

The birth background and main content of western citizen culture theory and its major shortcomings

Huayi Zhang

School of Political Science and Law, Capital Normal University, Beijing, 100048, China

Abstract: *The theory of civic culture is a research method of political culture constructed by American scholars Almond and Wiba on the basis of empirical research. By investigating the political attitudes and democratic institutions of five western democracies, namely, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Mexico, this paper sums up three different Western citizen cultures. Although this theory has some shortcomings in the research methods such as sample selection and quantitative objectivity, it has exerted an important influence on comparative politics, especially on the theory of democratic development. This paper will first explain the birth background and core views of the Western civil culture theory, then point out the shortcomings of the theoretical research, and finally provide some feasible suggestions for the construction and development of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics in the new era combined with the actual situation of China's development.*

Keywords: *Political culture; People's democracy throughout the process; Core socialist values*

1. Introduction

As the standard-bearers of the behaviorist political revolution, Almond and Wiba first coined the term "political culture" in 1956, defining it as "the specific orientation of political behavior embedded behind every political system" [1]. In the book *Civic Culture* co-authored by the two, they compared the specific situation of political culture in five countries through the use of comparative politics. He created a new theory of civic culture. This theoretical achievement not only promoted the rapid development of the theory of political democracy, but also introduced history, sociology, psychology and other disciplines into political analysis, and promoted the spread of behaviorist politics. Although limited by objective factors, Almond's civic culture theory has defects in research methods and argumentation effects, it is undeniable that many argumentation points are still very important today. Now that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, we are vigorously promoting socialist core values and building people's democracy throughout the process. At this time, in-depth analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of Western civil culture theories is of great reference value for the construction of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

2. The birth background of the theory of civic culture

The analysis of political affairs from the perspective of culture is not a situation that has only appeared in modern times. The Chinese and Western sages have long taken the influence of cultural factors on political phenomena into the scope of investigation. In ancient China, there are ideological arguments such as "all who rule the world must be based on human feelings" ("Han Feizi · Eight Classics") and "simple folk customs". For Western political thinkers, culture is an indispensable element of political analysis. Plato pointed out that governments change according to the habits of men, and that "the state does not exceed the sphere of human nature in which it lives". [2] Aristotle also believes that social culture plays an important role in national politics, and the difference of social structure will have an impact on the development of political life. Since modern times, political thinkers have explored the relationship and influence of the two from many angles. Montesquieu believed that natural resources, environmental climate and social customs had a significant influence on political development. He further pointed out that institutional construction, natural environment and cultural customs were the three major elements of the "spirit of law". Later modern thinkers, regardless of their political stance and value judgment, attach great importance to culture and emphasize the role of cultural customs and empirical traditions in promoting political operation.

In the aftermath of World War II, the question of why two world wars broke out in quick succession

in the first half of the 20th century, and why European democracy met the subversive challenge of fascism, became a hot topic in political circles. At the same time, with the rise of the national independence and liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America, more and more third world countries got rid of the control of colonial masters, completed the independence step, and established new nation states. In the beginning, these countries established various levels of government according to Western-style democratic systems, and expected to join the ranks of world powers through their own political reforms, but the reality is that in the short term, these countries have either political deadlock, difficulty in promoting economic development, or unrest and civil war, and social order has been broken. More importantly, some Western countries also have various social contradictions, even in the case of economic development, it is difficult to achieve political stability. Why do different countries with the same political system have different governance scenarios? What are the influencing factors and causal links among them? It has become a realistic problem that western politics urgently needs to answer and crack, and political culture can give a detailed answer.

At the same time, the outbreak of the Cold War and the rapid development of comparative politics have laid the foundation for the further study of political culture. In the context of the Cold War, how the Western countries gained a head start in competing with the Soviet socialist countries for the Third world, "winning the hearts and minds of people in the rising countries of the world and influencing their way of thinking". [3] At the same time, it is necessary to continuously consolidate the construction of democracy in Western countries and create a thriving democratic state in the Western world. Under such circumstances, in-depth analysis of the influencing factors and causal logic of the development of political democracy in various countries, and judgment of the prospects and possible crises of the development of democracy in various countries have become an important topic of Western politics. Under the influence of the behaviorist revolution, comparative politics has gone beyond the static analysis framework of the old institutionalism and introduced a large number of conceptual methods related to sociology, psychology and statistics. The country is integrated into the political system, and the psychological perception and concept interpretation behind the political behavior are analyzed. Such a unique research paradigm reactivates the old concept of culture and re-enters political research as a new political term of behaviorism.

