and advocated DT as a paradigm of self-sufficiency [4]. Chiu proposed to apply the post-structuralism paradigm to the political ecology paradigm, enriching the themes and perspectives of political ecology, thus transcending the theoretical constraints of understanding ecological problems only from the perspective of ecological Marxism [5]. Although many post-structuralist scholars use their unique perspectives to explain problems and solve development problems in many political fields, however, neither providing a framework nor questioning traditional mainstream political science does not directly respond to the problems faced by post-structuralism but places the contribution of post-structuralism to political analysis in a "potential" position. This article will start with the signifier and the signified in semiotics, then

extend to the discourse field of political analysis, and finally explore the "synergy" between post-structuralism and other disciplines and its implications for political practice.

2   Signifier, Signified and Infinite Extension

Post-structuralists recognize the importance of studying discourse and thus understand and explain the whole system of the world through discourse. They seek to redefine these divided systems. Rather than acknowledging the reductionist methodology of their structuralist predecessors, post-structuralists want to explain the world in richer ways. This goal also extends to all the areas they discuss. Post-structuralism, in particular, delves into the importance of the field of "discourse," which is a crucial difference between structuralism and its emphasis on the central role of discourse. From this point of view, Saussure played an essential role in promoting the interpretation of the "chain of signification" [6]. He proposed that each word is composed of meaning and pronunciation, namely "signified" and "signifier." This relationship does not have any natural relationship at the root, so a word does not have two parts that are necessarily and permanently connected, and they prove the indeterminacy of language, or what might be called the sliding of meaning. Therefore, it can be considered that the sliding of meaning is carried out in the social and cultural context. The new signifiers produced under the influence of this sociocultural background are called Traces by Derrida [7], meanings slide in the traces and gradually disappear and leave new traces over time. This involves the concepts of signifier and signified in semiotics. As Saussure put forward in semiotics, a signifier is a physical form of a sign that can be perceived by the human five senses, while a signified is a psychological concept that exists in the context of signifiers and social culture extended.

In addition to Saussure, other scholars have also developed their analyses. Their discussions of discourse and its culture have provided us with a logical perspective in the sense of political analysis, which has profoundly impacted political analysis. The structuralist emphasis on the signified was gradually replaced by the post-structuralist emphasis on the signifier. This free sliding process of the signified within the signifier can be seen as an effective ideological break from dogmatism in the traditional sense. From the inside of the signifier, it can be seen that people are often bound by the signified defined by the ruling class and ignore other meanings of the signifier, which makes the world seem so simple, Like a simple idea of binary opposites. Such a theoretical research framework makes people accustomed to understanding democracy and hegemony as opposites, but is there a blank outside of democracy and hegemony? This is not true from a post-structuralist point of view. As MacLure pointed out, truth is textual, and the way people see the world is rendered by discourse, which to a certain extent reflects the influence of power on ideology [8]. Therefore, society needs this free sliding of meaning, which provides a new direction of thinking for the analysis of political problems, that is, what we see is not necessarily true, maybe it is just what the ruler wants us to see. This article does not say that the signified created by the ruler must be wrong because there is no right or wrong choice between the signifier and the

signified, but it should be emphasized from the signified from the concept and further seek progressive meaning and positive impact. From this, it can be seen that the breakthrough of the signifier and the signified means the infinite extension of the discourse. For example, the word eagle can be an animal, or it can be extended to a character that is brave and powerful, and it can also continue to evolve into a symbol of freedom in human society, or it can refer to the United States of America at the national level. This provides an excellent extended framework for analyzing political affairs.

At the same time, the focus on infinite derivative meanings and signifiers and signifieds also remind people of the enormous power of discourse. The excavation of discourse theory has a relatively full manifestation in Foucault's power and knowledge. Power is regarded as a function of discourse, which primarily reflects the ability of the ruling class to manipulate the ruled. As Kim puts it: Saussure's theory of language is grossly underestimated in the social and political realms [9]. The social and political implications of these discourses provide a reconstructive reflection on the context in the text. Foucault defines discourse as a system of knowledge shaped by fixed social power relations that determines what people say and what can be said. This creatively links Roland Barthes' infinite ramifications with subject liberty and the confrontation between democracy and hegemonism, pointing out that any movement of political significance attempts to reconfigure language. As Barthes proposed in his semiotic studies, the meaning of a literary work is found when it comes into contact with the reader rather than when it is created by the author [10]. This means that readers have the ability to create suitable textual meanings according to different social environments and era backgrounds, that is, the sliding of the signified within the signifier, thus reflecting the defined scope and influence of discourse in power and politics. If we can eliminate the ideological repression of the signified by the ruling class and allow the signified to slide freely within the signifier, this will undoubtedly be of crucial significance to the frame construction in the field of political analysis. This slippage can break away from the world narrative set by the ruling class and restore the direction of political analysis from the one-sidedness derived from the so-called mainstream language system to the state of embodying "natural" [11]. In this sense, Lacan's thought points us in the direction. Lacan pointed out in the mirror stage theory that infants seek self-knowledge in the mirror, and he uses this realistic self-perception to express his criticism of the self that is influenced and shaped by the social environment. Thus it made a vital contribution to the development of the whole field of psychoanalysis.

