

# The Integration of Criticism and Experience—A Dual Interpretation of the Construction School

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## Abstract

Since the 20th century, the duality of the empirical school and the critical school has always been the focus of discussion in social science. The two schools have argued for decades, and different understandings and differences have emerged in endlessly. So far, the two factions have a trend of learning from each other and emerging. The emergence of the construction school provides an intermediate plan for the debate between the experience school and the critical school, as well as a satisfactory and open answer to the multiple choice questions in the academic world.

**Keywords:** experience, criticism, positivism, constructive school

## 1. Introduction

Since the middle of the last century, the critical school has formally entered the academic field with the dispute between Paul Lazarsfeld and Adorno, which also opened the prelude to the coexistence of the empirical school and the critical school. Since then, the two schools have been changing each other, and the disputes have been constant, which has always been the divergence of research paradigms in various social science field. However, while the two schools developed, they also learned from each other. During this period, some scholars continued to learn from the strengths of the two schools, and new research paradigms and research frameworks gradually emerged.

Up to now, facing the emerging social problems in today's world, many fields have begun to try to combine the two to promote the emergence of new research models. The construction school built by Cai Shangwei and other scholars in China conforms to this academic and historical trend, which can be understood as a node of the past dispute between the two schools, as well as a new beginning of the research paradigm and research framework of communication science and even social science.

## 2. Overview of Critical, Empirical and Constructive Schools

From the perspective of methodology alone, in terms of research style and academic starting point, the critical school has always tended to research at the meso and macro levels, and is committed to exploring the objective laws of nature and social life. The school believes that the constitution of society is the subjective characteristics of human behavior, which is different from natural phenomena in essence, and must have independent methodological principles different from natural science methods. And try to make an explanatory understanding of social action, gradually forming a humanistic and critical tradition of social science research.

The empirical school tends to the micro level and focuses on empirical analysis. It believes that science can only adopt the standards and methods of natural science. Social science should also imitate the tradition and methods of natural science and make causal explanations of social phenomena, so as to make social science a precise and empirical science. This school believes that there is no essential difference between social phenomena and

natural phenomena. In terms of methodological orientation, social science should take natural science as the standard model, thus creating the tradition of empiricism or empirical research, and becoming the mainstream of the research methods of the whole social science for a long time.

Up to now, the two schools have infiltrated each other in research methods, and as far as the standards of school division are concerned, the two schools have no specific measurement standards, but are roughly divided according to the differences in research methods, contents, and guiding ideology. The annual conference of international communication held in Hawaii in 1985, with the theme of “model dialogue”, formed a situation of joint discussion between the two universalists for the first time.

The construction school started in the last century, and by the beginning of this century, it had gradually formed under the background of the increasingly blending of experience and criticism. Its main purpose was to promote social improvement or development. It used purposeful and rational constructive methodology as the research tool, dialectical materialism as the philosophical foundation, and used empirical methods such as observation, comparison, experience, and experiment to link with reality. Carry out thorough research on specific problems to achieve the constructive goals of understanding, solving social problems and promoting social progress.

By comparison, the critical school attaches importance to the essence of the problem, and focuses on the qualitative; The empirical school focuses on research methods and paths, and on quantification. Both have their own advantages and disadvantages. The construction school tries to accommodate the strengths of two schools and establish a style. Although it is just emerging and some framework concepts have yet to be enriched, it cannot be said that it represents a new trend in the academic world, and even the future trend of social science research.

### **3. Sort out the Context of Experience and Critical School**

#### *3.1 Empirical School*

The empirical school sprouted in the middle and late 19th century. Under the strong background of the rapid development of humanities such as economy, society, psychology and politics, it gradually took shape in the first half of the 20th century by absorbing the achievements of various schools. The school mainly studies in the way of natural science. It believes that social science is mainly descriptive rather than normative science, and tends to use natural science to explain the effectiveness of social phenomena, so as to conduct objective research on all aspects of society and human behavior. The quantitative and empirical research methods in sociology, economics and psychology at the initial stage of the school's formation had a significant impact on later communication research.

