

Formation Mechanism and Psychological Effect of Social Mentality



Yiyin Yang

As the most macroscopic and complicated social mental phenomenon, social mentality is surely quite complicated in its formation mechanism as well. As previously mentioned, in this book, we apply a perspective that is different from that of the “individual in the group” and the “group in the individual”—namely, the perspective of the mutual construction between “individual and group”. This perspective will help us to uncover the internal mechanism of such a macroscopic and complicated phenomenon, and able us to develop a theory to describe and explain more systematically the formation of social mentality and changes it undergoes.

1 Theoretical Framework of Dynamic Construction

Mutual construction is a dynamic process. First of all, as a process, social mentality is constructed by members of society, and this construction process includes many complicated and intermixed stages, such as formation, change, deposition and induction. Social mentality reflects the macroscopic social characteristics of individuals. It is the relations between individuals and the larger society and the product of their mutual construction, perceived by people through the endless, complicated and changeable mental facts it breeds. This dynamic process, i.e. formation, change, deposition and induction, is similar to that of the cultural mentality mechanism and as such can even be regarded as a part of culture. Second, as a driving force, social mentality is the continuous background and mental horizon of social behaviors of individuals and groups, as the preferred orientation for internalized social adaption on which individual survival depends, it potentially guides, induces, promotes, provides and restricts the mental activities of individuals. Third, as a representation system, social mentality is not at all completely inexpressible or non-recordable. It always manifests

Y. Yang (✉)
Beijing, China

© Social Sciences Academic Press 2019
Y. Yang (ed.), *Social Mentality in Contemporary China*,
Research Series on the Chinese Dream and China's Development Path,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7812-6_3

itself and is perceived via the behaviors and languages of individuals and groups. Moreover, such representation is often closely connected with social structure and reflected among different groups and categories, expressed as tacit knowledge shared by certain groups and categories, or in other words, stereotypes and ideas.

It is thus clear that the construction process of social mentality is a mental process, which is closest to the cultural mental construction process. We can be much enlightened from the Dynamic Constructivist Model (DCM) of culture proposed by cultural psychologist Kang Yingyi et al. on the basis of study of bicultural individuals.

When it comes to cultural DCM, first of all, culture is defined as the networks of shared knowledge among group members. Here, knowledge refers to the beliefs, values and lay theories shared within a cultural group. As a tradition of knowledge, culture has the following characteristics: it is shared by members; it is externalized in implements, signs, customs and even social institutions; it is the basis of communication among members within the group; it is handed down from generation to generation; and it keeps changing along with new social order. Second, different cultural groups share different knowledge systems. Third, initiating different knowledge networks can result in different behavioral responses. Fourth, members of the same culture share the same knowledge system. However, just as other features of knowledge, shared knowledge is also characterized by availability, accessibility and applicability, and to extract and prime knowledge requires evoking specific context. Thus the appearance of cultural icons, which are of typical significance, can activate corresponding behavioral responses. Fifth, the different characteristics of individuals, being boundary conditions and moderator variables, can moderate the process of culture acting on individual behaviors (Hong 2009).

Similar to cultural DCM, the social mentality DCM defines social mentality as a dispersive social mood state. It is composed of social emotion keynotes, social consensuses and social values, which are shared among society members, reflected in representations such as catchwords, fashions and ideas, and serves as the background and basis for mutual comparison, communication and cooperation among society members. Second, as different social mental groups have different social mentalities, they can also be hierarchical in some aspects. Third, via mutual identification, communication and contagion among society members, social mentality can be transmitted and form its influence. Fourth, the perception, participation and transmission of social mentality also influence the accessibility and applicability of shared reality. Fifth, serving as boundary conditions and moderator variables, the different characteristics of individuals can moderate the process of social mentality acting on individual behaviors, among which the degree at which individual values and social values coincide, as well as individual susceptibility, are of particular importance.

In comparison, there are some similarities between the social mentality DCM and that of culture, and both have also some characteristics of their own, as shown in the Table 1.

In comparison we can see that the DCMs of both culture and social mentality reflect variability, dynamic property and multi-channel property. However, the former is also characterized by the coexistence of multi-culture and long-time alternation (such as intergenerational inheritance), while the latter features the potential