3   Decentre metaphysics and breaking through traditional ontology

Post-structuralism realizes the subversion of traditional metaphysics by deconstructing the core viewpoints of traditional ontology, thus integrating a critical spirit into the field of political discourse to the greatest extent. The post-structuralists reconstructed a set of criteria for judging truth through the existing way of cognition about objective existence, thus realizing the critique of traditional ontology. It can be seen from this that post-structuralists uphold anarchist views and do not recognize the existence of objec-

tive truth. Relatively speaking, they are more concerned with the influence of truth. Based on this starting point, the holders of this position seem more like a group of doers. They do not pursue the concept of the supremacy of truth, nor do they regard things as objective criteria, but through criticism and questioning of existing things, they realize the application of positive significance to social development. From another perspective, the focus on the influence of truth enables political analysts to make intuitive judgments and analyses of what has happened more effectively. To a certain extent, it has also stimulated the inherent vitality of the political field. Unlike mainstream theories that divide objective things so clearly, post-structuralism helps people think about things from an equal perspective. They have greatly expanded the range of discourse activities of political analysis by breaking away from the constraints of social norms and have achieved free speech in politics. As later studies of Foucault's genealogical legacy have shown, understanding knowledge and power through decentre truth [12] can break down traditional barriers to divine truth.

Post-structuralism, on the other hand, removes the central role of metaphysics by opposing the metaphysical tradition, a view that can find traces in Nietzsche and Heidegger. In Nietzsche's analysis of traditional philosophy, he found that mainstream and collateral philosophies are only under the banner of the will to truth, but their essence is a variant of the will to power. Nietzsche believes that the principle of power itself is metaphysical. After this, Heidegger believed that the metaphysical tradition of the period of Nietzsche's view of power had reached its zenith [1]. However, it can be seen from the laws of movement and development that the ideological foundations in the field of political science must also undergo continuous construction and deconstruction, thus indirectly realizing the decentring of the central role of metaphysics. Heidegger believes that this is an excellent opportunity to step out of the traditional field, which means that the analysis of political science can go out of the tyranny of power and face the relationship between people and politics (such as humanistic political thinking), there is no doubt about this Provided new vitality for political research. Through the critique of traditional metaphysics, the role of discourse and institutional practice in constructing the entire power framework is revealed. This means that discourses established under a given power system can serve as a defense. In addition, another discovery by Heidegger is instructive for the analysis of contemporary politics, which permeates the centrality of thought control using language in the context of the entire social structure. In Heidegger's view, the tradition of metaphysics penetrates people's life through people's language systems and language habits, so it is necessary to eliminate the centrality of language [13]. In addition, by discovering and establishing new linguistic relations, Lux further proposes the third face of power in the political realm, which operates not through routine decision-making but through understanding the realm of consciousness. Manipulation achieves the most sophisticated purposes of domination [14]. The social structure uses discourse as a medium to create a social status that is more conducive to domination, thereby exerting an influence on people's agency, which has a positive significance for studying power perspectives.

In addition to the enlightening significance of the concept of power, post-structuralists reveal the "real illusion" of culture at the level of language and culture. By showing the process of repression of old (dominant) texts encountered by

new texts in the production stage, people are made aware that behind the socio-cultural background there may be false faces that claim to be the truth. This can be called a crucial critical spirit, which teaching people to criticize things for themselves instead of simply believing the so-called objectivity and truth. However, this critical spirit is different from the criticism advocated in other periods, and the political effect of this decentre criticism is even more critical. It subverts the power relationship within capitalism by changing the relationship between reading and writing and discourse. The purpose of this decentre is not to reveal the truth but can be understood as subverting privileges in all fields. Regardless of the cultural or political field, the critical spirit of demystification can be understood as a call for democratization, and the process of criticism can be understood as the process of democratization. This democratization gives everyone the same qualifications and powers by denying and depriving the authorized writers of their privileged status. It not only breaks the privileged status of authors in the cultural field but also breaks the monopoly of wealth and power because everyone can obtain fame and social status.

