Theory Construction and Exploration of Relationship between Ethnic Identity and National Identity

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Keywords: Ethnic Identity, National Identity, Cultural Community, Community of Destiny

Abstract. The relationship between ethnic identity and national identity is of great significance in the building of a modern nation. “Homogeneous school”, “heterogeneous school” and the “theory of multiculturalism” can only lead to radical views due to their “either this or that” choice. According to China’s national conditions, the Chinese nation community identity is the necessary link in the realization from ethnic identity to national identity. Only by actively constructing cultural community of Chinese nation and common community of Chinese nation destiny, can we achieve the purpose of enhancing national identity of all nationalities and maintaining national stability.

The deepening of globalization and modernization makes it possible for the world economy, politics, and culture to have unbalanced development. The unbalanced development makes internal contradiction of interests intensified in different ethnic groups between nation and nation, region and region, and inside nations. The traditional “nationality and nation” relationship is questioned, and there arises so-called “identity crisis”, so that in many countries “ethnic conflict and national war triggered by ethnic problems seriously affected the countries’ political stability and economic development.”\textsuperscript{[1]} It also has impact on the development of normal relations between countries, even world peace and tranquility. Because of this, there is a widespread discussion in academic field. But scholars are confronted with a lot of confusion as they consider ethnic identity and national identity in multiethnic countries: unlike a single ethnic nation, many ethnic groups within multiethnic countries are not always consistent because of inherent differences and tension.

Brief Analysis of Ethnic Identity and National Identity

Ethnic identity refers to “the sense of oneness attached to one’s ethnic group members due to their objective ties of blood connection or subjective recognition of the same ethnic identity.”\textsuperscript{[2]} Its core is the construction and recognition of ethnic identity, emphasizing on the sense of belonging and responsibility consciousness based on group members’ common region, kinship, common historical memory, and cultural traditions (identity based on ties of blood and regions is symbolic, and the identity based on ethnic common historical memory and cultural identity is fundamental). In reality, the ethnic identity is shown with two different attitudes: closed and open ethnic identity. Closed ethnic identity is shown in strong sense of belonging and responsibility consciousness. At the same time it also refers to disagreement with and rejection of other ethnic groups; open ethnic identity, on the other hand, refers to people’s awareness of difference and boundary of their own group with other ethnic groups, but they recognize other ethnic groups. Their behavior is a benign interaction with other groups and harmony.

National identity has strong political attribute. It refers to “the recognition of a country’s citizen of historical and cultural traditions of his motherland, moral values, ideal and faith and national sovereignty, namely, citizen identity.”\textsuperscript{[3]} It contains two aspects: cultural and political aspects. Cultural level of national identity emphasizes on attachment and belonging to common historical tradition and culture, namely “belonging” national identity. It refers to “citizen’s recognition of his
cultural—psychological belonging to a country (or nationality) and not belonging to a country (or nationality).” [4] Political level of a country refers to loyalty to and recognition of a country’s system, policy, namely “positive” national identity. What should be pointed out is that, by constructing equal citizenship, the emphasis on the identification of specific political and economic system does not necessarily produce citizen loyalty to his country. Only “strong” national identity can enhance national cohesion and centripetal force based on national community built on two bonds of political identity and cultural identity, that is, “political identity and cultural identity are the important aspects of national identity. Together they create citizens’ loyalty to the country.” [5]

Theoretical Construction of the Relationship between Ethnic Identity and National Identity

(1) The first is “homogeneous school”. This view thinks that the core of modern nation construction is homogeneous national citizenship, namely to eliminate ethnic identity; it tries to construct undifferentiated citizenship to realize the integration of ethnic identity and national identity. In the eye of people who hold “Homogeneous school” view, members of ethnic identity emphasize common historical memory, common customs, common language, common psychological recognition and sense of belonging; while national identity has obvious political nature, focusing on citizenship building within the national territory, whose core is citizen loyalty and belonging to the nation. Therefore, “also there is a close connection between the two, but it is difficult to reconcile the contradictions between the two.” [6] The moderate advocates of “Homogeneous school” think that ethnic identity and national identity is a pair of contradiction. It can only be either this or that. They think ethnic identity will weaken the national identity, and vice versa. Therefore, in the process of national construction, ethnic identity should be subject to and serve the national identity. Radical advocates of “homogeneous school” think that ethnic identity and national identity are the relationship between part and whole, and part must obey the whole. National identity has wider scale and higher level. National identity covers ethnic identity, so clarification of national identity and citizenship must precede ethnic identity construction. “It is necessary to stress ethnic and national identity regarding the construction of ethnic identity, connecting ethnic identity which has academic significance with national identity associated with political connotation.”[7] Namely, ethnic identity submits to citizenship and ethnic identity subordinates to national identity. In order to build a homogenous nation, the radicals of “Homogeneous school” even argue that a politically homogeneous community should be established through the national mandatory policies and measures. This community can crush and ignore heterogeneous elements of minority groups or create a “cultural community” with “common historical memory and common cultural psychology.”

