

Comparisons Between Social Functionalism and Constructivism International Relations: Example of the French Revolution

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Abstract. For researchers in the fields of sociology and international relations, the thoughts and actions of using theories from each other's fields are regular and frequent, as the two research fields sometimes share similar research goals and subjects. Yet even though corporations between subjects are regular, articles merely focusing on comparisons of theories in two research fields can be defined as in shortage. As a result, trying to find out similarities and differences between major sociological theories and international relations theories can be a great help and guidance for crossing-major research. From the analysis with a theoretical aspect, this paper tries to show the differences and similarities of two theories from a theoretical basis by adding a brief introduction of a combined new theory from two theories and a table showing the comparison of the two theories; the paper will show a much clearer vision to the differences and similarities. By using the example of situations in the French revolution, those true and existing historical issues with great influences on both French society and European, even international politics and diplomatic atmosphere gave out clear sights about the practical analysis for comparisons between international constructivism and social functionalism. As a result, from both theoretical aspects and practical examples, the paper will conclude that the similarities between the two theories will focus on the interdependent relationship between agencies and structures, and the differences will focus on the appropriate use fields.

Keywords: Social functionalism, Constructivism, the French revolution.

1. Introduction

In common opinions, researchers in sociology and international relations often have similar ideas on certain issues. In this paper, the similarities between basic social structural functionalism and international constructivism. In recent years, most researchers are focusing on other new theories, such as neofunctionalism, postmodernism and meta modernism and so on. At the same time, researchers who are still focusing on social structural functionalism and international constructivism are also facing some challenges. Some researchers are focusing on resistance to functionalism and changing characters in IGOs [1]. Some researchers are focusing on analyzing everyday nationalism in constructivism sights [2]. Combined research from two subjects is a shortage among all researches. Therefore, back to the starting point of sociology and international relations is a great option to start the analyze of theories in sociology and international relations. To define in a broader way, international relations are a part of international society so that international relations are also in the researching field of sociology. To combine the two researching fields, comparing current theories of two subjects is one of the best methods to continue such process. Therefore, the analysis of comparisons of two theories is very important.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Social Functionalism in Sociology

Functionalism is a theory founded by Émile Durkheim. To be more specific, functionalism consider our society as a machine which consist by millions of components, especially all human in this society. People in society will be divided to different aspects of society to participate in their most appropriate

occupations to function society. All different phenomena in society have their own function for this society to exist. To dive deeper to Durkheim's social structural functionalism, this paper will start from his famous book, *On Morality and Society*, to discuss more. In his book, Durkheim stated that, "As work is divided more, this suppleness and liberty become greater. The same individual is seen to raise himself from the most humble to the most important occupations [3]." By dividing labor, society will achieve a better democracy and liberty. Dividing labor is the basis of social functionalism. As I mentioned in the previous part of my article, Durkheim saw people as millions of components of this society. Therefore, to achieve the most efficient and rational. Yet, the way to achieve such efficiency is hard to find. Simply defining people's advantages by authority can only cause to lack of liberty and low willingness to occupations among all society components. As a result, to seek out a proper method to divide social labor, Durkheim pointed out "IT IS TRUE that in the industrial societies that Spencer speaks of, just as in organized societies, social harmony comes essentially from the division of labor. It is characterized by a cooperation which is automatically produced through the pursuit by each individual of his own interests [3]." Durkheim emphasized the importance of interest in human society, which is really correct according society nowadays. Interest, as the subject power driven by human themselves, is the most powerful and efficient motivation for people to achieve their own divisions in society. As we can imagine, in the same occupations, people who are working with interest can devote all their attentions to their own occupations, while people who are working without interest would simply finish their own work by the lowest standard. After discussing about the part of dividing labor, then Durkheim state that society is united by social solidarity. Social solidarity includes mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. On the one hand, mechanical solidarity only exists in primitive tribes with no central government and it can simply create solidarity under the pressure of survival and the small number of humans in society. On the other hand, organic solidarity is the main cohesion in an industrial and modern country. Proper division of labor in society can create organic solidarity, which means dividing labor by people's interest. As people are working according to their own interest and free will, they will have sense of belonging to society and happiness under their divisions. Therefore, division of labor is so important for a modern industrial country, as it can creates solidarity. That is the main part for theoretical foundation of social structural functionalism.

