
UNSUITABILITY OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY FOR AESTHETIC ACTIVITIES AND IN SOME EASTERN RELIGIOUS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

Social exchange theory is one compelling theory to describe the social individual activities. However, because such theory is in the background of Bentham's economics theory and western culture, it cannot explain all the social activities of human being. The research focuses on social behaviors influenced by the unique eastern religious cultures and especially the aesthetic activities. The findings show that the social exchange theory cannot explain the behaviors under the influence of some unique religious cultures, because those religious cultures advocate avoidance of utilities. It also cannot explain the aesthetic activities, because the aesthetic activities are beyond the utilities. So in the above processes, the social exchange of utilities cannot happen. That is, the social exchange theory cannot explain those activities.

Keywords: social exchange theory; Bentham; utilitarianism; aesthetic activities; eastern religions

INTRODUCTION

Human social interaction activities are so complicated that it attract numerous theorists to describe and explain such interesting phenomenon. Among the different theories, social exchange is one of the strongest theories to explain human activities. Social exchange theory believes that the fundamental form of human interaction are formed on the exchange of social and material resource. This theory developed fast during the 1960s and 1970s, with many theorists advocated and improved this theory.

It is fit to explain many human activities, as most of the human activities are based on social and material resource exchange. In many human spheres, the social exchange theory is applied because of its strength to explain human activities, especially after 1970s(Dai Dan. 2005). This theory is influenced by utilitarianism, which appeared in 18th and 19th centuries, and Bentham in

England of 19th century is the representative theorist of utilitarianism. Bentham believes that the human being is selfish naturally, so the principle of human activities is to avoid harm and lose and to get the interests. Social exchange theory is also influenced by some economists' thoughts, such as Adam Smith's economic theory, which emphasize exchange activities in society. In 1960s, Homans's social exchange theory came into being. This theory absorbs prior theories of utilitarianism and economics, so and the economic rationality and utilitarianism are the principles of it(Zafirovski M. 2003). Another representative of social exchange theorist is Peter Michael Blau, who criticizes Homans' theory can only explain the individual social activities, but not the activities of human society as a whole. He develops social exchange theory, basing on the Marist's theory. No matter Homans' or Blau's theory, their theories are all based on the principle that human activities are interest-oriented and exchanging among the society.

However, there are some activities that are not based on the social and material exchange and interest-oriented, for example, love and aesthetic activity, in which cases, actors do not care about the social and material interests. There is rarely academic literature addresses on those unique social activities compared with the social exchange theory.

This paper set out to discuss on some of the human social activities which cannot be explained by the social exchange theory. Among such unique activities, aesthetic activities, religious belief and love is the representative ones. In respect that religious belief and love are too complicated to be discussed in academia, this paper select aesthetic activities, which are belong to the aesthetics studies, as the study topic.

Not surprisingly, some theorists believe that the aesthetic activities are the utilitarian, although many of the aestheticians argue that aesthetic activities are beyond utilitarianism. The debates between the two groups of aestheticians has never stopped. In this paper, I advocate the idea that aesthetic activities are beyond utilitarianism, which I will discuss in the main body of the paper.

This paper has been organized in the following way: it begins by the introduction of social exchange theory, the advantage and the disadvantage of this theory; It will then go to discuss on the aesthetic activities' characteristics, especially its characteristics of being beyond the utilitarianism; In the next section, this paper will discuss on the social activities about aesthetic activities. It will find that both the aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic creation are beyond utilitarianism. On the other hand, once the so-called aesthetic activities involve in the utilitarianism, they are not the aesthetic activities.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY'S ORIGINALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

When discussing on social exchange theory, we should notice the social exchange theory is based on the utilitarianism. Before Homans and Blau's theories, the social exchange theory is

based on the utilitarianism economics, which believes that social individual is rational and free to choice and to exchange with each other in the pursuit of the benefit maximization. Homans thinks that the utilitarianism social exchange theory is based on the exchange of material, however, he argues that many of the social exchanges are not about the material, but the beyond material. Nevertheless, Homans believes that the social exchange among the individuals has cost or price, no matter materially or beyond material. Even in some intimate social relationships, such as love, such exchange activities exist.

The originality of economic utilitarianism influences all the after development of social exchange theory. Utilitarianism can be traced to ancient Greek philosophy. Some philosophy schools, such as Epicureans and Stoics, advocate the utilitarianism. The one who elaborates utilitarianism in modern times is Bentham in 19th century. It is necessary to detail Bentham's utilitarianism before proceeding to discuss on the social exchange theory.