Table 1 Comparison of the two models

	Cultural DCM	Social mentality DCM
Definition of culture/mentality	Knowledge network shared 1. Shared 2. Reflected in implements, signs, customs, ideas and institutions 3. Basis for communication among cultural members 4. Handed down from generation to generation 5. Changes slowly and enduring	Dispersive social mood state 1. Social emotions keynotes, social consensus and social values 2. Shared 3. Reflected in catchwords, fashions and ideas, potential/vague influence for a long/short time 4. Transversely diffused and transmitted 5. Changes quickly
Subculture	Different cultural groups share different knowledge systems	Different social mental groups have different social mentalities which can also be hierarchical
Priming effect/convergence effect	Priming different knowledge networks can result in different behavioral responses (priming effect)	Transmits the influence of social mentality through identification, communication and contagion (convergence effect)
Characteristics shared	Availability, accessibility and applicability	Perception, accessibility and applicability to shared reality
Boundary conditions and moderator variables	Individual traits	Degree of agreement between individual values and social values, and individual susceptibility
Contribution of individuals	Inheritance and innovation	Participation and transmission

directional and emotional nature of value orientation. From the perspective of cultural comparison and categorization, social mentality is the product of certain cultural conditions and features certain cultural characteristics, such as optimism, enthusiasm, and the pursuit of achievements. However, from the perspective of social mentality, cultural mentality is also a part of social mentality. Their relationship should be mutually constructive and justified.

2 Interpretation Levels and Upward-Downward Models of Social Mentality

The relationship between social mentality and individual mental states and behaviors can be understood from the models of its two layers (upper and lower) and their directional relation. They validate and interact with each other. They are also two important and basic interpretation levels of social psychology (Doise 2011). According to Doise, the level of analysis is also the level of interpretation. Different levels of analysis provide unique interpretations of social psychology. The existing levels of analysis and levels of interpretation can be divided in many ways, among which there are many complicated or simple four-level and six-level analysis frameworks. Among them, four-level analysis frameworks are quite common: (1) intra-individual process, interpreting how individuals organize social experience; (2) inter-personal (interpersonal or intra-context) process, interpreting the dynamic mechanism of the interpersonal process; (3) social position/social status (group-self and inter-group), interpreting the contextual interaction process; (4) individual and society process, interpreting how the ideology and belief of universalism trigger different or discriminative mental representations and behaviors (Doise 2011). Doise specially emphasized that, “these four levels of analysis are closely overlapped, so the articulation of levels of analysis itself should be regarded as a research subject of social psychology” (Doise 2011).

2.1 *Upward, Downward and Interactive Models*

The upward model refers to the mood states that disperse among the whole society or some groups of the society and which are converged from social mentality by individuals from the bottom up. Data from surveys on social attitudes is usually used in the description of social mentality. This data is generally the mean value of scale scores or the cumulative percentage for the surveyed group. This allows us to speculate on the degree to which the representation of specific social mentalities among social groups is shared. If most society members share the characteristics of a certain social mentality, we can assume that such social mentality is easily perceived and recognized by people.

We assume that the mechanism for individuals to integrate into society comprises four channels: namely (1) attitude, (2) emotion; (3) personality; (4) nationality. Individual integration and convergence forms a shared mental reality that, in the end, surpasses individuals and becomes an organic component of real society. On a deeper level, the integration of individuals is also a the integration and interaction process among individual values and social values (cultural values), which profoundly guides and orients the development of the individual’s social attitude, affection, personality and nationality towards (1) social consensus, (2) emotional keynote of overall society,

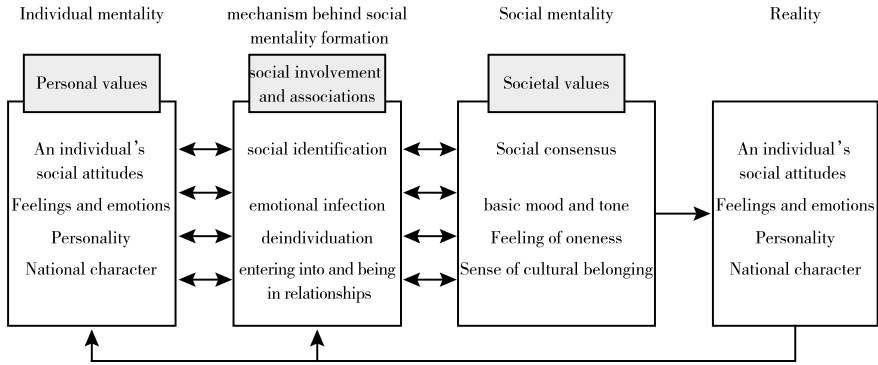


Fig. 1 Deriving the formation mechanism of social mentality from the structure of group mentality

(3) sense of integration and sense of belonging to society, and (4) sense of integration of cultural characters and mutual strengthening and adjustment (see Fig. 1).

Here, we emphasize discussing the formation mechanism of social mentality—social involvement and social relevance. As shown in Fig. 1, we operationalize the relation between individual and society into four paths or channels.

1. Social identity

Social identity is the individual mental process of affiliating oneself with a category or group. Studies have found that when an individual establishes a mental contact with one category, identification with this category is formed. There is hereinafter an active distinctiveness between the individual and other people outside the category or other categories, which results in the concept of “we”. The category identified by such an individual is termed in-group and other categories are termed out-groups. Such mental process is called the “self-categorization process”.

