An Intertextual Analysis of the Formation of "China Threat Theory"

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Abstract. Of the international perceptions of the rise of China, "China Threat Theory" is a kind of cognition mode that can not be ignored. Based on the postmodernist theory of intertextuality, this paper makes an analysis of the formation of the "China Threat Theory". Through an analysis from the perspective of intertextuality, it can be seen that the conventional international cognition of the rising state as well as of China's past has to a certain extent contributed to the formation of "China Threat Theory".

Introduction

With the rapid development of China's economy and the dramatic increase in its national strength in recent years, China's rise has become a concern of the whole world. China has maintained a rapid economic growth for more than 30 years, the rise of China has become a reality, and the rise of China will inevitably bring about a new change in regional order and even the world order. Therefore, the concept of "China's rise" also appears with the rapid development of China's economy and its national strength in recent years, which has aroused widespread concern in the world.

In the face of the rise of China, there are different views on the international arena. Some people view the rise of China as benign development, while a lot of people think China's rise will pose a threat to the world. "Chinese Threat Theory" has become a kind of cognition mode that can not be ignored. The discussion about the formation of "China Threat Theory" has become a hot topic in the academic circles both at home and abroad. There have been many articles discussing of "Chinese Threat Theory" at home and abroad. But most of them concentrate on the material aspects, such as economic and military aspects. Besides, there are a few articles focusing on culture, values and ideology. However, it is still a blank to explore this issue from the perspective of intertextuality. Therefore, an intertextual analysis of the formation of "China Threat Theory" may produce some new and fruitful understanding of the issue.

The postmodernist theories of text and intertextuality

Text and intertextuality are the concepts of postmodernism, which are widely used in the study of philosophy, art, literary criticism, translation and so on. Similarly, they are two important concepts in the theory of postmodernist international relations. However, the use of text analysis and the analysis of the text in the international relationship is still very weak. As an important concept of criticism, intertextuality was first proposed in the 1960s by French Semiologist and feminist critic Julia Kristeva. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva defines intertextuality as "the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another"[1]. And in "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva comments that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another"[2]. The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context).[3] Then intertextuality is the idea that "text cannot be viewed or studied in isolation since texts are not produced or consumed in isolation: all texts exist, and therefore must be understood, in relation to other texts"[4]. Blommaert reinforces this idea that "whenever we speak we produce the words of others, we constantly cite and recite expressions and recycle meanings that are already available"[5]. And intertextuality becomes the mark of the postmodern and post-structural criticism.

Intertextuality embodies the process of the interaction between the old and the new texts. Each individual text is always present in a larger text space, that is to say, all texts will refer to or relies on other texts consciously or unconsciously. No one text exists as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole: firstly, the writer of any particular text is also the reader of other (unavoidably influential) texts; secondly, at the moment of reading, the reader inevitably brings to the text all his/her store of accumulated knowledge.[6] A text is therefore an intertextual construction–it only has meaning in relation to other texts. All writing (and reading), in short, is intertextual.[7]

Intertextuality is not only a literary or linguistic concept, but its use and influence also extends to other fields such as culture, sociology, and politics. And according to the postmodern International Relations theory, the world is a text that can be interpreted from different perspectives. Investigation of how the world is apprehended requires inquiries into various pre-texts of apprehension, for the meaning and value imposed on the world is structured not by one's immediate consciousness but by the various reality-making scripts one inherits or acquires from one's surrounding cultural/linguistic condition.[8] That is to say, the understanding of the world embodies and relies on the intertextual relationship between texts. Any event in the international relations can be seen as one of the text. They are not isolated, but are influenced by other texts. It is a breakthrough of the traditional international relations theory to understand the international relations from the perspective of postmodern theory of text and intertextuality, and it can contribute to some new insights into the international relations.