From the perspective of historical context, France's Comte, Tald and Germany's Zimmer have provided a direct source for the study of the empirical school. Comte is the founder of sociology. He believes that social science is committed to finding an “eternal natural law” and establishing new orders and rules based on this law, which requires accurate observation, hypothesis, experiment and other empirical methods, mathematics should even be regarded as the basis of all sciences.

Tald is the founder of imitation theory in social psychology. Tald claims that human social life is a cyclical process of invention, imitation, conflict and adaptation. When an invention is consistent with the rationality of a certain culture, it can be effectively spread and adopted. The adoption rate usually follows the S-shaped curve. Zimmer believes that the main purpose of social science is to study the mechanism of individual interaction. Zimmer points out that there are the most basic forms of human interaction and mutual influence, which are applicable to all social fields and have universality and universality.

In the 1920s, Lazarsfield, Lasswell, Hovland, Schramm, etc. further promoted the development of the empirical school. Through a series of empirical and quantitative studies, they proposed a series of classic theories of communication, such as “gatekeepers”, “agenda setting”, “secondary communication”, etc. On the one hand, these theories have promoted the development of communication science, a new discipline, and also provided strong support for the development of the empirical school of social science.

From the perspective of its formation basis, the empirical school was formed in the United States. At the beginning of its formation, it received more donations from various foundations, consortia and private individuals. In order to feed back and serve the needs of investors, the research process and results more reflect the practicality. For example, in the field of media market and advertising, communication research has achieved considerable accuracy and predictability, so that some research institutions have become necessary subsidiaries in these fields.

From the perspective of research ideas, the empirical school believes that the law of social operation is based on the fact that it can be verified by experience. There is no essential difference between social phenomena and natural phenomena. They follow the same methodological criteria and can be explained by the universal law of

causality, thus excluding the impact of the subjective factors of researchers on research. In terms of methodology, the school believes that social science should imitate the tradition and methods of natural science, take natural science as the standard model, establish a unified knowledge system, and make causal explanations for social phenomena, so as to make social science a precise and empirical science.

However, Linde, an American scholar, believes that social science research is long-term and complex, the data is huge and often incomplete, and the situation is constantly changing. Under such circumstances, it is too rigidly bound to the quantification of data, which is easy to fall into bias. Because the solution to some problems is to connect with values rather than data. Precise data can only objectively discover what exists, but cannot indicate what should exist.

In general, the empirical school is mainly based on three dimensions: quantitative induction, causal determinism, continuous quantitative analysis and statistical experiments. Most scholars of this school believe that statistical experiments are the key method to test theoretical assumptions, which can effectively find problems and promote their solution. But less attention is paid to the values and attributes behind the problems, and the historical and modern social significance behind the methods and tools.

### 3.2 Critical School

The origin of the critical school is mainly in Western Europe. It was born in the 1930s. Some scholars of the German Frankfurt School in exile in the United States began to question the empirical school by demonstrating the mass culture of ideological hegemony. These Western European scholars who came to the United States because of the persecution of fascism, out of disgust with the local fascist rule and the continuity of academic tradition, noted the connection and similarity between the reflective tendency of American society and Nazi Germany.

These scholars believe that this is authoritarianism, but its form is different. The United States does not use terror and coercion to rule, but to a large extent, it realizes its authoritarianism through mass culture through mass media. So they tend to use a critical perspective to study American mass society and mass media. Criticism of fascism did not lead to a simple identification with American culture, and the United States provided them with a different research theme and opportunity.