The identity process resulting from self-categorization usually causes two mental effects. The first is the prototyping of membership. When an individual has established mental contact with a group via self-categorization, often he believes he possesses the presumably typical characteristics of in-group members and believes that other in-group members also possess these characteristics. In many cases, people tend to believe that they are representative of the in-group. This phenomenon is termed self-stereotyping. In terms of the social compound subject, when multiple subjects “compound” into a “new subject”, the relationship among members is restructured. Therefore, the mental effect of prototyping is, on the one hand, to improve the sense of mastership and, on the other hand, to cause a superiority complex against other members. The second can also be interpreted as in-group preference (namely the effect of “liking ourselves”) and improvement of group self-esteem. After forming “we awareness”, people start to blindly appreciate in-group members. The logic is that “those who are of us are likable”. Group members usually cannot see the shortcomings and mistakes of the members of their own group. And even if they do see them, they will try as much as possible to defend them and attribute them to external

factors, forming a group-serving attribution bias. On the contrary, attribution bias can be formed in out-groups as well, and under opposite circumstances, in-group members would usually attribute the shortcomings and failures of out-groups to internal factors.

The social identity process establishes the mental contact between the individuals and the group (or category) and forms the sense of integration and “we awareness”, which share the similar social mentality. And people establish the distinction in and out the group with such mentality. For example, the mentality of hatred against the rich and officials is usually generated along people’s vague category identification to the corresponding “wage-earning class”, “low-income groups”, “vulnerable groups”, “ordinary people”, “people with neither power nor status” and “lower class”. We will expatiate on the research in this field in a specialized chapter.

2. Emotional contagion

An emotion is an important part of the individual mental process that greatly affects individual attitudes and behaviors. Studies have constantly proved that emotions can be transmitted and spread among individuals and thus generate a collection of emotions shared by members of an organization or group. These are known as group emotions (Barsade and Gibson 1998; Brief and Weiss 2002).

Emotional contagion refers to a process during which an individual or a group affects the emotions and behaviors of other individuals or groups by intentional or unintentional emotional states, attitudes and behaviors. This is because individuals can automatically and continuously imitate the expressions, voices and postures of others during interaction. Therefore emotions are transmitted and copied through emotional contagion and then become a state that disperses in some context or period of time.

Barsade and Gibson have also brought forward the concept of emotional heat, which implies that society members bring their own emotions or feelings to the group or society, and via communication, incubation and transmission among different society members, these emotions and feelings finally form social emotions that surpass their own emotional state and are re-shared by society members (Yang 2012). At this moment, the emotions of society members as individuals, such as great joy, excitement, boldness and generosity, a shared bitter hatred of the enemy, common consciousness, boundless forces, etc., are corrected, depersonalized and intensified. Such social emotional states tolerate and dissolve individual emotions as well as restructure individual emotions and closely connect individuals with the whole society.

The mental mechanism involved in emotional contagion is relatively complicated, and includes the imitation-feedback mechanism, the association-learning mechanism, the language adjustment and association mechanism, the cognitive mechanism, and the direct induction mechanism, etc. (Yang 2012).

3. Deindividuation and depersonalization

Deindividuation implies that the self-orientation function and sense of responsibility of individuals is lost or weakened when influenced by group pressure or

group consciousness, which causes uncontrollable behaviors that would absolutely not occur during lone individual acts. Deindividuation is mainly the obfuscation of responsibility caused by concealed identity. Under the circumstance of non-identification, individuals are less pressured by external constraints, evaluation and normalization, and their own sense of responsibility weakens. Deindividuation is commonly seen in group behaviors.

Depersonalization implies the formation of a “greater self” or “group mind” when an individual integrates a social group and shares a common awareness with it, causing the disappearance of individual differences. This is a mental product of social identity, especially of self-categorization. Depersonalization is consistent between individuals and the group or collective, which do not necessarily cause responsibility diffusion and, on the contrary, may strengthen the sense of responsibility of the group and better achieve group goals.

Deindividuation and depersonalization are interlaced in some cases. However, the difference between them remains noticeable in terms of mechanism.

4. Demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’ and group member indispensability

“Demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’” is a process specific to the traditional Chinese society, in which individuals form an awareness of “us” during social communications, of which kinship is the blueprint accord to the principle of “being close to those who we should be close to and giving respect those who are respectable”. This process either maintains or interrupts the relationship of the innate kinship system according to “differential patterns” or establishes fictive kinship through communications in non-kinship, and includes other people within the mental boundary of ego, thus leading to mutual communication and toleration between “I” and “we” via the concept of “us” and achieving an integral whole made of the “lesser self” and “greater self”. The opposite process is the exclusion of others outside the boundary of ego and the distinction of “us” from “outsiders”.

