УДК 316.347; 316.344 http://doi.org/10.32603/2412-8562-2019-5-5-88-98
Original article / Оригинальная статья

Beyond the Believer-Citizen Dilemma in a Polity: a Membership Approach

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The article discusses the priority of belonging to a particular community and identification with it. The authors believe that among the entire set of communities, membership in political groups should be a priority, and their membership in state political communities should be higher than territorial, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other differences. However, the devotion of religious believers to an international religious community that does not know official state borders can exceed their devotion to the state as the main political institution. Consequently, they can become a centrifugal force that threatens the solidarity of political unity. The authors define this conflict as the "believer-citizen" dilemma, which poses serious challenges in the field of nation building in China. Based on the concept of related identities, the article analyzes and explains the existing dilemma "believer – citizen" from the position of simultaneous inclusion in various social groups. The authors suggest that such an approach, involving the analysis of membership in several social groups, is useful for constructing solutions to this dilemma. In conclusion, the authors conclude that religion has many opportunities for the upbringing of civic virtues. Ethical principles such as kindness, tolerance, and empathy are widespread in various religions, and they have indeed become universally recognized human virtues. In this sense, believers can also be good citizens and at the same time fulfill their religious and civic duties, which will not contradict each other. For religious fundamentalists, on the other hand, an extreme form of religious identity can undermine their social life. How to create institutions based on honesty and justice, how to build reliable and correct strategies for constructing identities in order to promote self-identification from citizenships and reduce identification based on extreme religious movements, as well as how to use religious identity to create a civic identity on its basis – these are the biggest problems in state building.

Key words: believer-citizen dilemma, adhesive identities, multiple group memberships, spiritual capital, life capital.

For citation: Zhao Mi, Fang Wen. Beyond the Believer-Citizen Dilemma in a Polity: A Membership Approach. DISCOURSE. 2019, vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 88–98. DOI: 10.32603/2412-8562-2019-5-5-88-98

Conflict of interest. No conflicts of interest related to this publication were reported.

Received 02.10.2019; adopted after review 18.10.2019; published online 25.11.2019

Связная идентичность в противоречии «верующий» – «гражданин»

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В статье рассматривается актуальная проблема идентификации человека с тем или иным сообществом и принадлежности к нему.

Авторы убеждены, что среди всех существующих типов различных сообществ именно принадлежность человека к сообществу политическому должна являться приоритетной и доминировать над всеми иными территориальными, этническими, религиозными, языковыми разногласиями.

Однако преданность верующих международному религиозному сообществу, у которого не существует официальных границ, может оказаться сильнее их преданности государству как основному политическому институту. Следовательно, верующие могут стать мощной центробежной силой, которая будет являться угрозой политической солидарности. Авторы определяют этот конфликт как необходимость выбора «верующий» или «гражданин», создающего серьезные проблемы в деле национального строительства в Китае. Исходя из концепции связанной идентичности, авторы анализируют и объясняют существующее противоречие «верующий» или «гражданин» с позиции одновременного включения человека в различные социальные группы. Авторы предполагают, что такой подход, содержащий анализ одновременного членства индивида в нескольких социальных группах, является обоснованным при решении данной проблемы.

В заключение авторы приходят к выводу, что религия обладает множеством возможностей для воспитания гражданских добродетелей. Этические принципы, такие как доброта, терпимость и сочувствие, широко проповедуемые различными религиями, действительно стали общепризнанными человеческими добродетелями. В этом смысле верующие также могут быть и достойными гражданами своего государства, исполняя одновременно свои религиозные и гражданские обязанности, что не будет противоречить одно другому.

С другой стороны, для религиозных фундаменталистов жесткие нормы религиозной доктрины могут препятствовать их общественно-политической жизни как граждан.

Авторы считают, что вопросы о том, как создать общественные институты, основанные на честности и справедливости, как определить надежные и верные стратегии формирования личности, способствующие самоидентификации этой личности, на основе гражданства и препятствовать самоидентификации ее на основе экстремистских религиозных движений, а также как использовать религиозную идентичность для создания на ее основе гражданской идентичности, являются важнейшими в государственном строительстве.

Ключевые слова: необходимость выбора, «верующий» или «гражданин», адгезивная идентичность, принадлежность к различным сообществам, духовный капитал, жизненный капитал.

