

Community to Society: Research on Tönnies's Modernity Thoughts

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Abstract: *The thought of modernity reflects the characteristics of modern society, and the classical social theory is a knowledge response to the problem of modernity. Tönnies reveals the characteristics of traditional society and modern society through the description of the two ideal types of community and society. The kernel of his modernity thoughts is his specific explanation of the changes in social relations and the combination mode of social members during the transformation of human life from community to society. This article discusses the background of the time when Tönnies's modernity thoughts was put forward, and further explained Tönnies's insights on the diagnosis and treatment of modernity.*

Keywords: *Tönnies, modernity, community, society*

1. Introduction

Tönnies's modernity thoughts can be said to be observations and reflections on his time and experience. His modernity thoughts are fundamentally motivated by modernity issues. Tönnies's modernity thoughts reveal and describe the development and change of human society from a traditional community to a modern society, and this is the entry point of Tönnies's modernity thoughts. In the book "*Community and Society*", Tönnies clearly pointed out that "in the development of large cultures, two eras are opposed to each other: the era of a society follows the era of a community (Tönnies, 2010, p265). The community is old, and the society is new. Community is a lasting and true common life, and society is just a temporary and superficial common life (Tönnies, 2010, p44-45)", this is the concentrated expression of Tönnies's modernity thoughts.

As an ideal type, "community" and "society" are similar to the "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity" of French sociologist Durkheim, and both try to show the Transformation from traditional society to modern society. Tönnies regards community and society as two different combination groups, and profoundly explains the changes in social relations and the way of social members' combination caused by the transformation of traditional rural society to modern industrial society. Through historical analysis and comparative research, he has analyzed the transformation of traditional society to modern society. The transition of society gives a sociological explanation, and Tönnies's concrete interpretation of the development process of human life from a community to society is Tönnies's modernity thoughts.

2. The background of the times when Tönnies's modernity thoughts were put forward

2.1 Social backgrounds

In the process of the rapid evolution of German society to modernization, it not only brought about the development of social productivity, but also produced many social problems and modern social diseases. This is the social background that Tönnies's modernity thoughts were put forward. Increasingly emerging social new things and large-scale social changes have increased the psychological pressure of social members; social disorderly competition has destroyed the original social harmony; the prevalence of egoism has weakened the individual's identification with society (Huang, 2019). These naked phenomena aroused the anxiety and thinking of the sociologist Tönnies, who used community and society to profoundly explain the changes in social relations and the way of social members' combination caused by the transformation of traditional rural society to modern industrial society.

2.2 Academic backgrounds

Tönnies's modernity thoughts were also a reference and reflection on the theoretical standpoint of romanticism and the thinking methods of the historical schools at that time. The *Romantic Movement* at the end of the 18th century adhered to the standpoint of "social organic," emphasizing the individual independence and personal freedom of social members while following the social holistic viewpoint. The historical schools advocates the supremacy of rationalism and opposes the use of any universal principles to define things and analyze social development. Tönnies's modernity thoughts were influenced by the collision of these two theoretical positions, He believed that Romanticism and the historical schools had some antagonisms in some theoretical positions, Romanticism ignored empirical objects, and the historical schools only emphasized empirical induction. Tönnies believes that the formation of social theory requires not only empirical verification and correction, but also rational logical inspection and verification deduction (Jiang, 1983).

Therefore, Tönnies uses "organic" and "mechanical" to express the difference between community and society. He believes that community is based on emotion, and membership is an organic combination based on mutual trust. Living in this community, individuals and society are an intimate relationship, and the individual does not feel a loss of individuality in the community. On the contrary, a co-living form based on the contract and mechanically combined is the essence of society, and social members entering the society are like entering an unfamiliar territory. Tönnies's conceptual interpretation of "community" and "society" and the description of these two forms of life are influenced by the collision of romanticism and historical schools, thus showing the purity of sociology (Wirth, 1926).

3. The diagnosis of modernity

3.1 Reasons for social evolution: the essential will and choice will

Tönnies believes that different wills lead to different forms of life, only from the common will, that is, from mutual affirmation, can the so-called social life in a narrower and stricter sense be derived (Tönnies, 2016, p5). Therefore, there are two ideal types in human social life: community and society. Essential will generate community, and choice will generate society. Tönnies's division of the essential will and choice will be mainly based on individual motivation. Essential will is mainly based on the natural emotional motives of the members of the community, which cannot be obtained through efforts, and it is also the principle of the unity of life in which the thinking and behavior of the individual are consistent with the ancestors. The choice will be different, it's mainly based on thought motivation, and the individual has to a large extent got rid of the thinking and behavior inherited from the ancestors (Tönnies, 2010, p117).

