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Othering and Self-Cognition: A Paradigm for National Image Communication

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Abstract: The study of national image communication is an academic topic discussed by scholars from various fields such as political science and communication studies. This paper aims to deconstruct the theory of "othering" in postcolonialism and explore the relationship between the real "other" and "self" in Orientalism, envisioning a utopian communication model of "self" under the paradigm of "othering." Faced with the dominant discourse system of the West, China's communication of its self-image is not only constrained by national values and power but also by the binary thinking patterns of "othering" and "self-cognition" inherent in the historical opposition between the East and the West. In this paradigm, it is impossible to completely detach ourselves from the Western "other" and achieve a modern "self-cognition." However, we can imagine a cognitive convergence in an idealized model, gradually aligning the Western perception of the Chinese "other" with China's self-cognition, thus forming a temporary balance and an objective "true image.".

Keywords: Other; Othering; Self-Cognition; National Image.

1. Introduction: Research Background and Challenges of National Image Communication

1.1. Image Research

Scholars have approached the study of "national image" by initially focusing on the concept of "image." In communication theory, an image is defined as the product of the information transmission process: "In the process of communication, materials exhibit different features and differences through continuous movement and transformation, forming information, which is the form in the image" (Fei, John et al., 2004). Nimo and Savage further define an image as "a conception formed by people based on the observable characteristics exhibited by objects, events, or individuals. When applied to a nation as the object of image, the national image can be defined as the characteristics that a nation demonstrates or is perceived to possess" (Lee, S., 2004). These studies indicate that national image possesses both subjectivity and perceptibility.

1.2. Self and Other Research

The study of image often begins with an examination of the self. In psychology, individuals are believed to have multiple "selves." "These selves are actually reflections of different objects' images of the individual... Through these relationships, individuals obtain various different images, namely, othering images. The interaction between these images and individuals' self-image cognition enables individuals to acquire distinct characteristics and identities that differentiate them from others" (Ren, Y., 1994). The concept of the "other" has long been emphasized in traditional philosophical systems regarding the construction of self-image. Hegel provided an interpretation of the concept of the "other," suggesting that if individuals want to reflect upon themselves, they must obtain recognition from the "other" as a prerequisite. In other words, when the self seeks to introspect, it can rely on the "other" as a mirror. This theory supports the subjective and perceptible nature of images as mentioned in psychological studies.

1.3. Self and Other in National Image

As a member of the international community, a nation also possesses various self-images and othering images, namely, domestic image and international image. However, many academic works fail to clearly distinguish between domestic and international images, even confusing the latter with the former. Among scholars studying national image, Wenhu Guan emphasized the contradiction between the "self" and the "other" in national image. In his article "Reflections on Researching China's International Image," published in 2007, he stated, "A country's international image is an important component of its national image and should be clearly distinguished and scientifically defined. National image includes the 'self-image' (the image held by the domestic public) and the 'other-image' (the image held by the international public, i.e., the international image), which often differ significantly" (Wenhu, G., 2007). He explicitly pointed out the contradiction between the "self" and the "other" in national image and called for a correct understanding, scientific analysis, and in-depth exploration of the differences between China's international image and its domestic public perception, in order to identify breakthrough points and focus areas for shaping a positive international image.

Furthermore, in discussing the "self" and the "other" in the context of national image, the concept of Orientalism proposed by Western scholar Said and the cross-cultural image studies conducted by Chinese scholar Zhou Ning shed light on the dialectical relationship between the two through perspectives such as history, culture, and politics.

Since there is currently limited analysis of the cognitive models for China's national image communication, this paper will further define and explore the concept of national image

based on existing research, drawing insights from psychology and philosophy regarding the dimensions of image and identity—namely, the "other" and the "self." By extending and delving into these dimensions, this paper aims to construct a thinking model for national image communication and, based on the analysis of the impact of the "other" and "othering" on national image, deconstruct the concept of "othering," highlighting the potential binary opposition and contradictions in the thinking patterns of national image communication. Furthermore, while acknowledging the persistence of the "othering" paradigm, an idealized model for national image communication will be constructed based on the recognition of the "other" and the "self" theories, serving as the theoretical foundation for this research.

