

# The Revival of Western Political Culture Theory and its Causes Analysis

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**Abstract.** In the western countries, there was already someone who had tried to explain political phenomena through the analysis of cultural factors, but the special political culture study slowly rise in political circles until after the Second World War, the theory of political culture in the West has experienced the new establishment and flourishing period of the beginning of 50 to 70s, after the recession in the beginning of 70 to 80s, it came to revive since the mid of 80s and realized further prosperity in 90s. In this paper, the author introduces the revival of the political culture theory, discusses the reasons of the revival, and summarizes the trend on the theory of political culture after the revival.

## Introduction

After the founding of the western political culture theory in 1950s, it has experienced a saddle-shaped change in the past half century. From the middle of 50s to the beginning of the 70s, it was founded and flourished, during this period, the newly-emerging political culture theory became more and more popular, and became one of the main methods to analyze the social politics in the west. After entering 70s, it suffered attacks and criticisms from all aspects of society, it was blamed for being conservative and rigid, underestimating the function of social structure and power structure, and for having no explanatory power and predictability etc. Many scholars gave up the study of political culture because of these criticisms. As a consequence, the theory of political culture fell back to the edge of political science, even almost abandoned. In the early 80s, the political culture study appeared to a new turn. By the end of 80s, the revival was in full swing and flourished in 90s.

It was Ronald Inglehart who first put forward the concept of “political culture revival”. In 1988, he said that “it is time to correct the bias in social analysis” in his article entitled “the revival of political culture”. “Bias” refers to since end of the 60s, the rational choice theory based on the economic variables became the dominant mode of analysis, which belittled the cultural factors to be inconsistent with the actual level. However, in the eyes of Ronald Inglehart, no matter in western countries or in non-western countries, cultural factors in political life has increasingly shown its importance that can not be ignored, in the face of the political reality, rational choice theory was in a dilemma, it required people must pay attention to the effects of political culture in political analysis.

If Ronald Inglehart’s article is a kind of appeal, calling and expectation on revival of the political culture study, in 1989, Howard J. Wiarda declared, “Now, political culture is reviving”. What he proposed is based on the important works and articles about the research of political culture, recently published by important figures in the field of political science professional, including S. Huntington, A. Wildavsky, H. Aikestan and L. Pye.

By 1993, Almond, founder of political and cultural studies, further affirmed the existence of political culture revolves. The preface to the book “the political culture and democracy of the developing countries” edited by L. Dahl, is “the return of political culture”. He pointed out that only after a glance one would find that only in the past few years, there were five books, two political speeches of President of the American Academy, two first published papers of “American Political Science Review”, and two papers APSR debate, which all studied the problem of political culture.

He said: “Obviously, the research of political culture and political culture theory has ‘returned’, or as Ronald Inglehart said, has been ‘revived’”.

Nowadays, the political culture of the “revival” has been the obvious facts. However, this revival is not the simple repetition and extension of the past classic study, as Michael Brint said, “the research of political culture from the very beginning of the revival means regeneration, reinterpretation and recreation. It is not a simple change, but a change of history inspired by the perceived need of reality.” “It should not be understood as merely returning to the starting point of Almond’s scientific research”.

### **Analysis of the Reasons for the Revival of Political Culture Theory**

Political culture is an independent variable, regardless of what kind of criticism, political culture study is not likely to die. The main reasons leading to the recovery of political culture lies in.

Firstly, from 70 to 80s, the western developed industrial society has undergone profound cultural changes, which highlighted the importance of cultural factors. The post-war social and economic development and flourishing for decades led to the decline in the importance of economic factors, but the rise of the influence of cultural factors. Westerners growing up in such environment no longer valued income, job security, social security and other economic factors. Instead, they attached great importance to such demand of non materials as quality of life, environment, friendship and satisfaction of interests. Their values transferred from materialism to post materialism. The new generation of westerners had more opportunities to receive education, coupled with the growing social media, so that they had the potential to participate in politics in a more active and special way. The contemporary western citizens were full of increasing interest and understanding on national and international politics, and played an increasingly active role in policy formation, the elite-directed type of political participation had changed into the elite-challenging type one. The former, to a great extent, means the elite mobilized public to support the established political parties and trade unions, which mainly for political output, while the new “elite-challenging” type of political participation is mainly for political input, the public in the process of policy-making were less dependent on the elite, they were able to participate in issuing opinion actively, and played an increasingly important role. These changes in the culture had a profound influence on the political life of western countries. Political scientists realized that if they applied purely economic variables in political analysis without considering cultural factors, they would not be able to grasp political reality accurately and comprehensively.

Secondly, the achievement of the East Asian model in 80s led to the revival of the native culture in Asia, which shocked the western people’s preconceptions about modernity, as a result promoted non westernization of political culture study. With the rapid development of East Asian economy, many western scholars have realized that modernization is not the only one model, and the western political culture is not the only one that can promote modernization. Countries with different political culture traditions will have different modes of modernization. Although financial crisis of East Asian in the 90s made some people began to doubt the traditional Confucian culture and the positive role of “Asian values” to the modernization, the economic development of East Asia at that time indeed resulted in different political culture patterns of attention in political circles and attached importance to the political culture study in non Western countries.