“Homogeneous school” has realized the positive assimilation effect of multiethnic nations so they deny, or suppress heterogeneity of ethnic culture and ethnicity by compulsory means to implement national identity. Its theory originated from racial superiority theory in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The theory views the relationship between ethnic identity and national identity in one dimensional perspective and thinks with one-sided view that minorities should abandon “backward culture” and initiatively be integrated into “subjective culture”. Theory of homogeneous in essence is a kind of nationalism. It maintains its vested interests by publicizing the legitimacy of national rule of the main entity. It builds national identity. It tends to provoke minorities’ anger, even armed confrontation. The implementation of Kazakhstan “subjective nationalization” policy, for example, ignored minority cultural diversity and legitimate interests appeal and ran aground; Rwanda’s radical homogeneous country building angered minority group and led to serious social conflicts.

(2) The second is “heterogeneous school”. This view admits ethnic diversity and heterogeneity, regarding the ethnic identity and national identity as two levels of a group identification, namely double identity. Multiethnic cultures not only have equal status, but the same value amount; therefore, this theory argues that on the premise of respect for cultural diversity, peaceful coexistence can be achieved in different ethnic groups. To recognize and protect ethnic culture
diversity, it certainly will need to “build a multivariate system structure and legal norms” [8] to enable heterogeneity, diverse ethnic groups to have balanced development in multivariate political framework. In fact, the theory of heterogeneous school adheres to the absolute consistency of ethnic cultural identity and political identity, namely, various ethnic cultural demands can be satisfied in inclusive and multivariate political framework. Therefore, the Heterogeneous theorists think that unity of the ethnic identity and national identity can be realized by constructing inclusive and multivariate political structure to recognize and secure ethnicity of different ethnic groups and cultural diversity.

“Heterogeneous school” admits the possibility of integration between ethnic identity and national identity, and tries to establish an inclusive and multivariate political landscape by respecting the differences. This approach surely secures equal development of all nationalities, and may enhance ethnic consciousness of national identity in a short period of time, but in the long run, the emphasis on ethnic cultural differences and cultural value amount, and construction of “political—legal norms” of national identity in a unilateral way is dangerous. It can easily give rise to a country's unrest and poses threat to national unity at the time when minority groups ask for “self-determination”. For example, the former Yugoslavia was an allied government based on different political, cultural and religious background with the combination of different nationalities. The national identity was built according to institutional framework and legal norms. This model has the effect of cohesive forces when dealing with foreign aggression, but when the internal contradictions could not be solved in the institutional framework, ethnic conflict broke out, leading to its final collapse.

(3) The third is “the theory of multiculturalism”. This theory advocates for coordination of ethnic identity and national identity in a different and democratic way and treats different ethnic differences by the concept of “conformity in unconformity”. It advocates for a coordination of the relationship between cultural pluralism and political integration in a democratic way. It emphasizes equality in differences and demands equal rights for minority groups, and hopes to build national identity through this political tie of different citizenship. Multiculturalists think that every ethnic group has the right to keep and develop ethnic culture. It emphasizes mutual respect, equality and coexistence between ethnic groups, negates cultural hegemony, and opposes a single standard of evaluation of other cultures.

Multiculturalism adheres to equal cultural value of multiethnic cultures, opposes oneness in value judgment and cultural hegemony. Due to the respect for minority cultural diversity, it emphasizes the construction of national identity with differences in citizenship and thus acquires the political function in the building of unified national country. However, the theory of multiculturalism is put forward in order to prove the validity of liberalism, and it is easy to overlook the possibility of the building of cultural community of Chinese nation leading to cultural relativism, so it is in fact a kind of pure emphasis on the political level of national identity building, a fragile mode. If the diversity of ethnic culture is viewed in an isolated and closed way, it cannot objectively reflect real conditions of the ethnic culture. In fact, the ethnic minorities within multiethnic countries are often marginalized. Emphasis on cultural diversity does not mean the improvement of economic status of ethnic minorities. Material determines consciousness. Culture is exterior characterization of ethnic identity center. The economic inequality is often expressed in the form of cultural form, becoming the direct cause of ethnic conflict. For example, Canadian Mosaic platter tries to give equal cultural rights and citizenship to ethnic minority groups, to enhance their national identity. However, due to the lack of unified national level of cultural identity, the emphasis on equality of ethnic cultural value does not bring real economic and political equality.

