
Analyzing and Understanding Network Politics

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Abstract: Cyber politics is a new branch of science that has been formed and has developed since the 1990s. The cyberspace has had a profound influence over the political system, political process, political power and international relations. With the development of information technology, cyber politics has emerged as the times demand. Cyber politics, which is an important theoretical branch of politics, has presented the urgent request about the development of traditional theory of politics. The thesis further analyzes its basic features, basic contents, influence and predicts its development tendency in the future based on the understanding of the definition of network politics.

Keywords: Network, Political science, Cyber politics, Cyber democracy

The Network has had a profound influence on the political system, political process, political power, government, international relations and so on, therefore which has made Cyberpolitics that studies the political phenomena and laws emerge as the times require and has offered a new theoretical research subject for traditional political science. The topic of political studies in the 21st century should focus on various political issues from the network, establish cyberpolitics and serve for the political practice.

1. Implications of cyberpolitics

The network itself is the product of social development. In the early stage, the network was mainly applied in the scientific and technological realm, but it has infiltrated into diverse aspects of human society with the rapid development of information technology, especially it has entered the political life of human society. Now the network has covered the key issues such as power and interest in the realm of political studies. To a certain extent, the network is making traditional politics have qualitative leap, cyberpolitics has been a new theoretical research paradigm in the realm of political studies.

Cyberpolitics that is characterized by the internet is a branch of politics. From its language etymology, cyberpolitics is composed of cyber and politics. According to Nazil Choucri, the word mainly discusses the political issues in the cyberspace. The key to understand cyberpolitics is what the meaning of network is^[1]. The Euro-American scholars have focused on cyberpolitics from various angles. In Western academic works, we can see the words that are composed of network and politics like cyberpolitics, virtual politics, politics on the net and so on^[2]. Exactly speaking, some Western scholars usually link cyberpolitics with virtual reality. For example, in *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-tech Assault on Reality*, Mark Slouka argues, with the proliferation of technologies that allow us to immerse ourselves in artificially created worlds - from radio and television through to virtual reality and cyberspace - the line between real reality and artificial reality is blurring. We will be unable to distinguish between what is real and what is artificially generated, with disastrous consequences. But the digital revolution is related to power in its deeper implications. Besides this, other foreign scholars have studied cyberpolitics from different angles such as the power shift of network society, political control, philosophical methods of post-modernism and etc.

Therefore, we can understand the implications of cyberpolitics from the broad and narrow angle. In a broad sense, cyberpolitics is a branch discipline of political science which concerns national power and some special interests on the Internet; In a narrow sense, it means the politics of the virtual world that has absorbed and used the subject knowledge on information science, computer science, system science and ethics for reference and the influence of network over the real world politics. From this cyberpolitics is a cross-discipline. Because of the special features of the network, cyberpolitics that is different from other branches of political science has formed a new emerging discipline with development potentials^[3].

2. Basic features of cyberpolitics

2.1 Virtual reality

Cyberpolitics is virtual in existing form and is real in functional effect. The network is based on the real human society and in turn has an important influence on the real economic, cultural and political life. The reality of the network means that its subject is real. The

participating subject of the network politics consists of two parts: one is the real subject that can be regarded as the general citizen, the other is virtual subject, i.e. netizen, which can be called the virtual political person^[4]. Under certain conditions, the two participating subjects whose barriers are indistinct can be interconvertible. So cyberpolitics can be a kind of virtual real existence.

2.2 Directness

Cyberpolitics has explored a channel through which citizen can participate in the administration and discussion of state affairs directly, and the network has been essential to citizens' direct participating in politics, consequently, people can do so by means of the network, and can give the judgment and choice independently. We can say, citizens' participating in politics is the most outstanding demonstration in cyberpolitics.

2.3 Equality

Equality means in politics that one is that everyone has the right to participate in the administration and discussion of state affairs, and the other is the right above should be equal to all people. In the virtual world, if the conditions of participating in government within the law are achieved, equal political rights for individuals can be given fullest demonstration. In addition, all kinds of opinions can be reflected clearly on the Internet. Thus the network can promote the political equality between human beings. Truly the virtual equality can be realized more easily than the equality in the real world, which is a strong recommendation of information superhighway.

2.4 Convenience

In the real world, a series of activities and contents related to politics are finished by speed of light on the Internet. For example, the form of participating in government like voting, election, active contact, political association and etc, which now can be achieved by participation in network politics is more convenient, and the convenience strengthens the initiative and capacity that people participate in politics.

