

Contribution and Defect: Study of International Relations on the Perspective of Feminism

KONG Qingyin^{[a],[b],*}; SUN Daojin^[c]

^[a]Post Doctorate of Philosophy, Institute of Political Science and Public Administration, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

^[b]Institute of Political Science, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China.

^[c]Institute of Political Science and Public Administration, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Feminism has contributed to the theoretical development of ontology and epistemology from totally new ideas and views since the end of the 1980 it put the gender's analysis in the International Relations study. But, feminism has seemed to enter the period of bottleneck of development after more than 20 years. Internal schools are numerous and points are not the same. It has not formed unified theoretical framework. Its range of study is so branded. It regards the gender as analysis tools be applicable everywhere. The development and prospect of feminism depend on revising and remedying the above defects of study.

Key words: Feminism; Gender; International relations; Public employments; Independence; Domination; Governance

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INTRODUCTION

The International Relations study has experienced three academic discussions¹ since the birth of it during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. After a period's impaction among different theories and genres, international relations theories develop and become more prosperous and this new-rising subject becomes more mature. It was feminism school² that stood out from the third academic discussion with its features of opening up new space and diversification in the 1980s. The Feminist International Relations study has gained long-term progress due to the great efforts of several-year research from scholars, contributing a lot for the development of the International Relations study. At the same time there are also some deficiencies. How to make up for the deficiencies of the Feminist International Relations study and make it increasingly from edge to center becomes the major task when the study continues to expand.

1. INTRODUCE SOCIAL GENDER

Social gender is translated from the word "gender" in English. The explanation to "gender" in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* has two-layer

¹ Some scholars think is the four battles. In 1920s to 1940s, the battle between idealism and realism; In 1950s to 1960s, the battle between traditionalism and behaviorism; In 1970s to 1980s, the battle of pluralism (neoliberalism) and structuralism (Western Marxism) with neorealism; From 1980s to now, the battles of positivism and post-positivism, rationalism and reflectivism. [Britain] Written by Chris Brown, et al., and translated by Wu Zhicheng, et al.; *Understand International Relations* (Edition Three), Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2009, Introduction by the translator, pp.3-4.

² "女性主义" is translated from an English word, "feminism". We have multiple translations to "feminism" in our country, thereinto mainly is "女权主义" and "女性主义". Here we adopt "女性主义". In the quotation, we adopt the expression of "女权主义" for "女权主义" in original paper.

meanings: First, (grammar) nature (noun and pronoun can be classified as positive, negative and neutral), means that it is a word of purely grammatical meaning; Second, it means the gender classification physiologically—sex (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, para. 2, 1992, p.480). With the core analysis scope of social gender³, feminism thinks that “social gender is the component element of social relations on a basis of the visible gender difference, and is a basic mode that expressing power relations”⁴, referring to masculinity and femininity formed from social cultures. Such division also reflects binary opposition thought, and the custom's recognition to male and female differences. Habitually, people think that woman is closer to the nature, while man is closer to culture, so women are more qualified to those public roles and public employments. Therefore, women lay under tribute, play their mothering skills as housewives, and cannot be admitted by those public offices. Men are associated with public domains, and the characters of activeness, reason, determination, violence, independence, domination, governance, etc., while women are just associated with private spheres, and the characters of passiveness, emotion, irresolution, peace, dependence, being dominated and governed, etc..

Over the several centuries, physiological difference is the starting point and reason of different social division for men and women all the time. People always think that the physiological function of fertility and lactation, and a worse physical stamina determine women's family status, and they can only take charge of housework and bring up children; Moreover, physiological difference causes that women cannot be qualified to those work of public spheres. For example, people think that women are more emotional, and cannot be so rational like men, so they are not suitable for political decision-making. Actually, “although physiological difference is generated naturally, all social roles and behavioral patterns related to women are the creatures of various kinds of social histories” (Friedmann, 2007, p.16). The representative personage of French existentialism ideological trend, Simone de Beauvoir, states briefly in her *The Secondary Sex* that nobody is born with a woman, but the society structures women. People may come into the world with a cry as a female, but the social culture centering on men

has already defined “what women are”, and defined them as special and “the other”. Women are stipulated in how their behaviors shall and must be, so that they become “the secondary sex” between female and asexual being. Therefore, “the concept of social sex is used to distinguish amphiprotic division in physiology, which indicates that many differences between male and female are not inherent, but shaped deliberately by social cultures” (Hu, 2010, p.16). When social sex emphasizes society's sexual identity cognizance to humans, it also explores the biological foundation of the view and concept that men are superior to women, who provide a powerful ideological weapon to achieve equality of men and women.