2. Logical Starting Point: Defining National Image in the Context of the "Other"

2.1. The "Other" and "Othering"

"The Other" was initially proposed as a philosophical concept. "The Other" and "the Self" are relative concepts. Hegel argues that without the recognition of the Other, human consciousness is insufficient to understand itself; both exist as contrasting entities. The issue of "The Other" is inextricably linked to identity recognition and differentiation... "The Other" refers to non-self and non-us." [Binghui Liao. "Keywords 200: A Compilation of General Vocabulary for Literary and Criticism Studies", Jiangsu Education Publishing House, 2006 Edition, page 177]. Viewing national image as a symbol, there are dual cognitive dimensions of "Self" image and "Other" image. Simply put, the "Self" image is the objectively existing subject image, while the "Other" image is the position of other objects outside the "Self". The "Other" we emphasize here is mainly the process by which the national image as a subject is recognized and reflected. The definition and clarification of the concept of "The Other" can actually help to define whether the national image should be "China's image in the eyes of foreigners" or "the international image in the eyes of the Chinese". The determination of the national image is actually dependent on the recognizing subject. If the recognizing subject of China's national image is China itself, then China's image in the eyes of foreigners is "the image of the Other"; if the recognizing subject is other countries except China, then their image of China has become the "Self" image. In contrast to their cognition, the self-image identified by China has become the "Other" image. Both exist as contrasting entities. Only the establishment of this idealized dual cognitive dimension can truly become the logical starting point for studying the national image. "Othering" is another theory to supplement the idealized cognitive dimension, which is an important concept word proposed from colonial literature and cultural theory. Its most important usage comes from Said's explanation in "Orientalism": "'The Other' is used to denote a cultural projection of certain ideas, which constructs the identity of the cultural subject through certain power relations and discourse rights. (Edward W., 1999)" The object of "othering" is often the weaker side in the binary opposition, and the division of the so-called other is made by the stronger side. For example, China in the declining period of feudal colonialism was undoubtedly the "Other" in the eyes of the colonial empire. The "Other" often presents a repressed, absent, spoken state in this smokeless field. During the historical period referred to as "the sick man of East Asia" and "the Chinese bug", China in the world discourse field is often the object of "othering". The national image of China during this period was actually preset in the context of "othering": it placed the subject identifying "the Other" (the so-called strong country) in a superior position, while the identified "Other" (China) was suppressed. The national image of the weak side is objectively existing, but due to unequal power relations, it erodes objective subjectivity and can basically only passively accept the recognized image. Thus, the dual dimension of the national image has become a single dimension.

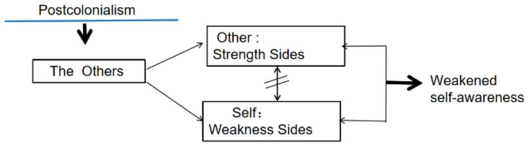


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Thinking Mode of "Othering"

2.2. The Evolution of "Othering" and the Logic of "The Other"

With the independence of national sovereignty, the gradual strengthening of economic strength, and the continuous strengthening of national consciousness, China's image as "The Other" has been continuously re-understood. Especially since entering the 21st century, the world pattern has begun to change, and China is no longer a passive "Other", but has begun to have self-cognition and is actively self-narrating. It has gradually moved from the single dimension of "othering" into the dual dimensions of "Other" and "Self" cognition. The evolution of "othering" is not a complete and thorough evolution, but a process that tends to transform towards an ideal cognitive model. In this process, the challenge we currently face is that due to a long period of "othering", although China's economic development momentum is strong, China today is still in the awkward situation of being "watched" and "gazed at", and is still painted as "The Other" by some developed countries in the world and prejudices are formed. This "Othering" is not going to be erased in the short term. Noisy voices such as the "China Rise Theory" and "China Threat Theory" are still echoing in the process of re-establishing the national image. Therefore, to construct a national image communication system, we must first start from the historical cognition of the national image and the real impact of "othering" to find the logic of "The Other". The logic of "The Other", in the context of current national image communication, is actually a context presupposition that has escaped the rut of postcolonial theory. It means that besides the national behavior of the nation itself as the subject of creating and disseminating images, all factors in the external environment that may affect the communication of national images can be collectively referred to as "Other logic". This logic is not opposed to the "Other image" in the national image, but requires that we face the objective fact that we have been and still could be the object of "othering", while also establishing the multidimensionality of "self-cognition". National images at the real level are mostly complex and diverse, but cannot be demonized by "the Other", lose themselves, and remain at the passive cognitive level of "othering". The logic of "The Other" no longer refers specifically to binary oppositions such as the weak and the

strong, East and West, and yellow and white races, but uses the logic of "the Other" as a study of the current "global", "presence", "difference" of the national image, and "communication narrative".