The “demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’” process possesses strong ethical and moral overtones. In traditional society, it played an important role in resource distribution, relationship maintenance between family members and relatives, and the maintenance of ethical order. However, the characteristics of the concept of “relationally demarcated we” (namely “our own people”) don’t apply to the connotation of the concept of “we” in modern contractual society. First of all, “us” included within the boundary of ego are hierarchized in the differential pattern of superiors and inferiors, whereas their relationship with the individual isn’t equal or homogeneous. Therefore, intimacy among individuals surely varies. Second, what kinds of people are included within the boundary of “us” depends on the choices of the individual himself. There may be as few as only himself, and as many as to include family members, neighbors, friends, kindred, townsmen and colleagues, and even countrymen and the whole of mankind. Though an individual may sublimate from the “lesser self” to the “greater self” from family and state regulation to world peace through self-cultivation, once the social cultural situation changes or if the individual isn’t morally cultivated enough, the scope given to “us” by the individual decreases and can’t guarantee cooperation with others. Third, “us” who are actively included within

the boundary of ego instead of under the necessary condition for the formation of common feelings, consensus or common interests with the individual, are “passively included” instead. Therefore, who is categorized as “us” is not based on consensus. Such concept of “we” is mainly applied in the distinction with “them” in responsibility, trust and emotional intimacy, and its main function isn’t to form a common sense of integration.

Through the channel of demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’, an individual connects himself with the people and the feelings of a same circle in a differential pattern, forming an “awareness of our own people” and setting the circle he selected in opposition or distinction to other circles. Not all people within the same circle are homogeneous or necessarily possess common interests, goals and feelings. This is the difference between demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’ and the categorized mechanism of social identity. It is a social connection mechanism with ample Chinese characteristics.

What is known as group member indispensability implies that the function of each member in a social structure is irreplaceable. It is neither a category group formed by homogeneity nor the tolerance of one member for the other members considering himself as the core of a group (in other words it is not a group aggregated through “demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’”); instead it is a community formed by members who provide necessary and unique contributions in order to achieve a common goal. All members are unique and indispensable to the community; therefore, all members are surely interdependent and organically combined. When all members are indispensable regardless of how much they contributed, the equality of members is assured. The result of such constitution mechanism of “we” is a state of “harmony in diversity and unity in diversity”. It is like the relationship between each piece of a puzzle and the whole picture: the picture cannot be completed if any single piece is missing. Therefore, this mechanism is formed by a sense of an individually unique and indispensable “we”, the basic characteristics of which are:

(1) **Harmony in diversity and unity in diversity**

“Harmony” is an important value in Chinese culture. “All creatures live together without interfering with each other; the sun and the moon are running after each other, and the four seasons alternate without violating each other” (*Doctrine of the Mean*). “Harmony” is not to impose consistency; rather it should be understood as “harmony in diversity”. “Consistency” is merely relative to “diversity”, while “harmony” may include “diversity”, and this is where the difference between “harmony” and “consistency” lies. As Fei Xiaotong argued, the meaning of “harmony” lies in the following affirmation “We should respect the culture of our own nation, cultivate and develop our own culture; at the same time, we should respect the culture of other nations. Only in this way can the outstanding cultures of different nations and states tolerate and learn from each other, thus helping to create a colorful, multicultural world.” Diversity is the basic condition for “harmony”, without which there would be no need for the pursuit of “harmony”, let alone “harmony itself”. In “diversity”

is manifested personality and particularity, while in “harmony” is manifested the complementary relation between “diversified” subjects rather than consistent ones.

(2) **Emphasis on communication and equal consultation**

All-round communication is the necessary premise for the existence of the concept of individually unique and indispensable “we”. In order to achieve the goal of harmony in diversity rather than a state of disunity, various subjects have to sufficiently and effectively consult and communicate with each other.

Openness and consultation are the basis for the organic integration of every society member. This is a full expression of the concept of equality in an individually unique and indispensable “we” organization. Only when the identities of the participants during consultation are equal is this organization consultative in nature; otherwise, it takes on features such as dispatching, bargaining, counter-measuring, competition or subordination. Consultation can ensure that all members are allowed to speak out freely and participate while giving them a sense of responsibility and a sense of achievement.

Equality manifests itself in the de-bureaucratized structural design of organizations, and even more important is the sense of equality of each group member, their self-esteem in interactions, and their mutual respect. In a social group, gender, age, seniority, title, post, grade, experience, income, education background, language, region, nationality, physical qualifications and customs are not indexes for man-to-man unequal discrimination. Everyone should respect each other, learn from each other and help each other, as well as become joint members forming a society.

(3) **Construction of consensus and internalization of ideas**

Communication and consultation result in the formation of consensus. Consensus is the product of compromises surpassing the idea or preferences of individuals, specific groups or categories, and forming a common “lower limit” or “upper limit”. The formation of a consensus and integration of different value orientations in a universal consensus by a society provides the mental condition for social cooperation.