Для цитирования: Чжао М., Фан В. Связная идентичность в противоречии «верующий» – «гражданин» // ДИСКУРС. 2019. Т. 5, № 5. С. 88–98. DOI: 10.32603/2412-8562-2019-5-5-88-98

Конфликт интересов. О конфликте интересов, связанном с данной публикацией, не сообщалось.

Поступила 02.10.2019; принята после рецензирования 18.10.2019; опубликована онлайн 25.11.2019

The believer-citizen dilemma in a polity.

In the contemporary world, nation-state is the prototype of a polity. Nation-state is known to be a political entity that occupies a certain territory and has a legitimate right to monopoly the use of violence. Despite the different ways states are founded and their distinctive historical heritages and relative positions in the world system, the general will, i. e. the consensus among all people, embodied in the *Constitution*, is and should be the normative foundation and the origin of legitimacy of a polity. A polity taking the *Constitution* as its common and super-ordinate political grammar, should in turn draw on what Habermas terms 'constitutional patriotism' [1, 2] to transcend and integrate the differences and disparities that exist among varied cultural communities within the entity including ethnic groups, religions and languages. In this regard, a political community as an 'imagined community' is also a moral and sacrifice community underpinned by its unique national memories and heroic legends [3].

Among citizens' multiple group memberships, their memberships in a polity should be prioritized, and their identification for the state should transcend the territorial, ethnical, religious and linguistic differences. However, religious believers' allegiance to the transnational religious community might exceed their loyalty to the polity. Consequently they might become a centrifugal force that threatens the solidarity of a political entity. We define this conflict as the believer-citizen dilemma.

This dilemma has imposed serious challenges to China's nation-building during its transformation. It has been exploited by separatists especially in Tibet and Xinjiang. Separatists take advantage of two social psychological mechanisms. Domestic separatists promote ethnic identity and religious identity among their targeted audience in an attempt to belittle and even substitute civic identity. Their international supporters on the other hand try to stifle Chinese people's national confidence by smearing Chinese identity. Identification for religious fundamentalism is a typical example of the believer-citizen dilemma.

Religious identity: adhesive identity.

Ammerman [4] found that the construction/reconstruction of religious identity is largely accomplished through what Somers terms 'religious narratives' [5]. Although she questions the validity of the reduction of societal activities to discourse, she also proposes that religious narrative is situated on the kernel status in religious activities, and religious narrative is produced and reproduced in believers' multiple narratives centering on the Sacred Other/s [4]. In the institutional context, and with the companion of other believers, the religious believers tell their feelings of peace, joy and God's grace, as well as their anxiety, confusion and struggles. This experience at fellowship is also a personal communicative one with the Sacred Others.

However, for all religious believers, they are not only believers. They are also citizens taking part in the secular social life. Theoretically, there can be three types of believer-citizen relations. The first type is a unification of believer and citizen, as is manifested modern theocratic states. The second type is that religious identity facilitates the construction of civic identity [6]. The third type is a believer-citizen dilemma that this paper focuses on.

Yang's ethnological study on Chinese-American believers reveals Chinese-American Christians' religious conversion and their construction of civic identity [7]. How they maintained their memberships in the Chinese cultural community when tried to become Christians and Americans constitute the core of their identity work. Yang discovered that Chinese-American Christians neither forsook their ethnic identity and became completely assimilated into the American culture, nor did they reject assimilation and stick to their ethnic identity. On the

contrary, they strived to construct and reconstruct their American identity, Chinese identity and religious identity simultaneously. Their identity strategy is to retain the characteristics of these three distinctive identities and integrate them into adhesive identities.

Actors' multiple group memberships.

The concept of adhesive identities captures Chinese-American Christians' identity construction, which can be transferred to other contexts. In all societies, every person bears multiple memberships, based on which one's unique identity with multiple elements in unity is constructed, and a full life of multiplicity is thus made possible.

Systems of social classification/categorization exist in all social contexts [8], which constitute parts of our social representational system. Perception of the systems is not only a part of one's knowledge about the social world, but also a part of shared reality with others. A person is affiliated to different groups and owns multiple memberships throughout the life course. Such memberships can be ascribed, achieved, or institutional prescribed. Ascribed memberships are social categories that relate to one's social origins, such as age, sex, ethnicity, *Hukou* and birthplace. Achieved memberships are categories that one actively pursues during socialization, such as the educational achievement, the occupation, a consumption style and an aesthetic taste. And institutionally prescribed memberships define a person's social categorical attributes in specific institutional contexts, for instance, as an urbanite or a countryman. Even the selection of lama, *Banchan* and living Buddhas in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is a process of institutional categorization. In fact, the nature of a human person as a social being is essentially the reification of a person's multiple memberships in social life. For a religious actor, his membership in a religious group is only one component of his multiple memberships.