Bentham's utilitarianism includes the following aspects: first, he defines the utilitarianism on the basis of individual, as individual is the unit of utilitarianism; second, Bentham argues that the utilitarianism is about the benefit, which including happiness and other kinds of interests; third, as the individual, the social ones try to avoid the loss and to get the benefit. The principle of utilitarianism is to achieve the maximization of happiness of all the society. It seems conflicting between the individual's benefit and maximization of happiness of all the society, because the individual ones in society always try to get benefit for the self, following the self-interest principle, so the society benefit would be damaged by the individual's activities. However, Bentham put forward that the solution for the problem: the principle of reciprocity, following which both the individual's and society's benefits can be achieve to the most extent, because when the individual pursuits for the benefit maximization, he or she should protect the benefit maximization as possible as one can do(Tang Daixing. 2002).

In Bentham's theory, all the individual's activities can be measures rationally. The premise of Bentham's theory is that all individual in society is rational, so the all the activities and thoughts of individual can be discussed rationally and are of social rationality.

The happiness, benefit and other interests are described by Bentham as the objects that human individual, and on the contrary, the unhappiness and loss are avoided by social individual as possible as they can.

However, Bentham's assertions do not apply many spheres of social individual. The social individual's activities are not rational in all the spheres, because many of the social individual's activities are not rational and cannot be decided only by the interests and other benefits. The following spheres do not belong to the spheres that Bentham described: the aesthetic activities

and some activities influenced by eastern religions. This paper will discuss the aesthetic activities in the following section, and here this paper will discuss on the activities influenced by the eastern religions.

The conceptualization of happiness in eastern views is different from that in the western (Joshani M. 2014). For example, Hinduism regards that the virtue practice and contented state as the key ingredients of happiness; In Buddhism, happiness exists with suffering, sadness and tragedy (Ricard, M. 2011); and in China, Confucians believe that the happiness state is the harmony between the intern and extern world, and another religion, Daoism, Happiness exists in where is no vice; Sufis thinks that one should get happiness through loving God which can be achieved by suffering (Vaughan-Lee, L. 1994).

Therefore, it can be found that conceptualization of the happiness in the eastern individual activities is different from that in the western world, which is the background of Bentham's research. In the western countries, Christian and Catholicism are the cultural background of many researches, which are influenced by the background inevitably. Bentham proposed that the individual has the tendency to get the happiness and avoid the loss and suffering in the western cultural background, however, he neglected the other regional cultures.

Different cultures, among which the religions are one of the coral ingredients, influence the social individual with different mode. Religion is often regarded as one kind of irrational activity, however, the irrationality of religion is in the sense of its effects on the individual in belief. When religion influences the society on the whole, that is the religion causes the forming of one kind of culture, religion is no more about irrationality.

Bentham's assertion is not suitable to discuss the social individual in different cultures, because Bentham set out to develop his theory in the background in the western culture, but not from all the different cultures in the world. Both the western culture and the other cultures in the world are influenced by religions, which is not irrational when they influence cultures in society.

Therefore, it can be found that one critical theory that social exchange theory depends on has some flaws. So the social exchange theory should not explain the individual activities in cultures influenced by the eastern religions at least.

The representatives of classic exchange theorists Adam Smith and Lock's theory is typical of utilitarianism. Modern social exchange theory afternoon Second World War inherited some genes of the classic social exchange theory, so the utilitarianism can be found in the modern social exchange theory, especially Homans' social exchange theory.

So it can be concluded, from the origin and development of modern social exchange theory, that the modern social exchange theory have the gene of utilitarianism, which is not suitable for interpret the social individual activities in the influence of the eastern cultures which are different fundamentally from western culture. Although social exchange theory open a new window, which is the advantage and advancement of this theory, to observe social individual activities in modern society, and can give the rational explanation of human activities, it cannot interpret the social individual activities in eastern cultures, which are influenced by the eastern religions to a large extent.

THE AESTHETIC ACTIVITIES BEYOND UTILITARIANISM

There is debates about the characteristics of aesthetic activities in aesthetics history. One central debate about the aesthetic activities is whether the aesthetic activities are of utilitarianism or not. Even when some researchers discuss about Socrates' notion on aesthetics, there are different interpretation of Socrates' notion: some researchers believed that Socrates' notion about aesthetics is utilitarian, another group researchers do not think so(Xiao Mu. 2009).

Some famous aestheticians, such Plekhanov, believe that all aesthetic matters derive from the utilitarianism: social individual's notion of matters is based on their utilities, then such notion redirected to the notion of aesthetics, so all the aesthetic phenomena come from the utilitarianism(Zhu Xiaojie.2007). China ancient philosopher Mo-tse said: " Only after one does not feel hungry, one can have the need for food to be delicious; only after one do not feel cold, one can have the need for the clothes to be gorgeous; only after one have the safe helter, one can have the need for his shelter to be joyful. "(Mo-tse. Mo Zi. 2016). The utilitarianism of the aesthetic contains two kinds of meanings: first, the aesthetic in the meaning of life; second, the cause of the aesthetic(Zhu Xiaojie. 2007).