The scope of male/female reflects women's unequal status in the reality of international relation as a group. Even if to the 21th century, the proportion of women participating in authority and public decision-making has increased a little, the goal of equal participation for men and women is still so far away; Even though those women enter into decision-making central, they still cannot get rid of the effects about binary opposition relations of male/female and masculinity/femaleness; For their contributions to international relations, the fact that they are the most primary victims in wars and conflicts, ecological and environmental degradation is always neglected by traditional international relations for a long time. Masculinity/femaleness can be separated from natural male and female, which mean that the women with masculinity and the men with femaleness shall not be excluded. In this way, masculinity/ femaleness will become a kind of cultural metaphor and symbol, and can be used to analyze international relations independently as an analytical category.

With respect to politics, philosophy, sociology and other subjects, feminism in international relation sphere appears a little late. In 1970s, the issue of feminism started to access to international relation sphere through the critical theory, mainly referring to peace research and development problems. In 1972, Bernice Carroll published an article named “Peace Research: Adoring Power” in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, which is usually deemed as a groundbreaking work for feminism issue to get involved in international relation sphere (Evans & Newnham, 1998). Since then, women's relations with war, peace, development and other issues have begun to access to international relation research agenda. In 1988, British *Millennium* magazine pushed out a phase special issue on “Women and International Relations”, which initiated research interest on gender issue, gender method and gender researcher in international relations science. Feminism international relation theory started to earn a place in international relation, especially the critical theory of international relation. Then the significant feminism international relation theory just could be born (Li, 2003).

As a new kind of international relation research paradigm arising in later 1980s, feminism international

³ Domestic scholars have two translation versions to “gender”: “社会性别” and “性别”. Now the translation of “社会性别” is generally adopted in academic circles.

⁴ Tan, J. C., & Xin, C. Y. (Eds). (1995). *Defining English and Chinese Vocabulary in Women and Law* (p.145). Beijing: China Translation and Publishing Corporation. The explanation of the word, “social sex” in this book, quotes the definition from American scholar, Joan. W. Scott: social sex is “the ingredient that constitutes the social relations with basis of gender difference; and gender is a basis mode to distinguish power relations”. (Joan. W. Scott: “gender: an effective scope in historical analysis” Record [America] Peggy. McCracken (Ed.). (2007). *Readings on Feminism Theory* (p.180). Nanning, China: Guangxi Normal University Press).

relation theory was the theoretical achievement that feminist got involved in international relation research. The critical theory of international relations and the feminism theory of other subjects have jointly cultivated the feminism in international relations. With the reference of those research achievements in biology, sociology and other subjects, and on the research perspective of feminism and core analysis scope of social gender, it introduces gender problem into international relation research, reveals the masculinity in international relations, and devotes itself to discovering those real prospects of international relations that hide at the back of mainstream paradigm and its practice (Hu, 1999). The development of feminism international relation theory has experienced two decades, and presented a staged characteristic. In the first decade, it mainly criticizes those mainstream paradigms, especially the masculinity of realism school; and in the second decade, it mainly focuses on the debate and exchange concerning the correlation between gender and international relations and mainstream paradigms (Su & Jin, 2008). From the perspective of research theme, the first stage devotes to introducing women and women problem in international relation research, while the second stage attempts to understand international relations from the aspect of integrity, rather than the angle of single gender, to construct the theoretical system of feminism international relations, and to promote the theory to be more mature (Voet, 1988).

The application of social gender perspective into international relation analysis can reveal those problems existing in mainstream international relation theory and practice—place one gender (male) and social sex character (masculinity) at a dominant position, while place the other gender (female) and social sex character (femaleness) at a subordinate position.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS OF RESEARCH ON FEMINISM INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Although the time of feminism's access to international relations is still short, compared with mainstream analysis paradigms, feminism is still remaining at the edge position. It makes "a daring breakthrough to traditions in ontology and epistemology" for international relation theory with a brand new idea and perspective (Hu, 2007).

