Study on the Construction of the Social Identity Basing on The Diversification of Cyber Society

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Cyber Society and Social Identity

1. **Cyber Society.**"Cyber society" refers to the virtual community based on human communication and practice on the information platform, which is a new social network triggered by the revolution of information technology. The social relations in cyber society present the features that different from the traditional society, which include the concealment of subjects' real identity and the multiplicity of their virtual identity.

2. **Social Identity.**Social identity theory aims to study how the social subject's understanding of the identity of the group he/she is in influences the individual's social cognition, social attitude and social action. At present, social identity theory is valued in multidisciplinary fields because the increasing differentiation and diversification of society in the information era has intensified the demand of social subjects for common significance and social integration. And the rapid expansion of cyber society intensifies the contradiction between social differentiation and social integration, therefore, more and more scholars use social identity theory to study the behavioral choice in the cyber society.

The cyber society is a complex social space interwoven by the traditional communication of presence, the online communication of presence and the online communication of absence. Due to the characteristic of its communication, including the lack of presence, the spatial mobility and the de-linearity of time, the social relations of cyber society present the features of the concealment of subjects' real identity and the multiplicity of their virtual identity, while the network power of cyber society generated based on the advantage of information is characterized by non-materialization and decentralization. The highly diversification of the cyber society determines that the construction of its social identity must follow the structural characteristics of it.

The Structure of Multiple Identity in the Cyber Society

1. **The synchronous development of individual identity and social identity.**The individual identity is the consciousness of the individual's own uniqueness, by which one can conform himself as an integrated man other than anyone else.Social identity refers to the individual's consciousness of being in a certain social group and social category. That is to say, social identity refers to the individual's awareness and reinforcement of being the same or similar with some people in a certain social category, but different from others.The rapidity and changeability of Internet technology determines that both the individual identity and the social identity of the cyber world are in the process of high-speed changing.In the process of communicating with highly diversified online communities, each individual of the cyber society constantly updates and develops his construction of self-identity. Based on this constantly developing self-understanding, each individual seeks to achieve social identity with other similar individuals in a broader online space in diversified ways.The above process makes the individual identity and social identity in the cyber society constitute a dynamic structure of interactive and synchronous growth .

2. **The interweaving shaping of the three types of social identity.**American scholar Manuel Castells first noticed the power of identity in the online world.He distinguished social identity into three types: (1)Legitimizing identity, refers to the dominant social system introduced to expand and rationalize their dominance over social actors.(2)Resistance identity: the identity formed among the actors debased by the dominant logic. They unite with each other and fight against the existing dominant logic.The resistant identity creates the "community" different from the "society".(3)Project identity: based on any available cultural materials, social actors construct a new kind of identity, by which they can redefine their social status and seek the comprehensive social transformation.In Castells's opinion, the rise of cyber society means the decline of the legitimacy identity which represents the civil society, while the project identity of the online subjects will inevitably generated from the resistance identity of the community.

Like the traditional realistic society, the social identity of every individual in the cyber society contains three aspects: legitimacy identity, resistance identity and project identity.

(1)The online world is not entirely devoid of the foundations of legitimizing identity.Although the number of formal regulation made by states in the cyber society is not so big as it is in the realistic society, the service agreement set by the Internet Service Providers(ISP) and the specifications and standards generated by the specific online community help to establish the basic order of cyber society. The identity based on these endogenous norms is essentially a prototype of legitimacy identity.(2) The resistant identity in the cyber society is only a confrontation with the "others" in a specific online community, does not necessarily lead to the contrary with official position or formal norms.There is no essential difference between the resistance identity of the cyber society and the identity formed from the community in the realistic society.It's just presented in digital and diverse forms.(3)The self-construction of the online subject and the pursuit of new social forms do not necessarily lead to the resistant identity, but may also constitute the basis of legitimizing identity.If the formal norms established by national legislation and policies are consistent with the self-constructed norms in the process of individual identification, the project identification of online subjects can directly provide the basis for the legitimizing identification.

The social identity of the cyber world is also made up of three different forms of identity, which is not essentially characterized by resistance identity. It is only because the cyber society is in the process of being generated, the formal norms have not been fully established and the foundation of legitimizing identification is weak, that the strength of resistance identification is highlighted .

Multiple Powers of Identity Construction in the Cyber Society

1. **Internet end-users.** Internet end-users refer to natural persons who access the Internet through computers or other mobile terminals and use the information therein. In the environment of web2.0, they are not only the consumers of massive information on the Internet, but also the carriers and producers of information. End-users often express their challenges to the determination, singularness and rigidity of traditional identities by using multi-dimensional virtual identities, and seek to deconstruct the existing culture and power structure with their own creativity.With the virtual, equal and multi-dimensional Internet

identity, end-users seeks to compensate for the loss of meaning, uniqueness and the alienation of subject in the reality.