(4) **Mutual support and respect**

A flatted social structure has no solidified leader-member relation, fades the strata relation and shortens power distance. Society members should take the whole society as the object of identification rather than emphasize self-identification, group identification, department identification and category identification. Only through the concept of the “greater we” can members regard the responsibilities of the whole organization as their own responsibilities.

Chinese traditional culture is not a culture that emphasizes contractual rights, but it emphasizes the relation between the whole and the individual. Integrative thinking provides certain conditions for the formation of the concept of an unique and indispensable “we”.

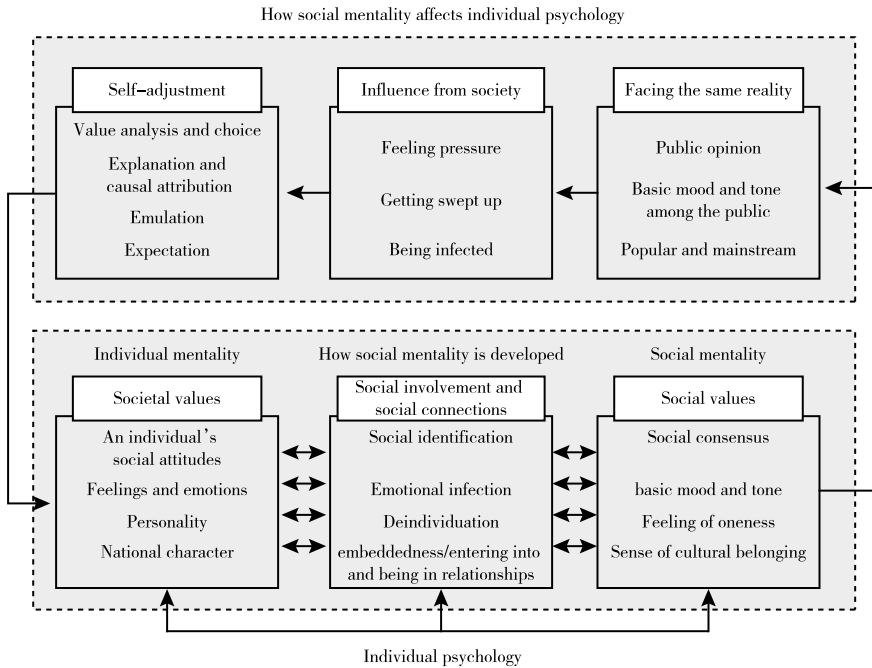


Fig. 2 Different levels of social mentality and their dynamic relationship

2.2 Downward Model and Interactive Model

When a social mentality forms gradually, it wholly affects the social mentality of individuals and groups in a top-down manner. This phenomenon is known as the downward model. Since it has the power of integrity, such social mentality has relatively great influence on individual mental states and behaviors, as pointed out by social psychologist William McDougall early in 1920:

The society as a whole always features clear characteristics, which are not from the individuals that form this society. These characteristics make the society as a whole affects individuals in a way that is quite different from the way in which society and individuals interact. Furthermore, each individual that becomes a member of a group will show some latent or potential characteristics or reaction modes that he will not show outside the group. Therefore, only when we regard individuals as the elements for the life of the whole can we discover the potential of these individuals. In other words, the society as a whole also has its own peculiarity, and it is a real-life whole, which determines the essence and mode of action of the individuals that compose it to a large extent; society as a whole is an organic whole. Society has its mental activities, but these mental activities are not the simple sum of the mental activities of the independent units that compose society. (Quoted from Doise 2011: 3)

This is illustrated in the following diagram (Fig. 2).

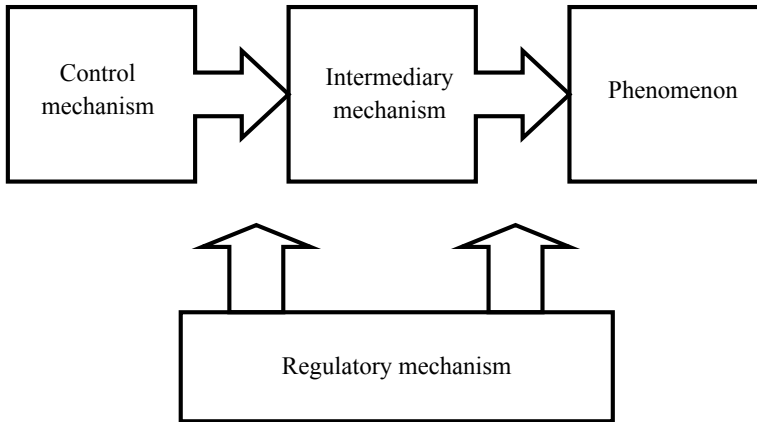


Fig. 3 Models of casual mechanism

The interaction between individual and social levels constructs the mental activities of the whole society—i.e., social mentality, and thus the mental activities of individuals are also interpreted socially.