First is the contribution of research on feminism international relations. The feminism scholar, Christine Sylvester in the book *Feminism and Post-modern International Relations*, proposes the category of "relations international" to express ontology characteristic of feminism international relation school:

our territory is for "relations international"... while "relations international" focuses on the various kinds of relations, including politics and bypassing various kinds of defense lines, obstacles, barriers, imaginations, speeches, politics, and worldwide immigration offices and customs. There into some relations have already been quite famous in international relations research,

and they are known as correlation dependence, war, balance, system, etc.. However, some relations are rarely known by people, because they don't have official relations, and the gender relation in this sphere just is an example illustration. Unless we start from these relations, and query their forms, we just can hit out in the third debate—we had better attempt to bring the attentions of "female" and feminism into international relations, to lead us to access to the relations of previous fewer researches. If we observe "international" first, and then "relations", we will continue to make cart-before-horse mistakes. (Swest, 2003)

Sovereign state is the logical starting point of the research for "international relations", while social gender relations are emphasized by "relations international" in the embodiment of interaction among unitary actors. It not only gets those common men and women access to international relation sphere through exploring the reality expression of social relations between men and women, but also puts the relations between men and women, and the relations of same class, nation and country in the first place. The privative masculinity and femininity structured by social cultures, and "the other" position of women makes their contributions in international relations always suffer belittling, and even neglecting. "Relations international" explores those problems neglected by mainstream analysis paradigms out, so that expands people's understanding of international relations.

In this discourse system, feminism school not only strives to explore women's rights in international politics lives, but also requires the equivalent position with masculinity for the behavioral patterns and values related to women. Feminism points out that the binary division of masculinity and femininity is created by the society, and such division

achieves categorization of gender, which means dividing individual into two categories, with each category corresponding relevant rules, rights and obligations, to simplify people's social perceptions...it means that what men and women are actually doing is not so important, but that the social system sticks to "stipulate" different categories upon men's and women's actions, to generate different expectations and evaluations to amphoteric behaviors, and make the two categories mutual repulsion. (Tong, 2005)

With the analytical category of social sex, feminism intends to explain that, now that amphoteric characters are created by the society, they cannot be changeless, and can be changed even removed thoroughly in the process of social development (Evans & Newnham, 1998). Through breaking the solidified social sex limits with distinctive hierarchy implication, feminism discloses the defects of mainstream international relation theory on a basis of "center/edge" relations of "self/the other", "nation/individual", senior politics/ junior politics", "the west/non west", etc., to make all individuals who access to such sphere, no matter men or women, can review the intricate international phenomenon on multi-perspectives, to get international relations science truly reflecting those swinging prospects of international community, and to promote the science more mature.

Second is the contribution of feminism international relation research on epistemology. “Epistemology, or knowledge theory, is a branch of philosophy, and it concerns the essence and scope of knowledge, presupposition and base of knowledge, and fundamental reliability of knowledge...” (Hamlyn, 1967). As a newly burgeoning epistemology, feminism international relation research expands a new method of looking upon international relations for its positivism and post-positivism. Sandra Harding gave a most extensively accepted discourse about feminism epistemology. She regards feminism epistemology as a defense strategy that proves legality of feminism research, and divides feminism epistemology into three modes: feminism empiricism, feminism standpoint theory and feminism postmodernism⁵. Accordingly, the empiricism, standpoint theory and post-modern theory of feminism international relations all provide supports for the rationality of feminism international relation research. Although the three feminism epistemology schools have widely different opinions, fighting for equal rights and interests for the weak female group is their common goal.

Feminism epistemology primarily has two contributions to international relations: First, pure value neutrality cannot be achieved in research. The theories and opinions on international relations for a country are reflection and embodiment of its state will, the idea and pursuit of its folk, and also ethnic wisdom achievements with several national features. Any scholar will be affected by those historical and cultural traditions of his own nation and his thinking mode, and they cannot surpass their own idealistic preference, tendency and limitation. And any kind of theory and schools is the deeply imprinted with subjectivity of research subjects. In the traditional international relation research, no matter for Morgenthau’s classical realism or Walz’s structural realism, under color of value neutrality, they actually all reflect the preferences of their theory supporters. For the rising America, or the declining America, the purposes of these two realism theories are both to serve for American benefits. Therefore, its theories inevitably disclose its recognition to power politics and maintenance to existing international system. On the perspective of feminism, the feminism epistemology with the objective of pursuing gender equality and fairness criticizes the posture of seeming value neutrality in mainstream theories, reveals the value orientation with patriarchy characteristic in mainstream theories, and advocates and gradually structures international relation theories of gender equality, care and justice ideas (Su & Jin, J. D. 2009).