2. **Internet service providers.** Internet Service Provider (ISP) refers to the business entity that provides services for the publication, transmission, searching, acquisition of information on the Internet. They are the backbone of what makes the Internet work and the cyber economy flourish. (1) ISPs are the dominant players of the Internet technology.The online world is basically created by different types of ISPs cooperating with each other, while they are still producing and reproducing the current online world and network order.(2) ISPs are important constructors of Internet social structure and Internet norms. Every innovation of internet technology means the emergence of new mode of network service, and new service mode means the birth of new information interaction methods.When ISP provides a new kind of service, it also establishes the basic information exchange standard and the basic ethics of the community under this service. Based on the unique role of ISP in the cyber society, they are the communication power of individual identity and social identity, the technical construction power of legitimacy identity, and the digestion and control power of the Internet resistance identity.

3. **Internet regulatory authority.** The self-created function of Internet determines that its initial norm is based on autonomy. However, the "unmarked" state of Internet activities inevitably leads to the disorder of cyber society.The self-generating norms of the cyber world are characterized by self-discipline and non-compulsion, which are not enough to fight against the chaos caused by abuse of rights.Therefore, the intervention and supervision of the public power organs on the network behavior has become the worldwide consensus and practical direction of Internet development. As the main pursuer of cyber legitimizing identity, the authority of Internet supervision must provide a legitimate identity basis for the establishment of formal norms to keep balance between the resistance identity of end-users seeking maximum freedom and the technical advantage of ISPs pursuing commercial interests. The key work of the authority of Internet supervision is to deal with two kinds of problems:(1)the consistency of the regulatory standards in cyberspace and the limits of power

behavior under the current constitutional framework;(2)the coordination between the regulation of authority power and the original norms of cyber world.

Diversified Norms Protecting the Social Identity of the Cyber Society

Social norms usually refer to the value standards and principles created by specific groups to guide and restrain their behaviors, adjust their relations, which requires all the group members to observe. The social identity of cyber society needs to be confirmed and protected by diversified social norms.

1.Value specification with "limited technology neutrality" as the core. The neutrality principle of Internet technology was first established by the Communication Act of 1934 in the United States.It requires that the Internet should be regarded as a public infrastructure, and the Internet technology is only responsible for the transmission of data, without asking what data and whose data are transmitted.The data in transmission can not be treated differently, and no specific data should be given priority. The Internet neutrality principle embodies the equality that human beings pursuit in the online world, therefore it has a positive effect at the early time of the development of the Internet. But with the influence of the Internet technology run deepening, cyber society researchers increasingly recognize that the Internet neutrality must be a "intrusive neutral". The author of this paper provides that the technology neutrality of ISP must be limited to the following conditions:(1) On the premise of technical possibilities, ISPs cannot indulge their Internet technology to cause harm to the user's rights.(2)No ISP has the right to use technical neutrality as a justification against regulatory legal restrictions based on public interest requirements.

2. The "ternary integration" norm system of cyber society. (1)Internet technical specifications.Internet technical specifications determine who we can communicate with, how we do it and what information can be obtained or transmitted. Different from the general technical norms which affect social relations indirectly by adjusting the relationship between human and nature, the Internet technical norms directly shape the mode of communicate in the cyber society, and at the same time establish the basic structure of the Internet community

under these technical norms. Therefore, Internet technical specifications, comparing with general technical norms, have stronger social attributes.

(2) Internal norms of online communities.The unique flat and decentralized social structure of cyber society and the anonymity of Internet end-users make the endogenous norms of cyber community play a more prominent role.It can be said that the initial cyber society completely relies on the internally generated flexible norms to maintain the basic order.They are the "soft law" of cyber society, the direct refinement of Internet behavior experience, and also lay the foundation for the generation of exogenous norms.

(3) Rigid external specification.Internet interpersonal interaction is actually an indirect and virtual interaction through the technical service provided by ISP. Since both parties cannot directly witness the consequences of their own behaviors, it is difficult to fully perceive even when "deviant behaviors" occur, and even if they do, the feel of guilt will be reduced.Therefore, it is necessary to establish rigid norms of externality represented by national laws in addition to the above two norms,so as to overcome the abnormal tendency of internal norms.

Conclusion

"Cyber society" refers to the community based on human communication and practice on the information platform, which is a new social form triggered by the revolution of information technology. The social relations in cyber society present the features of concealment of subjects' reality identity and multiplicity of their virtual identity, while the power based on the network information superiority manifests the characteristic of non-entity and decentralization.

The increasing differentiation and diversity of cyber society have intensified the strong demand of social subjects for common significance and social integration. Social identity theory aims to investigate how the social subject's recognition of identity in social groups influences their social cognition, social attitude and social actions. The essence of the order construction of cyber society is keeping balance between the diversified identities including legitimizing identity, resistance identity and project identity, to do which, the important role

of diversified subjects in cyber society must be noticed. The peculiarity of the social identity in cyber society shows as the synchronous development of the individual identification and the social identity and the co-creation of the three kind of social identities.

The network users, the internet service provider (ISP) and the internet regulators compose the power of construction in cyber society, among which ISP is very special. The multiple function of ISP includes linking up the individual identification and the social identity, helping to construct the legitimizing identity and controlling the resistance identity in the cyber society.

Based on the principle of Limited Internet Neutrality, a norm system consisting of technical norms, soft law and national law can maintain the stability of the social identity in the cyber society.