The different manifestations of the essential will, and choice will have a great influence on the development of social forms and the scope of life. Essential will include three forms of expression: liking, habit and memory (Tönnies, 2010, p136-137). The three manifestations constitute an organic combined community characterized by life-intensiveness and the principle of life unity. This community takes kinship, neighbors, and friendship as the main forms, and is based on blood, affection, and ethics, as a bond, such as family, neighborhood and village, and it mainly emphasizes the close integration of emotions between members. Corresponding to the essential will, the choice will also have three manifestations: deliberate, aspiration and concept. These three manifestations constitute a mechanically integrated group with individual members separated from each other, without expansion and compounded, such as stock companies and cities, which mainly emphasize the interests of social members.

According to Tönnies's understanding, in the process of development and change of human society, the ideal type of society appeared later than the community, "the community is old, the society is new" (Tönnies, 2010, p44). This statement reveals the objective fact of social dynamic development and the basic direction of the social transformation: the development of community to society (Zhang, 2017).

3.2 Combining Bonds: tacit agreement and social contract

In the community described by Tönnies, the bond between members is the tacit agreement. This tacit agreement is the dominant belief that memberships is common, has binding force, and unites members together organically. Moreover, this tacit agreement is based on the close connection of

individuals and living in a common area. In this community, members share a common spiritual consciousness and sense of community identity, which further promotes the development of the community. Thus, the greater the similarity between the structure and experience of a society, or the more coordinated the nature of individuals, the higher the possibility of tacit agreement (Tönnies, 2010, p59). Tönnies specifically pointed out that the symbolic mediators in the community that tacit agreement are “words”, such as pictures and facial expressions. Community members use these words symbols to convey feelings and share emotions to each other. This kind of words is innate and stems from the intimacy, understanding and love among members. Bauman stated this as: "The understanding is there. It's readily available and can be used at any time" (Bauman, 2003, p5).

However, the modern society is a mechanically combined group composed of heterogeneous populations with division of labor, and the bond between members is the social contract. “Any unanimous will to exchange, as long as the exchange is conceived as a social behavior, is called a contract” (Tönnies, 2010, p83). Contracts are mediated by real objects, and members can legally force the promiser to perform the payment according to the time limit. In this process, value replaces emotion as the criterion of member interaction, all social relations are fundamentally based on the balance between possible and actual payment.

3.3 Life styles: overall standard and individual standard

In Tönnies's modernity thoughts, the community exists before the society. The community is an organic combination based on the overall standpoint and formed naturally. The members of the community live together by relying on real estate such as farmland and houses and traditional natural feelings, Even if the members are separated in form, the community is still organically combined. Tönnies distinguishes three types of communities: blood community (relatives), geographic community (neighborhood), and spiritual community (friendship) (Tönnies, 2010, p53). The emergence of these three kinds of communities has a sequence, and the latter is always higher than the former. However, the geographical community and the spiritual community are separated from the blood community, which proves that although the traditional social community may be separated for some reasons, it is only separated under the overall standard, The essence of the separation is for the development of the community. Under the influence of the overall standard, the connection of community members is possession and enjoyment, such as children enjoying the protection and teaching of mothers, and mothers enjoying the happiness of possessing children.

However, separate and strange individuals are units of modern society, living together on the basis of individual instrumental rationality and social contract, following the mechanical combination of individual standard, or basically not combined together, but basically separated and independent. As Tönnies described it: "Despite all kinds of separation in the community, there is still union; in society, despite all kinds of union, there is still separation" (Tönnies, 2010, p77). For example, although a stock company and a big city are a combination, the reason for the combination is based on the interests of individuals, shops, companies, etc. In this exchange society, although people have various connections through contracts and regulations, there are strict boundaries in the field of individual activities, and any trigger is hostility (Tönnies, 2010, p77). Individuals measure their efforts in return, Goods are also exclusive, and individuals in society try to take goods as their own. Therefore, there is actually nothing in common.

3.4 Authority distributions: vertical management and division of labor exchange

Tönnies pointed out that traditional society is a community in a moral sense, and the natural distribution concept and sacred secular authority dominate social life, the role of exchange and purchase, contracts and regulations in the community is negligible. There are four types of secular authority in the community: the majesty of the prince, the majesty of age, the majesty of power and the majesty of wisdom (Tönnies, 2010, p56-57). Among them, the majesty of wisdom is the majesty of the priesthood, which is superior to other majesty. However, this kind of majesty does not come entirely from the weak's fear of the strong, but from the feeling of awe arising from the combination of fear and respect (Tönnies, 2010, p53).