Second, the theory advocates to “add female” and find female in international relation sphere on the perspective of social sex. Compared with various kinds of mainstream international relation theoretical paradigms, feminism

international relations science has more distinct features. All schools of feminism pay close attention to the “female problem” in international relation sphere. They try to inspect international relations with female everyday lives, and introduce the analytical method of social sex. It raises doubts in power, safety, war and peace, cooperation and other core categories of the traditional international relations science, which has an impact on the knowledge hierarchy that has already been deemed as “common sense” in international relation research sphere, and on the theoretical system of international relations science. At the same time, those feminism international relation scholars are making unremitting efforts to construct feminism international relation theory.

Feminism epistemology advocates making analysis and observation on the perspective of social sex, which can make up the deficiency of gender perspective in previous researches. Those feminism international relation scholars are trying to “look for” positions for female, and “find” the significance of “female” experience. Through social sex analysis, feminism theory devotes to bring female and femininity back to international relations, ‘restoring’ true and integrated international relations, and establishing the international relation theory with the meaning of social sex” (Li, 2006). Compared with other social sciences, international relation sphere introduces social sex analysis latest, which mainly attributes the precondition and assumption with main unitary actor of nation in mainstream international relation theoretical paradigms that fuzzes up gender issues and hides gender difference and gender discrimination still existing in international relations. After the unremitting efforts of feminism international relation scholars, they excavate the gender issues that hide in the depth of international relations, and also challenge those traditional international relation theories. In terms of feminism international relations science, social sex analysis not only reveal the status and condition of female in international relation theory and practice, but also explore the internal mechanism that gender discrimination needs to live by and maintain in this subject, to exhibit the mutual construction between knowledge hierarchy of international relations science and social sex conception—how mainstream theory’s cognition to international relations can lead female as “the other”, to be excluded to the margin of international community; and how the division of masculinity and femininity can react upon people’s understanding on international relations.

In the sense, we can say that when social gender conception narrates the population characteristic and behavioral pattern of the two genders, it also is evolving to be a kind of cognitive tool. Through the division and analysis of masculinity and femininity, it can reflect the thinking mode and value orientation formed in certain social culture environment. (Hu, 2010, p.26)

For the contributions from feminism international relation research, Wang Yizhou indicates that

⁵ Sandra. Harding: “What is feminism epistemology?” Record [America] Peggy. McCracken Editor: *Readings on Feminism Theory*, p.504.

various kinds of analysis in feminism, from international relations to daily life, from basic concepts to research methods, from epistemology to ontology, raise criticism and challenge to those past paradigms... It has exploited a new exploration space for the research field of contemporary international affairs. (Wang, 1998)

3. THE DEFICIENCY FOR THE RESEARCH ON FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The research on feminist international relationship exposes and criticizes the deviation of masculism in the international relationship, and also gets a breakthrough in ontology, epistemology, and methodology against the traditional theory. But the deficiencies for the research on feminist international relation are related to several aspects as the defect of the theory, the detachment between the theory and reality and the limitation for the researcher (Zhou, 2010, pp.140-152).

Firstly, feminism international relations science still does not come into being a unified essential theory, and great disputes still exist in some opinions, and even paradoxes. The primary criticism of feminism paradigms is that there is no comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of international relations (Genest et al., 1996). Although feminism discloses and criticizes many problems existing in previous researches, and its every branch is the opposition to one or more assumptions of positivism, any unified precondition and assumption have been formed, which leads to many deficiencies existing in theoretical integrity, integrality, systematisms and consistency. The numerous viewpoints of the internal school of feminism international relation theory are different, and conflicts and contradictions exist in all epistemology schools, "and even some people say the quantity of feminists means the categories of feminism" (Zhou, 2010, p.152). Each school holds different epistemology viewpoints, and also has its own different preferences in methodology. Moreover, each kind of epistemology and methodology has their different deficiencies, which sometimes are contradictory, and even falls into dilemma. For example, when feminism empiricists criticize masculinity, they also promote female positions and roles with the standards of masculinity, which actually acknowledges the ideal positions of masculinity, and make themselves caught in a dilemma. In addition, the limitations between every two epistemology modes are not so clear, all theoretical schools still have not reached prematuration period, and the systems are not perfect enough. And the contradictory phenomenon still often appears.