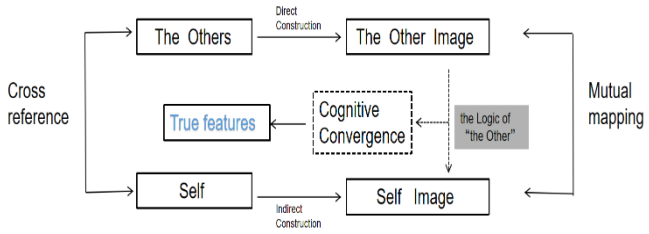


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of the ideal thinking model for "national image communication"

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3. The Binary Opposition in "Self-cognition"

In the context of national image communication, China's "self-cognition" has deep-seated, implicit oppositions, most notably the dichotomy between Eastern and Western worldviews. In other words, to cognize one's own image, we must resolve the fundamental contradiction between the self-cognition of national image and the referential other, namely the binary opposition between the East and the West in worldview. This opposition was gradually formed from the geospatial opposition framework in ancient Greece, shifting from geographical to ideological opposition. To analyze the differences between Eastern and Western worldviews, it's crucial first to understand the substantive content of "Orientalism" constructed by Western nations. Edward W. Said proposed in his book "Orientalism" that "Western knowledge about the East reflected the Western history replacing Eastern history, rendering it 'history-less'" (Edward W., 1999). He believes that so-called Orientalism is nothing but a product of the West as a subject, setting the East as the "other," and attempting to conquer the East through hegemony.

This viewpoint coats itself in the rational and just guise of knowledge, but its real intention is to meet the needs of Western colonial expansion, manufacturing a myth of the West's superiority to the East. The formation of Orientalism includes Western values, thinking patterns, and evaluation criteria, pushing these onto the "other" beyond the West, attempting to construct a "Western worldview" for the Eastern world that is deeply imbued with the subjective color of the West as the subject. Obviously, such a worldview is filled with power relations. It does not substantively correspond to an egalitarian "global community," but rather is a conceptual invasion of imperial hegemony. The East, created by the West, is a non-Western world, an "other" world, while the true East exists in another world. Therefore, the so-called "global community" mentality in communication has become a Westernized community or a world community biased towards the West.

In establishing China's national image as an Eastern country, in the binary opposition of the "self-cognition" worldview, Wang Yuechuan proposed the concept of "post-Orientalism." He emphasizes the need to dissolve and subvert the Western Orientalism's derogatory "cultural tutelage" with a completely different perspective from Orientalism. In the cultural self-esteem and equal dialogue of "post-Orientalism," we must regain a proper Eastern cultural identity and Chinese cultural confidence (Wang Yuechuan, 2010). He believes that the awakening of one's own culture is the key to self-identity cognition and a means to dissolve and subvert the "Orientalism" constructed by the West.

"Post-Orientalism" seems to have pointed out the direction for the communication thought of China's national image. However, dissolution and subversion cannot be achieved overnight. Instead, it requires "cognition" from two dimensions: firstly, starting from the perspective of geopolitical opposition, we need to break through the limitations of national boundaries and geographic borders, and exist more as a member of humanity. Under the vision of humanistic spirit and global situation, the dispute between Orientalism and Westernism gives way to the issue of human co-construction and coexistence. The formation of this worldview is indeed contrary to narrow nationalism and is to some extent a resistance against the suppression of "other reference" under the colonial discourse system. Secondly, we need to break the "silent other" status viewed by theWest from the perspective of identity opposition, and actively participate in the transition to "self-expression" and "speaking to others." However, another issue faced in the process of national image communication is whether the order of finding self-cognition in contrast with the "other" is disrupted or biased? This is a major issue currently troubling scholars studying national image. Zhou Ning mentioned in "Cross-Cultural Research: Using China's Image as a Method" that China has shown an increasingly strong tendency towards uniformity in the modern worldview system (Zhou Ning, 2003). However, this tendency towards uniformity seems to be a convergence and unification achieved by the cognition of the "self" leaning towards the "other".