Thirdly, in the field of theory, the main opponent of political culture theory----the rational choice theory was in a dilemma, and tended to be reconciled with political culture theory. According to the rational choice theory, social political phenomenon such as voting behavior, cabinet-establishment, political party’s decision, public policy-making can be explained by such a simple hypothesis, namely voters, politicians and other political actors were rational and they pursued maximization of short-term benefits. This theory argued that the political structure and behavior can be explained by political actors to their immediate interests, the maximum political role of short-term interests hypothesis can be effectively closed to reality, and accurately predicted the political behavior. The rational choice model has made important contributions to people's understanding of the political process, but it has reduced the importance of cultural factors to an

unrealistic level. By 1980s, the shortcomings of neglecting cultural factors, simplifying politics to the analysis model of the market became more and more obvious. sank into the dilemma of reductionism. Thus, the rational choice theorists began to seek ways to get rid of the dilemma, accepted the criticism from all aspects, made adjustments in several aspects: changed the assumption of complete rationality, replace complete rationality by bounded rationality, seeking satisfaction instead of seeking optimal; admitted human behavior had its irrationality, only the rational behavior was brought into the part of rational analysis; to be aware of the influence of system and culture on individual preferences and objective function, realized the sociology of purposeful behavior mode must consider the origin of people's values and beliefs, took personal preferences and purpose as influenced by institutional and cultural endogenous variables into the research category. The concession of rational choice theory and self-regulation adjusted the balance of social analysis, so that the cultural factors gained its important position. In this way, the political culture theory, which has been at the edge of political science since 70s, began to gain the mainstream status gradually.

Fourth, another major opponent of the theory of political culture--Western Marxism, was declining. The Marxist insisted that key industrial society political conflict in economic factors, politics was a reflection of the economic structure and process, and the capitalist society's cultural beliefs and symbols was a part of ideology and false consciousness of the superstructure, the superstructure was to reflect and protect the interests of the bourgeoisie, to absorb dominant mode of production and natural ideology in social class, therefore, cultural factors are passive, not having independent explanatory value. However, with the development of industrial society, the influence of economic factors reached the limit, non economic issues in national decision-making was playing an increasingly important role, so that in the West there is a "new politics axis", the axis is based on polarization between materialism value and post materialism value, social differentiation based on the class tended to decline. This means that the decline of social class conflicts and the emergence of a new type of political division based on the quality of life appeared. In addition, the Marx doctrine as the guiding ideology of the Communist movement suffered serious setbacks in Eastern Europe in 80s and lost the results, although the reasons of these events were complex, but denied the cultural relative independence and cultural differences, reality of denying cultural diversity to, resulting in a rigid system, can not be said to be a deep reason. Some western scholars believed that the events in Eastern Europe showed that "the political and cultural differences between nations played an important and even decisive role in the divergence of political behavior". In this case, some western Marx doctrine began to make concessions, trying to make self regulation, like "post Marxism" and appeared in recent years "analysis of the Marx doctrine", "rational choice of Marxism", they are closed to take on social science positivism method, built on micro foundation or individual decision. This fully showed that the various methods of modern political analysis has been towards integration, the Marx doctrine realized that politics is not only reflection of economic structure and process, there is also an interactive relationship between politics and culture, in which culture plays a relatively independent role, and has the value of independent interpretation. This recognition recognized the rationality of the study of political culture, thus promoted the revival of political culture.

Political culture theory after the revival.

## **Conclusion**

Although there are many imperfections in the study of political culture, the study does return to the center of political analysis, and shows a series of new trends and characteristics.

First of all, the date of political culture study in the 50-60s was from a fixed point in time, while the data after revival lasted for twenty to thirty years, which was constantly updated, this is a strong counterattack to the criticism that political culture is a static concept, and make the study of political culture continuity and change possible.

Secondly, the study of political culture in 50-60s of 20th century was accused of having tendency of ethnocentrism, the research content is mainly confined to the western political culture, and of

judging other countries' political culture by western citizens' culture standards, on the other hand, after the end of 80s ,the political culture research covers the majority of countries and regions in the world, such as the research of political culture in East Asia, the Middle East Islamic region, Latin America, Africa and India and other "Non West" political culture study, dialogue and interaction between different types of political culture came into beings, the western academia didn't characterize and measure other national political culture by the standard of western political culture any more, scholars began to pay attention to the role of the local political culture in the process of modernization.

Third, on the relationship with other subjects, the study of political culture after the end of 1980s is not a simple back to Almond's scientific method, but the convergence of more knowledge from many other subjects, for instance, Ronald Inglehart introduced the knowledge of economics and psychology and sociology in the his study, Putnam adopted the research methods of sociology and anthropology in his study and so on, all of these studies had shown that the rebirth of political culture had a tolerant rather than an excluded attitude towards the knowledge of other subjects, which also made its ability to explain the reality and predict future trends strengthen.

Last but not least, in addition to the construction of macro theory, the study of political culture after revival has greatly expanded the research field. For example, there has been a great deal of specific new issues' researches on protesting the new characteristics of politics, and the unsatisfied democrats.

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