Secondly, the research scopes of feminism international relations are too broad. The achievements that have been acquired in feminism international relation researches generally can be divided into two categories,

one is the criticism to those traditional international relation theories, and they try to establish feminism international

relation theories; and the other one is that they research the gender issue in international relations, and research all issues that refer to inequality and differences of the two gender. (Zhou, 2010, pp.158-159)

In terms of the first category, the criticism fails to shake the foundations of mainstream theories, and most are just rested on the level of description and lack discussions of analysis and explanation. After feminism puts forward "masculinity" of mainstream international relation theory, it does not give any further clear explanation of how "masculinity" is formed and what its causal relationship with power politics" is, which mean whether "masculinity" leads to the international relation reality of powerful thinking, or the competition of the powers and benefits on a basis of its strength in international relations conforms to violence, force, aggressively and other characteristics of "masculinity". For the former, feminism does not exactly expound their causal relationships. But for the latter, it is independent of the gender prejudice criticized by feminists, and the reality of international relations is the masculinity from those traditional international relation theories and practices. From this, the object criticized by feminism shall not be the so-called "masculinity", but the power politics in the reality of international relations. And theories have own applicative scopes. When the research field and boundary can be confirmed in feminism international relation researches, their own characteristic achievements can only be acquired. Therefore, for above problems successfully explained by traditional international relation theories, feminism has to give up intervening in them.

The fields that feminism theory can get involved shall be all "gender issues in international relations", which means that when gender difference or gender inequality can be regarded as the generation reason of certain international relation, feminism international relation research just can strut its stuff. For the gender issues in international relations, through the careful analysis of those examples in specific situations, feminism theorists combine those international and domestic problems related to gender discrimination or gender difference, which effectively broadens the horizon of international relation research, and helps feminism international relation research to find some perspectives with their own distinct characteristics. All these can help feminism to gradually confirm clear research scopes and accumulate more valuable research achievements. Such category of problems has never been mentioned or always been neglected in those mainstream theories of international relations, while analyzing such problems with "feminism" or "gender perspective" justice is the advantage of feminism theory. Only the thorough, sufficient and careful research within the issue delimited exactly can help feminism international relation research to win a place.

Thirdly, nearly all international phenomena can be unscrambled with social gender conception. First, many

problems exist in the term of “social gender.” Obviously, as an analysis tool, the application of ‘social gender’ and its more specific division over physiological gender and social gender, can help feminism theory to promote the research on difference problems” (Friedmann, 2007, p.19). However, “now, whether as another expression of gender, or as a controversial political terminology, ‘social sex’ cannot balance both at ease.” (Friedmann, 2007, p.20).

Social sex analysis may lead to rights inequality between men and women, because men and women are shaped by acquired disposition, which means that both masculinity and femininity are social creatures. Actually it just indicates the distinction between males and females, and never involves the inequality in rights. In addition to this, as those feminists frequently explain female social subordinate position with social sex, people often think that social sex is only related to female, and this term is only used in the female and the construction of femininity. Oakley (1997) thought that: “Only when female status is explained, the strategy of applying social sex will just take effects. Male will not suspect their own status, and need not explain it.” (Friedmann, 2007, p.21) As if only females need social sex, this actually indicates the inequality power operation clearly. However, if those feminists only analyze how social sex is structured, the power factors under the inequality of two genders still cannot be explained sufficiently.

Next, as social gender analysis acquires no response from mainstream international relation theories in long time, to highlight their significance, some feminism scholars are anxious to analyze nearly all international phenomenon with the conception of social sex without any screening, and conduct researches and arguments on all international relation problems with perspective of gender. In all research issues, they always emphasize gender perspective and gender equality. Such research of excessive attention to gender benefits neglects that they are created by politics, economy, culture and many other elements. Those feminists are also not aware that gender inequality is just one of many social culture phenomena, and the analysis only on the perspective of gender is not all-sided.

Like class, race and other categories, social sex is just an analytical category that is used to know the intricate social phenomenon of people. Its complexity mainly lies in that: it is not a single, still and a clean cut of fixed category. Just as the categories of race and social sex in class, and the categories of class and social sex in race, those people in the same social sex all have the differences generated from race, class and other different identities... (Bao, 1998, pp.2-3)

Feminism international relation is still a plan being constructed. As a burgeoning school, its developments are affected by multiple factors, and its future has various possibilities. But “with the increasing gender problems in international relation practices, its unique perspective and concentration on difference and diversity endow it with strength basis, to help it to overcome a variety of

obstructions and keep exploration and advancement” (Zhou, 2010, p.163).

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