In reality, when we organize the communication of the national image, we start to pay attention to international public affairs, such as dealing with the financial crisis, combating terrorism, limiting nuclear and biochemical weapons, environmental protection, and governance. By doing so, we coordinate with the cognition of the "other" to communicate China's active role in participating in global governance and the goal of building a "community with a shared future" to the international community. In the process of urgently aligning with the international community, the communication inevitably tends towards coordination. China inevitably falls under the atmosphere of the post-colonial world.

To this point, in the study of national image communication, we have not found a complete communication pathway that breaks away from the "reference to the other." The binary opposition in "self-cognition" does not require us to be wholly "exclusive" and "trusting," nor does it prescribe monopolistic "individuality." Instead, opposition contains elements of differentiated power, cognition, value, and history. This differentiation runs throughout the theoretical discourse of

binary opposition, constituting the starting point of theoretical thinking. It emphasizes "self-cognition," and since the cognition subject is "I," it is easy to encounter potential biases in the two-tiered thinking of "losing" and "complacency" about "me" during the communication process.

In order to mobilize more objective elements in "self-cognition" and to prevent the "self" from becoming "othered," we generally first recognize that there is often a significant gap between "self-cognition" and "identification with the other." This differs from the previous suggestion of integrating self-cognition into world thinking; here, it's about the difference that arises when compared with the thinking of other "others." Second, in the face of the "cognitive convergence" imposed by the West, we must maintain a clear mind, objectively seek the "self-elements" of "difference," discover the "cognition methods" of "diversity," and seek a balance in thinking between the "self" and the "other." Although cultural differences exist, we should strive for coexistence in a multicultural context and explore the path to identification between the "self" and the "other."

4. Conclusion

The manuscript should include a conclusion. In this section, summarize what was described in your paper. Future directions may also be included in this section.

We have found that the image of China as perceived by the West will never be a complete mirror reflection. Instead, it makes the Chinese image into the "other" in the eyes of Western nations, as well as a projection of Western hegemonic "otherness". The thinking path we should establish in communicating national image should be a process of "cognition--comparison--recognition--transcendence." The initial cognition refers to our understanding of the "other" and "reference to the other"; "comparison" involves reflection on and juxtaposition with Western nations, post-colonialism, and Orientalism; the process of "recognition" is actually self-cognition based on the premise of recognizing and accepting the existence of binary opposition thinking; "transcendence" does not aim to overthrow or eliminate opposition, or to invent an ideal image beyond the objective existence of history, but instead to establish good cultural mentality, accept feedback from the Western image of China, and eventually form a utopian state of the "true image" based on a binary opposition between "self-image" and "other-image."

The concept of "transcendence" is the imagined transition from a communication model based on the perspective of "reference to the other" to an ideal utopian model of the "true image," thus achieving a temporary balance or compromise in the image communication. It is crucial to stress that the utopian model we discuss is not a non-existent mode of thinking, but an imaginable "ideal model" that aims to achieve the "true image" in communication cognition. While the process of cognition can be demonstrated through reason and facts, moving to the "true image" level involves differences in the conditions of the subject and object, and in the short term, it is unlikely that we can genuinely enter the thinking level of "transcendence." However, consciousness is a prerequisite for change and transcendence. By conducting research on the communication thinking of China's image, we are also deepening cross-cultural studies of China's image, thinking about the problem of modern Chinese cultural consciousness in the context of global multicultural coexistence.

Our study defines the "other" in Chinese image research as all those who are not the subject "I". We classify these "non-I" entities as a single entity for research purposes, dissecting this "other" group to determine that different individual "others" can interact with the "I" image. However, by studying the "self" individual and the "other" as a whole, and delving into thinking patterns, we can provide reference for the influence between the analytical subject and different individual "others" through deep analysis and logical structure. Only communication can bridge the opposition gap, and only rational dialogue can build the "true image."

In our research, we do not slide from post-colonial cultural Orientalism to the dreamy Westernism of a rising power, but rather bravely open up our own culture, engaging in a deep cross-cultural dialogue between "me" and "you." It's not about talking high about multicultural coexistence, multipolar balance, and harmonious development ideals, but recognizing reality, identifying the worldview of binary opposition, acknowledging the modernity of Orientalism, calling for cultural consciousness, and rejuvenating the cultural creativity of modern China.

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