However, in modern society, secular authority is replaced by legal authority. The society is full of fairness, justice and rational rules. Social members become legal actors, and individual actions tend to be rationalized, and Individual relationships are based on contracts. Contracts serve as a legal validity, and the distribution of social property also needs to comply with legal regulations. Moreover, the

division of labor by contract makes the exchange relationship prevail, and individuals hope to obtain a useful value from the value they cannot use through exchange.

4. The diagnosis and treatment of modernity

4.1 Value correlations: the preference of community and the pessimism of modern society

Tönnies experienced the transition from the early rural community to modern society, consistent with other sociologists in modern times in the West, Tönnies is also keenly aware of the loss of the community and the crisis of modern society. In response to this difference, Karl Marx put forward the "free class" and "self-made class" (Marx, 1962, p133-134), and Emile Durkheim put forward the "inorganic unity" and "organic unity" (Durkheim, 2000, p33-159). Marx Weber described the "rationalized" modern society as a "disenchanted iron cage" (Weber, 2008, p147-190). Tönnies put forward community and society to distinguish traditional society from modern society, and he saw the problems in modern society: The industrial revolution caused the loss of individual identity; the market economy promoted the excessive rationalization of individuals; the development of modern technology made Individuals are excessively separated; people get great sensory and material satisfaction in modern society, but they are lonely, tense, and depressed due to excessive separation (Ding, 2013).

Obviously, in the discussion of modernity thoughts, Tönnies is committed to maintaining value neutrality between traditional society and modern society, but his discussion of community and society has an obvious value judgment from beginning to end: preference and idealization of the community. Tönnies pointed out that: "young people are warned not to be deceived by bad societies. However, it is against the meaning of language to speak of a bad community" (Tönnies, 2010, p43). Bauman puts it more clearly: "the life circle or the society may be bad, but they are not a community. We believe that the community is always good " (Bauman, 2003, p2).

4.2 Modernity prescriptions: seeking community in modern society

Tönnies has desire and enthusiasm for the social relationships and organic unions established by the members of the community through intimate and profound feelings, while he holds a pessimistic view of the mechanical combination formed by individuals based on instrumental rationality in modern society. "Community is a lasting and true common life, and society is just a temporary and superficial common life" (Tönnies, 2010, p44-45), this is the concentrated expression of Tönnies's modernity thoughts. Tönnies's prescription for the problem of modernity is to find the community in modern society. The British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman also expressed his desire and enthusiasm for finding community in modern society in his book "Community: Finding Security in an Uncertain World." Bauman believes that: "community has become a lost paradise, but it is another paradise we eagerly hope to return to" (Bauman, 2003, p5). Sociologists advocates that the return of community is not an ideological retrogression, but a modernity ideology based on the reality of modern society.

In Tönnies's view, community is the lasting type of real life and historical life. Although the power of community is reduced in the social period, it still retains, and people still live together in the way of community. Tönnies pointed out: "Society cannot suppress hostile actions, and it must create conditions and lay a foundation to create people and forces that obey the customs, or at least it must counteract the tit-for-tat forces" (Tönnies, 2010, p261-264), this is Tunnes' desire for the return of the community. Community was the destiny of pre-modern people, but it has become a possible choice in modern society. In an increasingly rationalization of modern society, we can no longer return to traditional society, but on the premise of affirming the development trend of modern society, we need to examine and measure the social problems existing in modern society, and clarify the boundary between traditional society and modern society. Efforts should be made to expand the survival tension of the community in modern society and reconstruct the mainstream values that belong to the modern society.

5. Conclusion

Tönnies's modernity thoughts are fundamentally inspired by the issue of modernity, and the core of his modernity thought is the transformation of community to society. Tönnies reveals the development and changes from traditional communities to modern society by distinguishing the differences between the community and society in terms of evolutionary reasons, Combining Bonds, life style, and Authority distribution. His modernity thought is a reasonable tool for diagnosing modern society

because of its keen observation on the development of modern society. Today, Tönnies's thought of modernity are still of great significance. For example, in the diagnosis of the "virtual society" currently being realized, Tönnies expressed that this virtual society was purely "fictional", and the contact between individual members is unfamiliar and unreal. Living in today's real society, as a modern person, we can also understand the profound influence of Tönnies's modernity thoughts.

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