3. The basic content of the theory of civic culture

In the book *Civic Culture*, Almond and Wiba conducted a statistical analysis of the civic cultures of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and Mexico through empirical research interviews. This paper focuses on the specific situation of the five countries' citizens' political cognition mode, feelings towards the government and politics, party positions, political participation obligations, citizens' awareness of political ability, political loyalty and social cooperation, social relations, organizational membership and political socialization. In particular, citizens of the five countries understand and judge the democratic system. On the basis of and, Almond and Wiba summarize three kinds of political culture, and then introduce the mixed characteristics of civic culture. The author argues that civic culture is neither traditional nor modern, but both. "It is a culture of pluralism based on communication and persuasion, a culture that combines consistency and diversity, a culture that allows for change but changes gradually." [4] "It is also a mixed culture, a balanced culture and a participant culture that promotes the good functioning of democratic politics." [5]

3.1 Village-type political culture

After analyzing the orientation frequency of the four specialized political objects, Almond and Wiba believe that when citizens of a country lack the necessary attention and enthusiasm for their own political system and the input and output content of the system, their civic culture can basically be called villager political culture (also known as regional political culture). African tribal societies and the primitive autonomous areas of the Coleman region, for example, can be considered of this type. In this kind of political society, there is often a lack of specialized political roles, and the functions and powers of the so-called tribal leaders, chiefs and grand wizards are difficult to clearly divide, and they are compatible with political, economic, and educational (religious) aspects. For the citizens in the village-type political and cultural environment, they do not expect that the political system can bring them great changes, nor do they expect to get anything from the political system.

Generally speaking, village-type political culture means that the society is in a primitive tribal or pre-modern state. Although the highly developed modern political system also has village-type political

culture, this is neither a universal phenomenon nor a decisive role in the direction of the political system. Therefore, relatively speaking, villager political culture is the main feature of pre-modern society. Although the typical pre-modern society is rare in contemporary times, this kind of political culture has far-reaching influence and plays an important role in the operation and maintenance of civic culture.

3.2 Subject political culture

The second type of political culture is subject political culture, also known as dependent political culture. The citizens in this political culture have a clear orientation towards the political system and the political output, but they have a low awareness of the input (supply) side of the political system and their enthusiasm for active political participation. In other words, citizens can be fully aware of specialized political authority, and regardless of whether they emotionally identify with the political system or whether they have a sense of belonging to political authority, citizens always acquiesce or approve it. In other words, the relationship between the political members of the political system and the political system itself is one of obedience and obedience. The purer the subject political and cultural society, the input ports of the political system are often less than the output ports, and even lack professional input ports within a certain range, showing a more passive participation relationship.

From the actual situation, the subject political culture means that the society has begun to enter the modernization, and gradually get rid of the villager political culture. However, a relatively stable political system has not yet emerged, and the principle of equivalence between information input and effective policy output has not yet been formed, so people lack the sense of participation to actively participate in the operation of the political system and give full play to their subjective initiative. It can be said that this subject political culture is very consistent with the actual situation of many third world countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the middle of the 20th century, and can give a relatively clear political explanation for the political development of these countries.

3.3 Participatory political culture

Participation political culture is the third category of political culture. This kind of culture is quite different from the above two kinds of political culture. Citizens are obviously inclined towards the system as a whole, but also towards the political and administrative structural process, that is, there is a clear political system input and output. Citizens under the influence of participatory political culture show a clear and positive orientation. Regardless of whether they agree or disagree with the political system itself, the status and role of individuals in political operation are very clear, and citizens themselves also have a positive cognitive orientation towards it. But this does not mean that their emotional attitude towards the role of citizens remains unchanged. There has also been a marked change in citizens' political attitudes.

It is worth noting that Almond and Wiba emphasize that no political system belongs only to a single political culture, in fact, the political culture of all countries is a mixed political culture, but the mixing proportion and influence of the three are different in different countries. Among the various blends, one political culture has the main influence and the other political culture has the secondary influence. The main reason for this is that the degree of political socialization is related to the differences between the internal and external environments of different political systems. Specifically, Almond and Wiba argue that mixed political cultures can be divided into three types: villager - subject political culture, subject - participant political culture, and villager - participant political culture.