3 Mechanism and Effect of Social Mentality

3.1 Mechanism of Social Mentality

The mechanistic causal model is usually used to systematize the relations between the variables of the mental mechanism, allowing us to interpret the control mechanism, intermediary mechanism and regulatory mechanism of a phenomenon. The control mechanism is the causal variable responsible for a given phenomenon. What we call the intermediary mechanism is the intermediary between antecedent variables and outcome variables. When the relationship between antecedent variables and outcome variables is established through an intermediary variable, the latter becomes a necessary element. The antecedent variable directly leads to the intermediary variable, and the intermediary variable in turn leads to the outcome variable. In the case of different causes caused by the control mechanism, the regulatory mechanism is required to determine when and under what conditions a given antecedent variable produces what kind of effect. The regulatory mechanism can regulate the relationship between the control mechanism and the intermediary mechanism as well as the relationship between the intermediary mechanism and the phenomenon. For the concrete process, please refer to the Fig. 3.

In previous studies, a number of different social mentality mechanisms have been identified. For example, the state of “mental harmony” can become the intermediary

mechanism for social comparison, core self-evaluation and life satisfaction (Zhang 2012). As the sum of self-harmony, interpersonal harmony, social harmony and harmony between man and nature, “mental harmony” reflects the essential nature of traditional Chinese mentality for the formation of social mentality in China. Elements like social comparison affect life satisfaction on the basis of mental harmony levels. The intermediary mechanism may be constituted of thinking models, values or self-constructs. Regulatory variables may consist of mental variables, such as expectations, social identity, self-esteem, or achievement motivation. Meanwhile, regulatory variables are usually demographic variables, such as gender, income, socioeconomic status, education, living conditions, or consumer preference. These regulatory mechanisms regulate and change the relationship between the control mechanism and the intermediary mechanism along with regulatory variables.

Reviewing existing studies, we discover that the relatively important variables affecting social mentality include:

1. Social comparison

Social psychologist Festinger proposed the concept of social comparison in 1950. It implies that when people are in an uncertain environment, they compare themselves with others in order to confirm and improve themselves, which leads to a better understanding of their own characteristics. For example, upward comparisons increase one’s power to change oneself, namely, to emulate those better, while downward comparisons grant self-satisfaction and confidence.

The phenomenon of social comparison includes different components such as cognition, emotion, ability and behavior. It is thus clear that social comparisons are ubiquitous. In the era which saw the advent of social media, people have more opportunities for social comparison. When social structures rapidly change, the structural characteristics of social strata become obvious and gaps between strata increase, leading people to try and locate and compare themselves, in order to beget a sense of belonging in terms of their identities, standardize personal emotions and attitudes, and form joint behavioral responses and attitudes with the group to which they belong.

Relative deprivation is also a product of social comparison. This term refers to the feeling of deprivation resulting from the disadvantageous comparison of one’s own situation with various standards or references. Such feeling may cause negative moods, which manifest themselves through feelings of unfairness such as anger, hatred or dissatisfaction (Zhou and Long 2010). Robert King Merton believes that when an individual compares his own situation with others in the reference group and finds himself at a disadvantage, he feels deprived. Such deprivation is due to comparison with a given variable rather than with absolute or eternal standards, and therefore it is relative. This variable may be other people, other groups or one’s own past. Sometimes, even when the situation of a given group improves, if this improvement does not match that of other reference groups, deprivation subsists. Relative deprivation influences the attitudes and behaviors of individuals or group and causes various sequences, including repressed feelings and feelings of inferiority, causing collective action.

2. Attribution

Attribution allows the deduction, attribution and interpretation of the reasons behind the behaviors of people or the occurrence of events. Attribution is driven by the motivation to explore the causal association between events, namely, the “why” of anything. Attribution is the interpretation of the significance of one’s own behaviors, others’ behaviors and of the occurrences of social events or phenomena. In daily life, such exploration usually stops when people find an interpretation considered reasonable, especially when they feel that this interpretation is conform to social norms or daily experiences. Therefore, attribution is different from scientific exploration in that it is a simple exploration and interpretation process.

American psychologist Heider (1958) considered that all people have the need to understand, predict and control their surroundings. In order to meet such need, people interpret the reasons for behaviors and occurrences on the basis of various clues. Only after understanding these can they interpret this world. People always interpret behaviors according to both reasons and outcomes, and the interpretation method is very important in the making of subsequent behavioral decision.