In addition to the critical spirit and the promotion of equality discussions in the political field, this paper argues that the more profound significance lies in post-structuralism's emphasis on subjective initiative, which is the inheritance and challenge of the critical human spirit. By breaking through the traditional cultural hegemonic structure, post-structuralists effectively overcome the influence of metaphysics on the dogmatism and centralization of thought. Post-structuralism is like a hurricane of change, transcending universality with randomness, breaking through unipolarization with a diversification of knowledge, and exerting the subjective spirit of human beings to the extreme. As Nietzsche thought, the genealogist's first task is to destroy the primacy of origin and truth [15], which means that human initiative can be maximized. The emphasis on the initiative of the subject also shows the concern for humanitarian feelings that the political field should have, which actually helps people get rid of the control of metaphysics on the spirit, and honestly considers the role that people play as a political subject. The so-called ethics may be nothing more than the suppression of people's thoughts by cultural hegemony, which undoubtedly has long-term progressive significance for political analysis.

4   The theoretical convergence of post-structuralism

The above article discusses the progressive significance of post-structuralism compared to structuralism. However, it is not enough to discuss an analytical framework for political discourse in terms of the internal changes of structuralism and its contrast with post-structuralism. It is more important to pay attention to the logical direction of post-structuralism in its development and its connections with other fields. Post-structuralists believe that the definition of politics should be broader, as the theory and methods of political science suggest. It should not be limited to a unique field of activity but should consider its discourse shaping interpersonal relationships and the transformation of social power on a larger scale. From this point of view, through the

unique definition of politics, the path of this analysis can be extended to the field of analysis of Marxist theory so that the two have a synergistic effect.

The origins of Marxism and post-structuralism can be traced back to the rise of structuralism. With the rise of Marxism and structuralism in the middle of the 20th century, the complex relationship between the two caused heated discussions in academic circles. With the emergence of post-structuralism from structuralism, Marxism also has the color of post-structuralism, that is, it has the weapon of political criticism [16]. Both hold opposing views on metaphysics so that the theories can promote each other, so the British scholar Currie called Foucault a post-structuralist Marxist [17]. However, mere critique is not its most substantial proof, and post-structuralism's critical significance to Marxism is embodied in the method of decentring. Marxists have more or less deconstructed traditional discourse when adopting post-structuralist strategies. Affected by this, the theories of many deconstructed Marxists constitute post-structuralist Marxism, also known as post-Marxism (such as Laclau's pluralistic democratic political system, Habermas's Communicative rationality, Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism). These post-Marxists deconstruct traditional Marxist theories of social development in the primary ways of post-structuralism.

More meaningful for political analysis is the "synergy" brought about by post-structuralism, that is, the inspiration and creativity that post-structuralism brings to other disciplines, making it more important than the sum of the individual disciplines. In addition, another significant departure from mainstream post-structuralism is the opposition to universality and historicity. Compared with mainstream views, post-structuralism emphasizes the importance of contingency at critical moments in the dynamic development of things. Thus, post-structuralists break free from the shackles of universality and realize the vital influence of critical events on historical development, which undoubtedly stimulates the discursive potential of political analysis. This discursive potential can be traced to Foucault's reflections on political affairs. For example, Foucault's concept of government has an important impact on global carbon emissions and carbon governance, and the Regimes of carbon accounting, inspired by Foucault's view on the role and power of government, consider the carbon cycle as a global cycle The spatial theory of carbon emissions expands the object of carbon emission governance, further expands the actual ability of climate governance and strengthens the government's governance ability by dispersing and re-aggregating carbon emissions. It is an excellent analytical framework and provides a practical basis for climate governance practitioners and scholars in the 21st century [18]. Innovative approaches to climate governance broaden the scope of political analysis and allow for more traditionally apolitical issues to be taken into account, and the piecemeal approach also provides a theoretical framework for other global-scale governance and control.

5   Conclusion

Through the above research, it can be found that the influence of post-structuralism on the political field cannot be ignored. It provides a rich perspective for political analysis

through the reconstruction of discourse and power. First, the shaping of language by movements within the political sphere can be emphasized by thinking about signifiers and signifieds. Poststructuralism links the freedom of the subject with the confrontation with hegemonism through the application of discourse and points out that the ruling class's ideological control over the people by shaping discourse is a manifestation of cultural hegemony. Second, poststructuralist opposition to the metaphysical tradition has injected new energy into the field of political analysis. This fully reflects its inheritance of the critical spirit at the epistemological level. This critical and skeptical attitude towards political things allows political analysis to speak freely, showing its humanitarian feelings in the political field. Thirdly, post-structuralism provides other disciplines, especially Marxist theory, with deconstructing analytical methods and mutual promotion of various schools to constitute a valuable framework for political analysis.

In general, though post-structuralism has been criticized for its incompleteness and its overemphasis on subjective factors. However, from the perspective of intellectual history, post-structuralism itself, as an ideological emancipation movement, is a critique of the limitations of structuralism and a manifestation of the spirit of the times. At the same time, the comprehensive criticism and reconstruction of tradition by post-structuralism is the internal demand of post-modern social development.

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