Approaching from the group-membership perspective and drawing on the concept of adhesive identities, this paper tries to answer three questions: a. what is a religious believers; b. what does a religious believer do; c. how do religious believers distinguish between their sacred/religious life and secular/civic life, in the hope to shed light on possible solutions to the believer-citizen dilemma.

What Is A Religious Believer?

Religious conversion.

Conversion refers to the transformation of a non-believer into a religious believer, or a believer of a particular religion into another. For an actor who has already had multiple memberships, by conversion he acquires a new group membership, i. e. a religious membership. For individuals without the capacity to make judgments and act such as infants and patients, the principle of inferred consent applies. In this condition, we assume: a. the legal guardian's will represents his ward's will; and b. if one has the capacity to make judgments and act, he would do the same as his guardian.

"Multiple-memberships" provides a novel angle to understand the distinction between monotheist and polytheist religions. On the one hand, the religious membership has differed psychological significance for monotheist believers and polytheist believers. While the former considers religious membership single and exclusive, the latter regards it to be plural and adhesive. Monotheist membership hence is more precious and salient for converts. On the other hand, conditions of initiation are different for monotheist religions and polytheist religions. As monotheism is highly exclusive, stricter tests have to be passed to acquire the membership. Initiation conditions are not randomly decided, and the difference has significant psychological implications [9–11]. Harsher conditions breed higher allegiance and a stronger sense of belonging. Also, consequences of de-conversion are different for monotheists and polytheists. If a believer

barely identifies with a particular religious membership, he will understandably ignore or give up the membership, or seek an alternative one. This is the process of de-conversion. Conversion and de-conversion are two basic factors that bring about religious changes. De-conversion has more serious and lasting social psychological consequences for monotheists.

Perception of religious membership.

Social identity theorists found that detection and awareness of any group membership is based on social categorization [12, p. 15–16].

Social categorization is an interactive and dynamic process. Every person/actor is born and raised up in a preexistent social milieu with specific social categorization systems. Taking self as the center, the actor categorizes self as well as the others present and places each in certain groups. Meanwhile, the actor is in turn categorized by other people present. The basic strategy of social categorization is (multiple ways of) binary coding, which is routinely conducted on different dimensions (simultaneously) [13]. Based on specific salient clues, the categorizer places everyone present in his group or out-groups. In the religious field in particular, the believer-non-believer distinction is easily activated. And there is always a minimal overlap between one's categorization and that of the others.

As the categorizer, the actor is not a "rational economic man" as deemed by theorists of religious market who compares religious behaviors with economic activities, but a "motivated tactician" [14–16]. This means that the actor is in possession of multiple information processing strategies, and choosing of the strategies depends on the actor's specific goal, motivation and needs, as well as social powers in play. In any circumstance, cognitive processing always serves to meet the actor's goals and motivation. In this regard, the actor does not follow an inevitable lineal path of the "economic man". He is indeed a comprehensive agent who is highly sensitive to a wide range of information, such as the immediate social context, his own inner condition as well as his long-term goals in complex social processes and contexts. He is also able to make use of social and cultural resources at hand to actively interpret and construct the social reality.

What is a religious believer?

For a religious actor, apart from the religious membership, he still bears multiple other group memberships. Only when his religious membership becomes salient that he is a believer. How the religious membership becomes salient to guide his thinking and actions is essentially an issue of how social knowledge is activated, which has been extensively researched by cognitive psychologists.

The acquisition of group membership is also the learning of the group's collective memories and social knowledge. The actor's social knowledge is not logically coherent but domain-specific, corresponding to different aspects of the social context and awaiting to be activated and applied. Once social knowledge or social categories with regard to a specific group membership is activated, the membership becomes salient to guide and dominate one's psychological activities and behaviors that follow. In this sense, the issue of how certain group membership overrides others in specific circumstances is also the issue of what domain-specific social categories are activated and applied.