3.4 Mixed civic culture

After elaborating on the three kinds of political culture, Almond and Wiba define and analyze the political culture. They argue that civic culture is different from the textbook "ideal" - in a well-functioning democracy, citizens are relatively rational and able to use their rationality to pursue their legitimate interests, making their own well-informed, well-considered decisions. The civic culture in reality is a mixed political culture, which not only includes the ideal and the active political participation of citizens, but also integrates the political culture of subjects and villagers.

First of all, civic culture is a kind of loyalty participation culture, and individuals have a full positive attitude towards the input and output of the political system. Secondly, the participatory political culture does not replace the subject political culture and villager political culture. As a participant in the political process, individuals do not always maintain an active participation in the state, but according to their

own circumstances to choose a political attitude suitable for their own period. However, it is worth noting that the cultural orientation of subjects and villagers under civic culture is consistent with the political orientation of participation, and is not mutually exclusive. In other words, these two political orientations provide a kind of "restraint" or "constraint", and integrate non-political attitudes such as trust with social participation and participatory orientation, so as to "achieve a more balanced political culture", which not only has political enthusiasm, participation and rationality, but also has certain negativity and tradition, which can achieve a dynamic balance. It is conducive to maintaining the stable operation of the political system.

4. The deficiency of the theory of civic culture

The theory of civic culture established by Almond and Vybar set a precedent for the study of political culture after World War II, and the new research method laid a foundation for the development of comparative politics. However, in-depth analysis of this research theory is not difficult to find that there are obvious Western centralism in the concept of this research, ignoring the historical development of countries in the world; At the same time, although this theory widely introduces the research paradigm of psychology and statistics, there are still some problems in the selection of research methods, such as sample sampling simplification and quantitative scientific difficulties, which need to be further analyzed and evaluated.

4.1 The problem of Western-centrism

The "Citizen Culture" co-authored by Almond and Wiba is a masterpiece of the behaviorist revolution. The innovative use of statistics, psychology and other disciplinary research methods is considered to be an important reason for the value neutrality of research theories. However, in the process of demonstration, Almond's ultimate purpose of classifying the political culture of the five countries is to explore the relationship between political culture and political system, that is, how political culture affects the operation of political system. Further, it is what kind of political culture can be seamlessly connected with the political system, and how to breed a political culture suitable for Western democracy. Therefore, the author has already assumed the conclusion at the beginning of the study, that is, only the political system identical with the western democratic system can correspond to the civil culture, and any country inconsistent with the Western system can not breed a suitable civil culture. Such preconceived research conclusions naturally do not conform to the fundamental principles of scientific inquiry advocated by the behaviorist revolution. From this perspective, we can find that Almond's self-proclaimed "value neutrality" is difficult to establish, because the preset starting point of the study is the contemporary western civic culture. Obviously, using this research model to judge the political culture of third world countries is inevitably full of Western-centered arguments, arrogance and prejudice. Behind the banner of scientific research, there is the export and expansion of Western ideology, which directly leads to obvious defects in the reliability of this argument.

4.2 Sample selection simplification problem

Almond and Wiba's theory of civic culture is based on the empirical sampling of Italy, Mexico, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. However, among the five countries, Britain and the United States at this time were typical democracies in the West, with stable economic and social development and relatively mature civic culture. Germany and Italy, on the other hand, were democracies established after the war, and it is difficult to judge the long-term development of their democratic systems in the context of the Cold War. However, Mexico in North America has long-term political instability and unpredictable domestic political situation. In this case, there are too many sample selection variables to measure the civil culture construction index with the same standard, and it is difficult to explain the reliability of the expected causal relationship. Generally speaking, comparative research should "seek common ground while reserving differences", and should be compared from the same perspective to achieve the final effect of "similar comparison". Political culture is different from statistical data. The political culture of different countries is affected by many factors such as historical development and cultural inheritance, so it is very difficult to unify the construction index of national political culture. However, Almond and Wiba oversimplify the selection of samples, which can directly verify the results of the preset study. Such a simple sample selection is not of practical help to scientific research, and the simple sample election also proves the deficiency and defect of this theory from the side. At the same time, there are too many interfering factors in the selection of samples in the research

process, which makes it difficult to conduct the study of control variables and single factors, and it cannot be ruled out that the mixed effect of multiple influencing factors may lead to serious weakening of the scientific and rigorous theory of civic culture.