2.2 Constructivism in IR Theories

To start with, constructivism sees the all parts of the world, including what we are able to learn about the world and international relations, as socially constructed. In the past decades international policy-making processes have increasingly involved both state and non-state actors [4]. As a result, the constructivists not only consider the states, which are the main actors in IR realism, they also consider all kinds of agencies including IGOs and NGOs as actors in their theory. There are mainly three parts of this theory. First of all, according to Sarina Theys, Constructivists would argue that agency and structure are collectively constituted, implying that structures can influence agency and that agencies are also able to influence structures [5]. To be more specific, on the one hand, in the constructivism theory, we define all agencies construct the whole international relations and no matter how small the agencies are, they have their own function in the whole construction. That is why the constructivists consider the agencies influence structures, as they are the main components of the structure. On the other hand, the constructions are changing as the relations are changing. Considering a situation that in Asia, two countries have a war and the whole international relations would be changed. As a result, other parts of the world would also be changed to deal with the crisis in Asia. That is how the constructions influences all agencies. Yet in a different opinion, this part can also be seen as agencies influences agencies. The second part of the theory focus on identities and interests. Constructivists argue that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors [5]. States and agencies participating in the international relations have their own interest. These interests are all different in large and small aspects and these interests are determined by identities of these states and agencies. To explain this in detail, imaging there was a

small state surrounding by several large states which were in war. The main interest for the small state was to survive in the war without being invaded. This is mainly diplomatic interest. However, for large states in war, their interests are winning the war and exploited resources from the failing counties. These are mainly politics and economics interest. Therefore, defining the right identities in international relations is another important part of constructivism. Last but not least, social norms are also the keys of constructivism. As stated in his article, these social norms are generally defined as a standard of appropriate behaviors for actors with a given identity in international relations [5]. To be more specific, as mentioned in the previous part of my article, defining identities and interests are important. Then, social norms are for agencies to find their identities and interests in a proper way. They have to follow the widely accepted to achieve their goals in order to stay in the constructions of international relations. The actors need to believe their actions are appropriate before they actually finish their actions. These are the main parts of IR constructivism.

3. Comparison of Two Theories

3.1 Comparisons on Theoretical Aspect

To start with, this paper will focus firstly on the similarities of these two theories. First of all, for the combination of two theories, a newly developed international and sociology theory have to be mentioned, international functionalism. International functionalism remains a frequently cited chapter in the intellectual history of international integration but as a widely debated blueprint for the reorganization of the international system its popularity peaked long ago [6]. In sketching out international functionalism, its limited relationship with structural functionalism as a broader analytical paradigm in the social sciences is a useful starting point [6]. It is clear to see that the starting of this theory is from Durkheim's theory on social structures. Yet the end of international functionalism came to become a theory focusing on the international relationship. As a result, from the history of international functional, this paper would like to define the origin of this theory is social functionalism. Moreover, besides the origin of social structure functionalism, one of the important founders of international functionalism, Harold Laski's theory was interpreted after his death that his theory was impacted Marxism theory [7]. Consequently, even though international functionalism was defined as a theory in international relations, its relations with sociology are nonnegligible. At the same time, the paper is able to find out another origin of international functionalism. The foundation of this theory was mainly early interdependence liberalism, which at the same time is the basic origin of international constructivism. To be more specific, early interdependence liberalism mainly developed to two different theories: liberalism and constructivism. Therefore, it is clear for researchers to define that international constructivism and international functionalism. Considering the timeline of developments of two theories, the probability of certain influences on international functionalism from international constructivism exist. To conclude, international functionalism combines the social functionalism to define the social functions of different agencies and actions in international issues and international constructivism to show the international status of international agencies such as IGOs and NGOs. From this theory, researchers can easily see the similarity of social functionalism and international constructivism. The two theories both showed the specific functions of certain agencies. From social and international aspects, two researching subjects- society structure and international aspects- are consist by the different agencies and all agencies have the abilities to influence the whole structure. At the same time, agencies in the structure would also be influenced by the change of the structure. These are the main similarity of the two theories.