Built on his priming studies [17], Higgins revealed the activation mechanism of social knowledge and proposed three principles [18]. The first is accessibility. Priming or frequent use makes certain categorical knowledge more easily to be accessed and ready to be applied. Knowledge in readiness is like actor's tool-kit at hand, which can be used at any time. The second is applicability. The actor's tool-kit can be useful or not when dealing with specific problems or tasks. Only when the tool and the problem or task match, knowledge in readiness

will and can be applied. In other words, knowledge activation depends on the goodness of fit between task and tool. Unfit knowledge, although primed, would not be used like unsuitable tools in the tool-kit. Accessibility and applicability are two principles that center on the actor.

Apart from these two, Higgins suggested that salient stimuli or clues in certain social contexts can also activate specific categories. Take our study in the protestant field as an example. As protestant stimuli are ubiquitous and highly salient, they inevitably will activate in a believer his religious membership along the believer-non-believer dimension, and a non-believer the realization that "I am not a believer".

What Do Religious Believers Do?

Positive distinctiveness of the religious membership: intergroup comparison.

Religious believers regard their religious membership positively distinctive, and attach with it positive recognition, emotions and values as well as identification. This positive distinctiveness is strengthened through social comparison.

The hypothesis of social comparison proposed by Leon Festinger is the first that offers systematic explanations of and prediction for human abilities and opinions [19]. This hypothesis however is confined to interpersonal comparison within a group, and based solely on personality. Henri Tajfel extended interpersonal comparison to inter-group comparison between ingroups and out-groups [20]. According to him, the significance of a membership is manifested only in intergroup contexts, and in comparison and contrast with another groups to be specific [20]. Evaluations about one's own group are always made with reference to other groups and through a comparison of value-laden attributes and characteristics. In the ingroup-outgroup comparison, the pressure of judging ingroup favorably leads one to distinguish one's own group from others.

Overall, there are two elementary forms of social comparison, interpersonal comparison within a group and inter-group comparison between ingroup and outgroup. Intergroup comparison gives rise to ingroup favoritism and outgroup homogeneity or even hostility. Religious believers constantly strengthen their ingroup positive distinctiveness through comparisons with other religious groups as well as non-believers.

The Criterion for differentiation within a religious group: spiritual capital.

Interpersonal comparison produces not only ingroup differentiation but also the elites class. In secular societies, ingroup differentiation and the elites production depend largely on power capital, economic capital and cultural capital, based on which specific structural roles and statuses are formed. Interpersonal comparison exists in religious groups too. Our field study found that the differentiation principle of the secular world does not apply to religious groups, which hold their own distinctive criterion, i. e. spiritual capital [14].

Similarly, theorists of religious market have also noticed this issue. In his market theory of religion, Iannaccone constructed the concept of religious capital analogous to 'economic capital' [21]. Religious capital is defined as "religious skills and experiences, which include religious knowledge, a familiarity with church rituals and doctrines, and the friendship network of co-believers" that are owned by the believers [22, p. 158].

Stark and Finke take religious capital as a command of and attachment to a particular religious culture [23]. A common mistake of the market theorists is their negligence of believers' emotional commitment, which constitutes the core of any belief. Compare a non-Christian scholar with an illiterate pious Christian in the countryside in Christianity. The former may have

systematic knowledge about the *Bible*, Christian doctrines, and the history and current developments of Christianity, but he does not believe. Whereas the latter may not even be able to read or write 'God' or 'Jesus Christ', but God is in his heart.

Drawn on Boudieu's 'symbolic capital', Verter constructed the concept of spiritual capital [24], providing new insights to understanding the group dynamics of the religious life. What he overemphasized is believers' instrumental calculation, i. e. accumulating and transferring spiritual capital for the clear purpose of acquiring advantages in social stratification, which nevertheless is rather insignificant in the religious life as our field research suggested.

Alone the line of Verter's research, religious capital can be alternatively defined as believers' accumulation of efforts in spiritual activities and God's grace received in return. Spiritual efforts are volitional and do not necessarily entail grace. Grace, on the other hand, depends on God's volition. It refers to the possibility of being favored and selected by God.

Within a religious group, believers receive varied multitude of grace and make different amount of spiritual efforts. The result is a skewed distribution of the spiritual capital among believers. It is from this skewed distribution that ingroup differentiation and elites production espoused. Our field study revealed three measurements of spiritual capital: the purity of belief, the involvement of religious activities and the relative position one holds in the network of the religious group [14].