4.3 The scientific problem of quantification itself

In the book *Civic Culture*, Almond and Wiba studied and analyzed the political attitudes of citizens in five countries through questionnaires, interviews and other methods, that is, they used scientific quantitative methods to study political culture [6], and then summarized and formed basic theories of civic culture. Different from the voting theme that behaviorism often adopts quantitative research, citizens' political attitude is not a number that can be easily quantified. Each person's attitude towards politics is affected by political environment, event development, emotional mood and other aspects, which is difficult to be fully displayed by quantitative tables. In addition, because the investigation on the political culture of the five countries is not carried out at the same time, although the locations and research objects selected for the investigation are random, the population base of the five countries is huge, and the regional development is not balanced. Random sampling surveys do not fully reflect the general views and main positions of people in various countries on politics. More importantly, it is difficult for people's attitudes towards political events to be consistent with their political behaviors. In the absence of repeated experiments to eliminate errors, it is impossible to guarantee the authenticity and reliability of statistical data, let alone prove that the political culture of a country is simply obtained through the superposition of individual political attitudes. The development of political culture has the characteristics of long-term stability, and is a dynamic consciousness gradually formed in the historical development. To judge the political culture of a certain country simply through individual consciousness through a short-term questionnaire survey is obviously unable to objectively reflect the civil culture of that country. Whether the research method of sampling interview and then quantification can scientifically reflect the revolutionary culture of the country is also an important question to reflect whether this research is scientific.

5. Conclusion

The western civil culture theory, which was born in the Cold War background, is the innovative result of comparative politics under the behaviorist revolution. Almond and Wiba introduced a new research method to connect macro political analysis with micro individuals and obtain new meanings from traditional research objects. Although there are Western centrism in this research, there are also some problems in the research method such as sampling simplification and quantitative science, and there are some historical limitations. "But it clearly puts forward a series of value goals for judging different political cultures, provides the basic process of political culture research, and has strong vitality." [7]

A careful analysis of Almond and Wieba's theory of civic culture is not difficult to find that this theory has a very strong European and American color, and acquiesces that Western civic culture and democratic system are the only benchmark of modernization. "Democracy is the right of all peoples, not the preserve of a few countries. There are many ways to achieve democracy, and it is impossible to be the same." "Only by developing a democratic path suited to national conditions can we promote the development of all aspects of society. At the same time, civic culture is a cultural imprint rooted in history, with the characteristics of continuity and inheritance, and can not be separated from the traditional culture of the country. This requires us to fully base ourselves on China's actual conditions when building and developing a socialist civic culture with Chinese characteristics, and critically absorb and learn from Western ideological trends and absorb research results useful to China's development. The traditional Chinese culture has a very rich cultural heritage. On the basis of inheriting and developing the traditional Chinese command, we should correctly view the successful development experience of different countries and regions, take the essence and discard the dross, give full play to the advantages of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and vigorously promote the core socialist values. We will actively build a whole-process model of people's democratic development that suits China's reality, and make theoretical contributions to the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era.

In addition, a nation's culture is a spiritual wealth gradually formed after hundreds or even thousands of years of historical evolution. Therefore, cultivating a socialist citizen culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era is also a long-term cultural construction task. In the 1960s, Almond and Wiba held that civic culture needed matching conditions such as economic level, political atmosphere

and basic education, and only after a long political and social process could a relatively mature civic culture be cultivated in the society. This also shows that in the new era, to promote the construction of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics, we should follow the principle of gradual and orderly progress, take one step at a time, do not rush to achieve success, and create a good atmosphere for political socialization. Through school education, media publicity and other means, the socialist core values are imperceptible in people's minds, so that citizens can gradually and orderly participate in government operation and public affairs. At the same time, "the state should provide an economic foundation and institutional guarantee for civic culture through economic and political restructuring, and cultivate civic spirit through the development of education." [8] To this end, we should actively cultivate and encourage citizens to practice socialist core values, actively promote the construction of people's democracy in the whole process, on this basis, further inspire people and gather morale, and accumulate strong positive energy for the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country and the realization of the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation.

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