2.5 Cheapness

Cyberpolitics is a sharp contrast with the real world which is engaged in political activities with high material cost and great political risk. In the virtual world, the political activities on the Internet are quick, cheap and stronger concealed, especially the network has been the

cheapest and the most effective medium by which opposition faction and terrorist forces create political chaos to accomplish ulterior purpose.

2.6 Global politics

Cyberpolitics is global politics in essence. Firstly, the political subject is global, i.e. as political individuals, its political influence can spread practically everywhere. Secondly, political targets are global, i.e. the eruption of great historical events and promulgation of political decisions run through the globe by the network in a twinkling. Finally, the space of political activities is global, i.e. cyberpolitics is the study of combination on politics and network space, while the network space is a global space through which any individual and organization may engage in political activities.

3. Basic issues of cyberpolitics research

Cyberpolitics is the outcome in network times, so the network has been main line of political activities whose input, conversion and output take place by network. Traditional politics sometimes does not know where to start when answering political issues resulting from the network, but the situation can be changed if cyberpolitics is built to enlarge the research object, content and area of political science. The research content and characteristics of cyberpolitics are similar and different from traditional politics. For the scholars abroad, cyberpolitics concerns power shift, political participation, government administration and etc in the network society. But studies on cyberpolitics got off to a late start in China, and have not formed the perfect and systematic methodological basis like Western cyberpolitics so far. Generally speaking, Chinese and Western scholars mainly analyze the position and role of cyberpolitics in the present political science from information sovereignty, network democracy, network power, network policy and world network based on theories of traditional politics.

3.1 Information sovereignty and national sovereignty

National sovereignty is that a state enjoys sufficient legislative power, judicial power and administrative power in its territory eliminating any foreign power, and is not subject to any foreign power in international communication. After the Cold War, the rise of ideological thoughts challenging and negating sovereignty has endangered the principle of national sovereignty and the extant state system. The network has also impacted traditional national sovereignty whose extension is expanded to the intangible information frontier, so a state's

geographic frontier will wield a less influence on its sovereignty. In the information age, information sovereignty will become the new realm of national sovereignty, therefore, strengthening the construction of network defense and upholding information frontier have been the key to protect national sovereignty in the information age.

3.2 Network democracy

The network democracy, also called electronic democracy or digital democracy, is a kind of new participating means and pattern with the development of electronic network, is the combination of network and democracy and is the embodiment of new democratic political theories in network times^[5]. The following are two opposing viewpoints about network democracy in the political field. Idealists argue, the network has ushered in a new epoch of democracy and will result in decentralization of power and rise of direct democracy, while pessimists argue, the new technology means centralization of power, and the variant of political control will be reinforced.

3.3 Cyberpower

At present, Tim Jordan, a politician of East London University, is famous for network power research. He published his No. 1 monograph-*Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* about network power. He argues, cyberpower is the form of power through which cyberspace and culture and politics on the Internet can be organized, and the power struggle in cyberspace is mainly launched between technological elites and individuals^[6]. Afterwards, more political scholars have worked at cyberpower. For example, Joseph Nye regards information power as an important part of soft power, so cyberpower is a kind of new form of soft power. With the rapid development of information technology, it is an important task in information age how to make cyberpower be a state's strength. In fact, the struggle of cyberpower is to market different values and to compete for dominant power about network game by Internet. Now, some Western countries, especially U.S., have the initiative for cyberpower, while its distance can be shortened between developing and developed countries to shake off the threat from information hegemony and electronic colonialism if information software technology is developed more rapidly.

4. Development prospect of cyberpolitics

Cyberpolitics has developed politics into an entirely new dimension as a knowledge

system. Western political scholars have scored great successes on cyberpolitics studies, which prepares the ground for the rapid development of cyberpolitics, and which in a sense lays the theoretical foundation for Chinese political scholars that understand and study cyberpolitics. But we can't be fettered by theories and research methods of Western cyberpolitics, we should quicken the combination of network and politics, promote China's political participation and the development of democratic politics and the creation of government administration to publicize and establish the image of CCP and Chinese government at home and abroad.

Network age must be the combination of legal system and rule of law, and legal system and rule of law should be world wide and be with the network. To formulate the legal system on the network is the prerequisites of game principle, however, it is important how to carry out the law and realize the orderly state of the network according to the law. Every country should strive for the legal system and rule of law in network age.

The vitality of politics is if it can focus on the change of times, put forward the new real political issues and serve for real politics. This is also an important test of cyberpolitics in the forefront of the times. Cyberpolitics can face the reality, close to life and is displaying its own charm, so which means that cyberpolitics is a discipline full of vital power.

The prosperity of computer science and political science has made more political scholars focus on issues of cyberpolitics, and its research achievements are being valued by different-level political policy-makers, so the development prospect of cyberpolitics is glorious.

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