The general attribution process may feature a special bias effect. For example, the actor-observer bias refers to an observer’s attribution of the party’s success or failure to external factors, whereas the same party attributes success to internal factors in case of success, attributing success to one’s own abilities and efforts and failure to external factors. Different interests can also result in an attribution bias. People are usually not considerate of those who have different interests, making attributions and usually overstating the effect of given factors, which is known as the self-serving bias.

When wealth gaps widen, people from different social economic classes may also face such attribution bias for the acquisition of wealth, which affects the relationship between the rich and the poor in other aspects.

3. Value

Value is defined as “an explicit or implicit view on ‘what is worthy’; it is an individual or group characteristic that affects choices of action, mean and end” (Kluckhohn, 1951). In his study of 116,000 tested work values from 40 countries and regions, Hofstede (1980) determined four potential dimensionalities of values: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, and masculinity or femininity. Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) found that values are related to ten motivational fields, which exist in any culture because they stem from three universal human needs: biological needs, social communication, and group survival and welfare.

4. Group communication

Group communication refers to the process of plural, interactive and interdependent exchanges of information between individuals in the group in order to reach its specific objective based on the individuals’ own purposes. Information communication is an important condition for the formation of group psychology. No group cognition in terms of group objectives, the cohesive force of group members, or the formation of

formal or informal organizations within the group, can be achieved without the communication and exchange of information. In the mass media era, there are extensive, rapidly-updated technological channels for inter-personal information communication. This communication ranges from texts to images, plane to multi-dimensional, and from official to popular, and greatly affects the formation of social mentality. It is also the basic precondition for the formation of shared reality.

5. **Mental expectation**

Psychology finds that the mental process of “imagination” features a “forward-looking cognitive” function. When one’s imagination of the future is accompanied with causal judgment or probability judgment, it becomes an expectation. As the future is uncertain, one’s sense of stability depends on expectations, and these expectations for the future can directly affect mental states and behavioral choices.

Some investigations have found that, the how satisfied residents say they feel about their lives is positively correlated with their expectations for the future. That is to say, those who are more positive about the future are also more satisfied with their present condition. Positive expectations for the future can mitigate feelings of dissatisfaction and give people reasons to be hopeful about the future, thereby improve their assessment about the present.

Realizing expectation can bring people happiness; the opposite frustrates and depresses, for expectations are causal judgments made according to existing life experiences. “We are expected to reap what we have sown.” If one’s expectation is not realized, his experience is challenged and his sense of security lost, increasing the uncertainty of the future. This causes anxiousness and uneasiness. It is thus clear that positive expectations for the future can help people live through unfavorable present situations, as well as more happily accept and enjoy their present lives and work hard for the future.

3.2 *Effect of Social Mentality*

The formation process of social mentality has various social mental effects. There are several typical effects, which are briefly summarized below:

1. **Convergence effect**

Convergence effect refers to the gradual formation of a social consensus on a given social attitude of viewpoint via various media communication and exchanges, forming a collective power that surpasses individual social attitudes or viewpoints. In other words, the convergence of the parts is greater than their simple sum. The process of convergence can be accumulative (time-sequence) or aggregative (simultaneous), or a mixture of both. When a significant social event occurs, people converge both in

space and in social attitude, thus forming a common voice or a strong request leading to a relatively consistent collective action.

2. Majority effect and minority effect

The majority effect, also called conformity, refers to the phenomenon of an individual doubting, giving up or changing his own attitude, judgment and behavior because of the effect of the majority of a group (real or imagined pressure), thus submitting to the direction most consistent with that of the majority of the group. Seen from the angle of the social identity theory, the individual becomes minority in terms of judgment and opinion in a group situation, and thus this phenomenon also be referred to as the “minority effect”. From this angle, conformity is behavior meant to remain consistent with others, but the underlying motivation is the safeguard of and the identification with the group, rather than self-doubt caused by pressure.

Seen from either angle, conformity phenomena are quite common in daily life. Conformity appears convenient (other people’s choices must make sense), safe (no punishment if everyone does it) and empowering (many hands provide great strength). It is a significant mechanism for the communication and formation of social mentality as well as a common mental phenomenon.

3. Group polarization effect

Group polarization refers to the phenomenon in which a collection of individuals is likely to be either more adventurous or more conservative when making decisions than would be true of decision-making by individuals. This is especially true when some members of the group have been deliberately provoked or when a majority are risk seekers; in those cases their attitudes or the decisions they make tend to be riskier or even reckless. Under some circumstances, if the more risk-averse members of the group become the majority, their collective decision also become show more caution. Under other circumstances yet, groups shift in the risk-seeking direction more easily than do individuals.

Positively, group polarization promotes the unification of group opinions, strengthen group cohesion and form relatively uniform behaviors among members. Negatively, it can lead to poor judgments or increasing the chances of reckless decisions. This occurs more easily within a group that has a strong group consciousness.