Then, the differences focus on the fields of using the theories (see Table 1). Researchers in sociology would focus on more about the division of social agencies to achieve harmony and highest efficiency in society. On the contrary, researchers in international relations would believe the existence of every agency in the globe is useful. They have their own functions in international relations. Besides the difference between using fields, there is also a difference on the function of the whole structure. In international functionalism, the basic foundation on the theoretical aspect only

focuses on the interdependence relationship between agencies and the whole international structure. However, for Durkheim’s theory, he pointed out in his theory, the society need to be aware of the importance of interest for labor forces and the appropriate division for labor. Therefore, in social functionalism, Durkheim inevitably mentioned the existence of ruling classes and designed a rational method for ruling classes to build a perfect world, which was the interest driven labor division and solidarity brought by such divisions. However, for international constructivism, in international relationship, it is impossible to find out a similar ruling class, as even though the agencies are influenced by the whole structure, they are still independent agencies without ruling from the whole structures. Therefore, such divisions or ruling methods leading to better development are impossible in international relations. These are main differences for international constructivism and social functionalism.

Table 1. Theoretical comparison between international

	International constructivism	Social functionalism
Similarity 1	show the specific functions of certain agencies in structure	
Similarity 2	Interdependence relationship between agencies and structure	
Difference 1	Using on international relations fields	Using on social structure fields
Difference 2	Without ruling classes leading development Independent agencies without ruling influences and are able to make policies on their own and for their own	Design for ruling classes for better social development, mainly focuses on social labor division and social solidarity

3.2 Examples to Compare Two Theories

Turning back to the time of the revolutions in the 19th century, it was easy to find out that even though the existences of both directory empires and republican democratic countries cause the whole European world into a great mass, at that time it was also a great field for sociologists, educationists, economics and international relations researchers to create and test their own theories[8]. France, one of the leading revolutionary countries in Europe, burst several revolutions from late 18th century to early 19th centuries. As a result, French revolution is also a great example to show the comparisons of two theories mentioned in this paper, even though at that time the two theories were still not constructed and published yet.

As stated in the previous part of this paper, the differences of the two theories mainly focus on the difference of utilizing fields. From international relation vision to analyze French revolution, the change in ruling classes in France has caused a great change in international relations. Then, the whole Europe came into a time full of revolutions and wars. France created and heightened a new balance to treat the existence of dynastic ruling in most European countries [9]. Other European either chose to stand on the side of revolutionary future or chose to stand on the dynastic reality. This phenomenon proves the truthfulness of the agencies influencing construction and then construction feedbacks to influence other agencies in the construction. That is how international constructivism theory can be used in the analysis of French revolutions. Yet, without the existence of international construction, it will be hard for constructivists to analyze social changes in France during and after the revolution. Therefore, using sociological theory to analyze social changes become the proper method. From functionalism aspect, sociologist would focus more on the result of changing ruling classing in social structures. When the king of French Louis XVI was executed by guillotine on 21 January 1793, he became the first and most significant character announcing the rapid social changes in structure in France [10]. At the same time, labor force division started to change from feudal exploitation to a new capitalism division. New construction of society was building at the revolutions. Moreover, previous solidarity proved by royalty and allegiance from society was replaced by new solidarity connected with economics profits and capital brought by the new capitalism society in France. That is how functionalists analyze French revolutions. Different from constructivists, functionalists

utilized their theory on the field of social structure, without taking care about international constructions. Yet two theories are still using structure of subjects to prove their truthfulness.

4. Summary

To conclude, social structural functionalism and international constructivism have a similar theoretical basis. From the definition of two theories, it is clear to find out their similar theoretical origins and similar thoughts on interdependence relations between agencies and structures. From the examples of French revolutions, the influences led by people to the whole French and European diplomatic atmosphere showed the practical utilization of the similarities between two theories.

At the same time, two theories require different fields to utilize them. For society structure, with the existence of ruling classes, it will easier to have a leading policy helping the whole social structure evolve to a better structure with better social labor divisions and social solidarity, according to Durkheim's theory. However, for international relations, it is impossible to exist a ruling institution to make policies for all agencies in the structure. Therefore, for agencies in international relations, agencies have their own independent policies and play their own roles functioning the whole structures. For international relations, the only way to change agencies among the structure is to change the whole structure. Similarly, the only way to change the whole structure is to influence agencies in the structure.

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