What do religious believers do?

At its very acquisition, group membership is dynamic but not static. It is manifested through regular social actions, which serve two basic functions. On the one hand, regular social actions constantly produce and reproduce perceivable group signatures. The signatures are cues for a distinction between and an evaluation of groups. They are also symbolic clues of group boundaries. They importantly include speech styles, behavioral styles, consumption patterns, manners and taste [24].

On the other hand, regular social actions are carriers and also primers of collective memories and the groups' representational systems [25, 26]. These actions remind group members of their memberships all the time, and through them group identification as well as symbolic group boundaries are produced and reproduced [27, 28].

In sum, through their very typical social actions, believers continuously strengthen their religious memberships, experience and reconstruct group memories and collective representational systems, and produce and reproduce their identification for the holy community as well as symbolic boundaries of their group.

How Do We Distinguish the Religious Life from the Secular Life?

Religious fundamentalism.

In the contemporary world, the acquisition of a religious membership takes place in the backdrop of rationalization, marketization and disenchantment. Demystification of the world however results in two unexpected consequences: a remystification of the world and a resistance to demystification. Religious fundamentalists strongly advocate a remystification of the world and fight against all demystification attempts. Radical religious participation and identification is what characterized religious fundamentalism [29, p. 128].

It should be emphasized again that religious membership constitutes only one of a believer's multiple memberships although it might be a very important one. For a fundamentalist however, his religious membership can be activated to become salient in almost all social contexts.

How do we distinguish the sacred life from the secular life?

The religious/sacred life is guided by the religious membership, whereas the secular life is governed by other group memberships, which revolves around civic rights and obligations and is regulated by civic virtues.

Accordingly, believers' religious life centers on spiritual capital and their secular life on secular capitals including power capital, economic capital and cultural capital. In certain situations and social contexts, believers' spiritual capital can be omnipotent and transformed into different forms of desired secular capital. For instance, in theocratic states, spiritual capital is omnipotent. Nevertheless, even under such circumstances, as spiritual capital and secular capital work in different fields, believers' religious life can be discerned from their secular life.

In situations when spiritual capital works beyond its legitimate field and becomes omnipotent to substitute or transform into other forms of desired capital, the religious membership becomes overwhelmingly conspicuous to dominate believers' entire life. Concomitantly their civic life will be deserted and their spiritual capital will transform into life capital.

Religious fundamentalists' spiritual capital: life capital.

Life capital refers to the volition and capacity of using life as a weapon. It is a form of latent capital owned by every individual. It is invaluable, unique, irreplaceable and nonrenewable. It should be the ultimate end but not the means to any other end. It is sacred and transcendental, and its value exceeds all other forms of capital. There are limited possibilities that life turns into life capital. It happens with the desperate and helpless. They have nothing to count on except for the one-chance life when faced with difficulties. It happens with the martyrs. They are willing to give up their lives for ideals and beliefs and for the sake of allegiance. It happens with the religious fundamentalists too. Driven by extreme identification, they are ready to forsake their lives for their religious group. Suicide bombers are one example. What should be noted is that with the physical life being regarded as a means to a spiritual or an eternal life, the physical being is demeaned and deprived of its dignity.

Spiritual capital provides a useful tool for researching terrorism. Although terrorism has now attracted much scholarly attention [30], it remains challenging to discern and monitor potential terrorists. It is however possible to identify potential suicide bombers and other religious fundamentalists based on one's spiritual capital. For religious suicide bombers and other religious fundamentalists, religious membership is perhaps the only important thing in life, which is salient in almost all situations. They are ready to use their lives as a weapon to fulfill their commitment to and loyalty for their affiliated religions all the time. Their spiritual capital thus can be easily distinguished from that of the ordinary believers.

Conclusion. Religious resources can provide rich materials for breeding civic virtues. Ethical principles such as kindness, tolerance and empathy are widely shared across different religions, and they have indeed become universally agreed human virtues too. In this sense, believers can also be good citizens and they can practice their religious duties and civic duties simultaneously without contradicting one another.

For religious fundamentalists, extreme religious identification threats to undermine their civic lives. How to establish fair and just institutions, how to construct robust and proper identity strategies to promote civic identification and decrease extreme religious identification, and how to take advantage of religious identification to construct civic identification are the biggest challenges in nation-building. The group-membership approach might offer insights and inspirations for answering such questions.

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