All homogeneous school, heterogeneous school, and theory of multiculturalism regard the ethnic identity and national identity as contradictory dual identity: namely they put emphasis on the fact that ethnic identity will endanger national identity, and vice versa. They think they cannot be
Cultural community of Chinese nation

Essentially, Chinese nation is a “composite nation”. It is not a simple mixture of 56 ethnic groups, but “a national entity which includes 56 ethnic groups within the territory of China.” “In the diversified pattern of unity, 56 ethnic groups are at the grass-roots level, and the Chinese nation is on the top.” “A high level of nation can be said as essentially an integrated and diverse complex.” [9] “Compound” Chinese nation denies the classification of ethnic identity as being different with a high and low level or grade. Instead, it recognizes that different ethnic groups have rights to keep and develop their own ethnic culture and way of life. Corresponding to the structure of the Chinese nation, Chinese culture also shows the unique diversified oneness. Its repeated emphasis on countless social practices of solidified social patterns has been internalized in community members’ consciousness and social psychology whose core value judgment standard is “filial piety, love and respecting one's elder brother, loyalty, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity and avoidance of shameful and indecent behavior”, emphasizing on “harmony with diversification”. [10] One of its outstanding characteristics “is the centralization of cultures of all nationalities in central China and the constant radiation to its surrounding areas, integrated repeatedly and forming a larger cultural community.” [11] This “harmony with diversification” of Chinese culture highlights the established history and practical inheritance of co-source and co-existence of Chinese national culture, emphasizes cultural communication register under diverse and blended multiethnic cultural context and shows the common social characteristics of Chinese nation. For members of the community, identity with Chinese culture does not only shape their basic personality, but also confirms their Chinese national identity. Therefore, based on the admittance, recognition and belonging of Chinese culture, community of Chinese nation is accepted and consolidated, independent of historical domain which shapes other nationalities.

Common community of Chinese nation destiny

Common community of Chinese nation destiny, namely “weal and woe together, live or die together and share the same fate together” [12] is finally formed in modern anti-imperialist struggle and fully developed in Anti-Japanese War. The national consciousness of the Chinese nation and national identity is gradually evolved in the interaction of Chinese nation with other nations. It is the national recognition and belonging on the basis of the recognition of other nations. The awakening of recognition consciousness of modern Chinese nation and the production and development of national thought is a response to the international situation at that time. It is characterized by two aspects: one is the establishment of modern national concept and the production of national identity. In the face of a full-scale invasion of western powers, the traditional Chinese concept of “unity of the whole world” appeared inappropriate. To save the nation from subjugation, we had to change the idea and admitted that China was a member of the national system in the world to achieve independence. The second is the construction of Common community of Chinese nation destiny. At the critical moment when we faced the problems at home
and abroad, the nationalism ideas based on Chinese nation as the center of the world was no longer useful to solve the practical problems of China. There should be a new national theory to handle China's national problems, namely, a diversified and unified common community of Chinese nation destiny should be built based on the common destiny and destiny, to achieve internal unity and cooperation of various ethnic communities of Chinese nation to fight outside forces. Under the condition of globalization, the international political, economic, cultural and social communication has become more profound and more diversified, but the sovereign state still is the active tool to realize national overall goal. The reality of today's international situation and the emphasis on sovereign nations make it possible for the fate and future of all nationalities of the Chinese nation more closely connected with each other. This is represented in the realization of “Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

In short, in the context of globalization, multiethnic countries can not only emphasize the national cultural identity, ignoring the political integration; neither can they limit national identity to the level of political identity, denying the possibility of common cultural construction in national scope. On the basis of respect for cultural diversity, the common cultural construction of Chinese nation and common community of Chinese nation destiny which is characterized with inclusiveness is a feasible scheme to handle the relationship between ethnic identity and national identity. Under the guidance of such theory and practical exploration of feasible measures, we can promote the development from ethnic identity to national identity.

References