Analysis of the formation of "China Threat Theory" from the perspective of intertextuality

In the face of the rise of China, there have been different views about it, of which "China Threat Theory" is one of the most prevalent. And "China Threat Theory" has come into being for various reasons. Although the threat is closely related to the physical force, it is not solely determined by the material force. Campbell notes that the danger is not an objective condition, it is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat, and danger is an effect of interpretation.[9] The interpretation of threats depends on a certain historical background.[10] Therefore, the formation of these different cognitions of the rise of China to a great extent are associated with the past historical events or related cognitions. According to the theory of post-structuralism, the fact of the rise of China can also be regarded as a text. The interpretation of such a text is influenced by other texts, namely, the text of China's rise and other texts form the intertextual relationship. Therefore, the formation of "China Threat Theory" is also an interpretation of the rise of china, which is influenced by other texts. Of course, the texts that have had impacts on the formation of "China Threat Theory" are also varied. This paper will mainly discuss the two types of texts, of which one is about the past traditional cognition of rising states and the other is about the conventional cognition of China and China's history.

The text of conventional cognition of the rising state and "China Threat Theory". Internationally, the dominant cognition of the rising state is based on the realistic thinking. As one of the mainstream theories of International Relations, realism's core idea is power politics and its theoretical pillar is balance of power. So far, realism is still the dominant paradigm of international relations research, and has been the starting point of the Western theory about the rise state. It plays an important influence on the diplomatic strategy and thinking of Western countries, especially America. The basic conclusions and understanding of the realist theory about the rising state is based on the history of the western countries and mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

First, the process of the rise of the great powers is often linked with the war, and in the history of the development of international system, the rise of emerging powers has always caused unrest and war. From the Peloponnesian War two thousand years ago to the rise of Germany in the twentieth Century, almost every rising power causes the global turmoil and war. In the process of the rise of emerging powers, the rising states constantly enhance their national strength in order to protect their own safety and such behavior will cause a certain degree of threat to the existing hegemonic states' security. It will not only aggravate the existing security dilemma and may even lead to new security dilemma,

which will affect or even break the existing international balance of power, thus leading to the international instability or conflict. Robert Gilpin, representative scholar of hegemonic cycle theory, believes that when a country has the advantage over other countries, that is to say, if the balance of power in the international system is to its advantage, the country will try to change the international system.[11] From the review of modern history, it can be seen that the rise of the UK, Germany and the United States all go with trifles and wars.

Second, the process of the rise of great powers is the process of the hegemonic state trying to maintain its dominant position and to curb the emerging powers. Realists believe that with the increase of relative power and strength of the emerging powers, their discontent with the existing international order will also increase and their attempt to change the existing international system and re-divide the sphere of influence will breed. Therefore, realists make the prediction that, with the growth of the national strength, the emerging powers will adopt expansion policy and if necessary, they will revise and even overthrow the existing international order by means of massive hegemonic wars. Robert Gilpin points out that with the increase of relative power, an emerging power will attempt to change the rules of the international system, change the division of spheres of influence, and the most important is to change the distribution of international territory. As a response to this, the nation with dominant position has to cope with the challenge by altering its policies to restore the balance of the system. History tells us that if such efforts fail, the balance can only rely on war to solve.[12] John Mearsheimer, the representative of the theory of offensive realism, holds that if a regional hegemony faces a rival of its comparable strength, it is no longer a big country just to maintain the status quo and there is no doubt that it will do its best to weaken and even eliminate its opponents in the distance.[13]

Obviously, with regard to the rise of emerging countries, the mainstream international cognition is that the rise of emerging countries will pose a threat to the existing international system. Likewise, when it comes to China's rise, the cognition of the world, especially of the West countries, to a large extent resorts to and relies on the old existing text. This kind of cognition of China's rise, which is based on the old text, results in the generation of "China Threat Theory". China's rise does have certain similarities to the rise of some countries in history, so many people associate China with the rising countries in history and argue that China will not rise in a peaceful way, thus interpreting the text of "China rise" as "China threat"

