

Research Project Outline

Guanxi as a Model of Social Integration

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Introduction

During my visits to PR China and my work with Chinese I have realized that the Chinese have a different approach towards the West and all that it compares. Many foreigners that have visited China are confronted with this approach. They face familiar behavioral patterns that appear familiar at the first sight. It would be wrong to assume that the apparent adaptation of Western standards and values would inevitably bring forth a modern society as it is known to us. My research will examine the adaptation of western values and standards and show how they are embedded into the Chinese context. Furthermore I want to show the social functions and the effects of the adaptation of the Western standards and values.

1. Theoretical Background and Underlying Concepts

Today, we find ourselves in a globalized world which is characterized by constant and dynamic changes. Many sociologists agree nowadays that the world society, which has emerged from the light of globalization, is a system without a center. The so called world society is not driven by goals or regulated by norms or a political directive and its dynamics are restricted by geopolitical borderlines. This has led to changes in contemporary sociological theory, in particular in the theory of social integration. Initiated by globalization, the expansion of the societal system is not integrated by the rules and norms of a societal community as it is commonly described by world system theorists. In order to deal with this problem, it is important that a theory distinguishes between social integration, inclusion and exclusion. *Social integration* is the creation of a social system through membership conditions. *Inclusion* is the respect of the interests of all members of a particular social system.

However, it is important to distinguish between these two concepts as there are some social systems in which inclusion does not take place, for instance caste- and class-systems. Inclusion is not identical with social integration, as it is possible for members of a social system to be highly integrated in the social domain of exclusion. Conversely, communication works with reflexive loops in the domain of inclusion.

Solidarity Integration is collective cohesion, for example, care, welfare, reciprocity, redistribution. The consequence of globalization for the theory of social integration is that it does not mean inclusion in a societal community of the world society.

One of the main subjects of sociological theory is to identify basic operations of social systems. Such systems are defined by the borderlines of their environment. The basic operation of social systems is determined by its members. Therefore the borderlines of such systems are fixed. This operation is fundamental to form a collective identity of the social system and its members. The theory of modernization has been rebuilt recently. The outcome is that there is not only one type of modernization (i.e. not only the Western Model of Modernity) but a "Plurality of Modernity". Therefore, globalization is not a unification of all social life, but rather a multidimensional process occurring simultaneously around the world¹.

Membership conditions and the decisions taken by the members of a social system are the framework for analyzing mechanisms of social integration. Following this assumption it can be concluded that there are three functional requirements of social integration:

1. Stabilization of external borderlines,
2. Stabilization within established borderlines,
3. The traversing and shifting of borderlines by confronting the functional requirements of the restructuring of these processes.

A dual creation of social systems on the basis of membership codes allow social systems to come into conflict with their environment. The evolutionary variations of inclusion and exclusion are determined by the differentiation of conditions of membership on the basis of codes and systems, and of orientation regarding factual social action systems. Membership conditions are the basis for the analysis of inclusion and exclusion because they control how an individual takes part in social systems. Hence membership conditions have a major influence on the way individuals communicate and behave and also they exert control over the relationship between groups.

The new membership conditions which have emerged from globalization give an insight on how membership in different social entities can be theorized and related to an empirical process. The concept of networks can be used to describe the different relationships between modernization, globalization and the restructuring of social integration.

2. Central Topic and Research Goals

The aim of the current research is to analyze and reclassify contemporary research results in accordance to the concept of *Guanxi*. China's modernization is of particular interest as its modernization has been based on re-structuring measures of the planned economy without changing the political system.

There are two main interpretations of *Guanxi*. The *first* one relates to institutional social structures, e.g., the socialist legacy, the economic shortage, and the absence of a ruling law tradition. The *second* interpretation sees *Guanxi* as a long traditional cultural element which, for instance, includes self-identification in relation to others².

¹ For example, Ch. Case-Dunn. 2002. Globalization: A World-System Perspective, In *Borderlines in a Globalized World*, edited by G. Preyer, M. Bös, 13-34. Dordrecht; B. Axford, Enacting Globalization – Transnational Networks and the Deterritorialisation of Social Relationship, In: op. cit., 99-124; G. Preyer. 2006. *Soziologische Theorie der Gegenwartsgesellschaft. Mitgliedschaftstheoretische Untersuchungen*, Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag; S. N. Eisenstadt, Eisenstadt. 2000. *Die Vielfalt der Moderne*. Weilerswist: Velbrück.

² Th. Gold, D. Guthrie and D. Wank. 2002. An Introduction to the Study of *Guanxi*. In *Social Connection in China. Institutions, Culture, and the Changing the Nature of Guanxi.*, edited by Th. Gold, D. Guthrie and D. Wank, 3-20. Cambridge: University Press.

The proposed research aims to investigate the question why these two interpretations of Guanxi correspond with each other. It aims to analyze why Guanxi is a mechanism of social integration that simultaneously includes and excludes people in the social system without regulating communication, and respect by a civil society and its values.

Guanxi can be defined as an ascriptive social status in which the communication system plays a particular role in contemporary modernization. At the same time Guanxi provides evidence for the existence of the 'plurality' of models of social integration.

My project aims to show that Guanxi is a unique mechanism of dual creation in social integration. From the inside it selects social relationships with different ascriptive status whereas from the outside it is a network that excludes everyone without a mediator. Thus, it often excludes those who are not familiar with the mechanism of Guanxi or those who are of no benefit to the members of the network.

In this project, it is further intended to examine the effect of a redefinition of the borderlines of membership first in the exchange with foreigners, and beyond this between different status groups within China itself. In the case of economical modernization, Guanxi may lead to a fragmentation within China's society. In this case it might be useful to consider and analyze Guanxi as a certain type of *patronage-relationship*. Patronage-relationships are a specific type of clientele-relationships which contain the exchange of resources. Further patronage-relationships are particulate and diffused relationships which are often long-lasting and are determined by rules of long-term allegiance. The patronage-relationship does not disappear by the reconstruction of modernization³.

The hypothesis is that Guanxi should be interpreted as a "Zone of interpenetration of political, economical and kinship systems" which do not convert this social system into a universal model of modernization. Simultaneously one could assume that there is no rational legal system which incorporates all domains of social life in China. When analyzing Guanxi, particular attention might be paid to its role in the integration of solidarity. It is a system of welfare and at the same time a mechanism to exclude welfare, or could be seen as an ascriptive mechanism and not a generalized description of a welfare state.

This fact would be of significance for the theory of modernization because the answer to this question may provide evidence that modernization is not a unification of social integration models. Perhaps China's modernization in respect to the model of social integration can be analyzed as a mixture of ascriptive solidarity (social particularization) and functional political and economical imperatives by sudden global economic transition. Finally, this may shed light on a model of modernization as de-traditionalisation, despite the high mobilization and migration rate from peripheral areas towards larger economic centers.

³ S.N. Eisenstadt, 2006. Kulturelle und strukturelle Kontinuität in Entwicklungs- und Wandlungssituationen: Persistenz und Veränderung von Patronagebeziehungen. In *Theorie und Moderne*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag: 277-305.

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4. Cooperation

My current research project should be realized with the support and in cooperation with:

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*PhD Urs Schoettli, Journalist, Beijing, PR China.

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