However, there are many spheres of aesthetics that cannot be explained by utilitarianism. For example, there are some matters that have no utilities, such as the beautiful color of rosebay, because the rosebay is poisonous to human being, but rosebay is regarded as one kind of famous ornamental plants. So, in the sense of appreciation and aesthetic activity, utilitarianism should not be the cause of the aesthetic cause.

One of the arguments for the non-utilitarianism of aesthetic activities is proposed by Benedetto Croce. He believe that our intuition is the basis of creating and appreciating beauty (Croce B. 1921) . He claimed that all human know can be deduced to logic and imaginative knowledge, among which the latter give the basis of art. The intuition and imaginative knowledge is not rational, so those cannot be considered in the premise that the social individual activities are

rational. Hence such social individual activities cannot be explained by the social exchange theory.

Kant's aesthetics believes that the appreciation of beauty originates from happiness without utilities, which will be the benefit or the loss of the subject. He states that, when one finds that the appreciation object makes him feel happy in the condition that there is no involvement with utilities, he or she will deduce that this object is sure to make others feel happy, because the happiness comes about without the subject's desire and the subject feels free to enjoy such happiness, so he or she can believe others will feel happy when encountering the object, just as he or she does (Immanuel Kant, 2000). Therefore, it can be concluded that the beauty comes to being without the utilities, that is, the appreciation of beauty happens without utilities.

The sharing of beauty appreciation is a process without utilities. When a social individual finds some aesthetic objects, he or she will introduce such object to others, and in this process, there is no consideration of utilitarianism. The introducing process is a social individual activity, however, that cannot be explained by the social exchange theory.

In many appreciation and aesthetic activities, there is no consideration of utilities. The aesthetic activities have no consideration of utilities, so such social activities should not be the social exchange of utilities.

But the process still can bring a social individual with happiness in the condition that there is no exchange of utilities. As one feature of aesthetic activities is that, when one appreciates the aesthetic object, he or she will intend to introduce this object to others, although that cannot bring with the utilities to himself or herself.

AESTHETIC ACTIVITIES AS A KIND OF SOCIAL ACTIVITIES WHICH CANNOT INTERPRETED BY SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Aesthetic activities are not only happen in the individual matters, but also in the social interaction of individuals, or in other words, the interpersonal relationship. As the social being, individual has different connections with each other, just as Marx believes that human being is the animals in social connection. So all the individual activities are the social activities, among which, the aesthetic activities of individual are the social activities inevitably.

There are many aesthetic activities happening in the interpersonal connection, however, that cannot be interpreted by the social exchange theory. The aesthetic activities happening in the interpersonal connection are those beauty creation and appreciation of the social individual. According to Kant's statement about beauty, the beauty is without utilities. So both the beauty

happening in the creation and appreciation are non-utilitarian. Of course, selling and buying the artwork which contains beauty are one kind of social exchange activities, which can be interpreted by the social exchange theory. Only when the artist creates the beauty without desire for utilities can the real beauty be created. The following will discuss about the social activities in the beauty creation and appreciation.

The creation of beauty is without intention for the utilities. For example, Kant believed that when the individual creates the beauty with the intention, there is no beauty can be created out. Therefore, according to Kant, the only beauty exist in the nature, because almost all the artificial beauty created by human are embedded with human intention. But, we should notice that when some works created by human being without intention, the works will contain the real beauty and become the object of the beauty appreciation. So it can be found that, although the circulation of the artificial works or the natural objects which contains beauty happens in the interpersonal connection and is one kind of social exchange activities, the creation of beauty does not involve in the social exchange activities.

Neither does the beauty appreciation involve in the social exchange and utilities. When one appreciates the beauty, he or she will believe the others are also interested in or excited by the beauty, because the appreciation process does not have the desire for utilities(Immanuel Kant. 2000). One will introduce the beauty object to others, as he or she believes that the object will bring about the happiness to others. However, just as he or she does not have the desire for utilities. So there is no social exchange in the process. Bentham's utilitarianism has no function here.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to discuss on the unsuitability of social exchange theory for the aesthetic activities. The study has found out that aesthetic activities is a kind of social activities, which involve in the interpersonal connection, however, such kind of aesthetic activities are not fit in the social exchange theory framework. Both the beauty creation and appreciation are not involved with the utilities, which is emphasized by Bentham's theory, an economics theory. Except for the aesthetic activities, some behaviors influenced by certain eastern religious cultures but not the western cultures, which is the cultural background of Bentham and Homans' theory, also do not involve with the utilities. Although religious behaviors is irrational, the cultures under the influence of religions are rational. This finding implies that the social exchange theory cannot interpret all social individual activities, because some activities of human being are beyond utilitarianism, which is the pillar of Bentham's economics, the foundation of modern social exchange theory.

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