The text of conventional cognition of the rising state and "China Threat Theory". The formation of "China Threat Theory" is also related to the old text of the international cognition of China, especially Western countries' cognition of China. In ancient times, China had created a brilliant civilization; in the middle of nineteenth Century China remained a strong nation in the world. But from the mid-nineteenth Century on, Chinese became poorer and weaker, and was gradually reduced to being bullied by the Western powers. And since the late nineteenth century, a popular argument aimed at China—"Yellow Peril", became popular in the western world. The main point of the argument is that yellow race, Chinese people in particular, constitutes a comprehensive scourge and threats to European and American Caucasian. The "Yellow Peril" originated in Europe, and its origin can be traced back to the local people's fear memory of Asian Tatar's attacks on Europe. And from the beginning of the Enlightenment, an aversion to "tyranny", "barbarism" and "closedness" of the East (mainly China) and superiority of civilization gradually formed in Western Europe. At the end of eighteenth Century, the proposal of such theories as Malthus's population theory and free trade and tariff protection reinforced "Yellow Peril". Because the advocates of "Yellow Peril" have been the influential figures in the modern history of the world, thus making it popular for half a century.[14]

Although history has already proved that "Yellow Peril" is ridiculous, this argument has never disappeared. With regard to China, "Yellow Peril" mainly manifests in the following three aspects. Firstly, Chinese race is inferior and incomparable to the Caucasian both in physical structure and in cultural level. If Chinamen should immigrant to the white people's territory and permanently settle down, they would undermine the civilization of western countries. Even more frightening is that if the yellow and the white have mixed marriages, the noble blood of the white people would be "pollute".

Secondly, the number large of Chinese people, Chinese people's great ability to adapt and their good tradition of hard work would make Chinese people very competitive and would sooner or later affect the western world's economic balance and industrial balance. Thirdly, if the Yellow race get full political liberation and becomes powerful equipped with modern weapons, they could drive the Europeans and Americans out of East Asia and even win the world hegemony because of the advantage in population.[15] "Yellow Peril" has been an argument mainly aimed at China and in essence has been used by the Western powers to realize their interests.

Although the present era and the era when "Yellow Peril" prevailed are in quite different historical stages, it can be seen that "Chinese Threat Theory" has close intertextual relationship with "Yellow Peril" in both manifestations and essence. On the one hand, this intertextual relationship can be understood as an objective factor, that is, the "Yellow Peril" has been popular for a long time and many people have deep-rooted and stereotyped cognition of China, they will rely on and embody this intertextual relationship subconsciously in understanding China's rise. On the other hand, this intertextual relationship may be used subjectively and consciously—some countries or individuals just use the argument or concept "Yellow Peril" to construct the cognition of China's rise, thus forming "China Threat Theory".

Conclusion

Up to now, "China Threat Theory" has had a variety of forms and covers many aspects, mainly concerning China's military threat, economic threat, racial threat, civilization threat, food threat, environmental threat, population threat, etc. The proposal of "China Threat Theory" reflects a panic mentality of some countries to the rise and the rapid development of China, and its main purpose is to contain China's development.

Maybe there are various reasons for the formation of "China Threat Theory". And athough the intertextual analysis of the formation of "China Threat Theory" is more of a theoretical exploration, such an exploration can to some extent help people have a deeper understanding of China's rise and "China Threat Theory". But on the other hand, based on the perspective of postmodernism, any text is not fixed, can be interpreted from different perspectives, and can be deconstructed, so the monopoly of traditional theories on the text interpretation should and can be broken. The original dominant text can be re-transposed with other texts so as to create another reality.[16] The interpretation of the text also reflects the power relations, so the practice of international relations can gain some enlightenment from this aspect. For example, there can be different interpretation of "China's rise" other than the western interpretation. Then the existing "China Threat Theory" can be deconstructed, a new interpretation of "China's rise" can be constructed, and thus China's international image can be improved.

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