Affected by certain social attitudes and mental sets, people usually treat things and events from specific angles or viewpoints that, once determined, can quite easily provide more arguments along a same direction to intensify and prove their own correctness. As a result, group opinions become more radical and more extreme, as well as quite at odds with the original ideas of everybody in the group.

Furthermore, “saying-is-believing” is an existing effect of interpersonal communication. When society members hear what other people believe, they adjust their

own standpoint in order to conform to the mainstream (Echterhoff and Higgins 2005). Those who hold different views often keep silent.

4. Group-reference effect

The group-reference effect is contrary to the self-reference effect. It is a kind of influence on individual mental states formed by selecting information from the group the individual belongs to as reference for self-positioning in the cognition process. Many studies show that, in vague circumstances, people naturally select those with the same characteristics as themselves for comparison, and these characteristics include age, gender, educational background, income, consumption level, experience, nation/culture, values, etc. (Zhang and Zhang 2011; Li and Zhang 2013).

5. Pygmalion effect

“Expectation” is the motivation formed on the basis of anticipation and pointing to this anticipation. When people expect or look forward to a future event, various behaviors are triggered. This is called the “self-fulfilling prophecy” by social psychologists. In 1968, social psychologist Rosenthal carried out an experiment on the language capacity and inferential capacity of primary school students. He did not select the subjects according to performance; instead he selected randomly from all the students and told the teachers that these students were “diamonds in the rough”, who could quickly improve within several months. In fact, these subjects included students with both high marks and low marks. Except for these words to the teachers, researchers did not intervene otherwise. When it came to the end of the term, they had another test on all students, finding out that those randomly selected and labeled as “diamonds in the rough” got much higher marks than others. This phenomenon is known as the Pygmalion effect according to a European legend. Pygmalion, a prince, fell in love with a statue of a beautiful girl. He often looked at the statue affectionately. After a long time, the statue became alive and the girl stepped down from the base and fell into the arm of the prince.

How does the Pygmalion effect occur? Psychologists find that expectations can induce self-motivation or motivate via autosuggestion or hetero-suggestion. They play a certain role in motivating and mobilizing potential abilities. When the primary school students were labeled, teachers had higher expectations for them and unknowingly encouraged or helped them by praising them in public or smiling to them. When they made mistakes or got low marks, teachers still believed in their potential and thought that their low marks were just temporary, not attributing them to congenital stupidity. Teachers became tolerant of their mistakes and always kept their confidence in them.

If the majority of the society members were confident in their future, they would surely have a positive attitude, put their mental power to work, remain vigorous, overcome various difficulties and advance bravely to realize their expectations.

As previously mentioned, the formation mechanism of social mentality is relatively complex, yet relatively few academic achievements have been made. Although there has been an accumulation of empirical studies, theoretical discussions are far

from enough. This is exactly the academic difficulty we expect to overcome through research.

References

Chinese-Language Sources

- Doise, W. (2011). *Levels of explanation in social psychology* (M. Zhao, & B. Z. Liu, Trans.). Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Li, H. & Zhang, H. (2013) Social identity prominence: A review of studies from self-reference effect to group reference effect. *Journal of Xihua University (Philosophy & Social Sciences)*, 32(2), 52–59.
- Yang, Y. (2012). *Difference comparison of group identification capability and its relations with cognitive style and subjective well-being under eastern and western cultures*. Doctoral Dissertation of School of Psychology, Beijing Normal University.
- Zhang, Y. (2012). *Research on the psychological harmony intermediary mechanism of college teachers' professional well-being*. Ph.D. thesis, Beijing Normal University.
- Zhang, H. Z., & Zhang, P. Y. (2011). Group-reference effect, a special self-reference effect. *Journal of Ningbo University (Educational Science Edition)*, 33(2), 39–43.
- Zhou, H., & Long, L. R. (2010). Referent selection in justice studies. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 18(6), 948–954.

English-Language Sources

- Barsade, S. G., & Gibson, D. E. (1998). Group emotion: A view from top and bottom.
- Brief, A. D., & Weiss, H. M. (2002). Organizational behavior: Affect in the workplace. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 279–307.
- Echterhoff, G., Higgins, E. T., & Groll, S. (2005). Audience-tuning effects on memory: The role of shared reality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 257–276.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hong, Y. (2009). A dynamic constructivist approach to culture: Moving from describing culture to explaining culture. In R. Wyer, C-Y. Chiu, & Y. Hong (Eds.), *Understanding culture: Theory, research and application* (pp. 3–23). New York: Psychology Press.
- Cluckhohn, C. K. M. (1951). Value and value orientation in the theory of action: An exploration in definition and classification. In T. Parsons & E. A. Shils (Eds.), *Toward a general theory of action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Schwartz, S. H., & Bilsky, W. (1987). Toward a universal psychological structure of human values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3), 550.