From the perspective of the historical context of the critical school, early scholars such as Mills and Rosenberg paid attention to the study of the “content” of mass communication on the “effect” issue, and expounded how the media works and how to influence the audience’s thoughts through critical inspection of the communication effect. In the 1960s, Canadian scholar McLuhan put forward some new ideas from the perspective of media technology and culture. From the perspective of research methods, McLuhan started his research more from the understanding of people and the social role of human beings by mass media tools themselves, such as radio and television and other electronic communication tools. Among the more representative representatives of the critical school in the 1970s and 1980s, there are Athuel’s Media of Power, Schiller’s theory of media empire, and the representative works are Mass Communication and the American Empire, the Thought Manager, etc.

From the theoretical perspective of the critical school, it can be roughly divided into the following: First, from the perspective of political economy, this perspective focuses on how the media industry is subject to various powers of capitalism, and discusses from the perspective of media ownership and economic structure. The second is the view of the cultural industry theory, which believes that media in the form of cultural industry often cover up the essence of their determination of audience awareness. It is difficult for people to find that the ideology they believe is enslaving them, and they will be unconsciously suppressed by the established ideology. The third is the perspective of mainstream ideology analysis. From this perspective, mass communication, through an indirect and unconscious communication structure, constantly replicates the stream consciousness to serve the ruling class.

From the perspective of the theoretical basis of the critical school, Marxism is its important cornerstone. On this basis, it mainly includes the following. One is Gramsci, the leader of the Communist Party of Italy. His theory of “cultural hegemony” provides a basic macro understanding path for future generations to analyze society. One is the French contemporary Marxist theory researcher Althusser. His research mainly involves the function and role positioning of ideology in society. He believes that people are essentially ideological, and live and exist in different fields and actual rituals and other ideologies, which provides an important theoretical basis for the ideological analysis in the critical school of communication. Another is British culturalist S. Howe, who proposed the media to construct social knowledge, form norms and respond to values from the perspective of macro culturology. Habermas, a German philosopher, is regarded as the representative of the third generation of the Frankfurt School. His concept of reasonable communication and the concept of “public sphere” provide an enlightening idea for the critical school to analyze and distinguish the fields in which media play a role.

By comparison, the critical school first grasped the law of cause and effect, and believed that everything has its

own internal laws in its operation. Through in-depth observation of human and social behavior and mechanisms, it made qualitative analysis, but it did not attach enough importance to data quantification and empirical support. Moreover, the school takes speculation as the starting point of studying problems, and does not rule out falling into the perspective of criticism for the sake of criticism. It is easy to limit the problem itself, and has little effect on the practical improvement of society and the practical application of methods.

#### **4. Analysis and Interpretation of the Construction School**

In the 30-40s of the 20th century, China suffered from internal and external troubles, and some sociologists were committed to changing China's domestic situation and realizing the country's prosperity. These scholars believe that the biggest problem in China is the problem of rural areas and farmers. In view of this problem, scholars have proposed a certain way to solve the problem from different perspectives.

One can be called the rural construction school, which is based on the countryside and carries out "endogenous" self-development through the transformation of rural internal organization, culture and villagers; One is the industrial chemistry school, which advocates the external development path of "developing industry and revitalizing the city, thus feeding back the countryside".

The school of rural construction is represented by Liang Shuming and Yan Yangchu. Liang Shuming believed that the plight of modern China, especially the decline of rural areas, was caused by the invasion of western forces. China has always been based on the countryside. To transform society, we must start from the root. The most important thing in rural construction is to cultivate farmers' consciousness and rural organizations. From the beginning of running village schools, the autonomous organizations of village conventions, administration and legislation gradually differentiated, and then became the basis of the new social system. In Liang Shuming's view, China should follow a path of starting industry from the countryside and prospering the city based on the countryside.

Yan Yangchu also believed that we should start from education to transform the society, especially the countryside, mainly including promoting civilian literature and art, cultivating productivity through livelihood education, cultivating strength through health education, and cultivating solidarity through civic education. Through the education of the spirit of cooperation and the teaching of civic knowledge, the problems existing in the countryside can be solved.

The school of industrial chemistry also regards rural issues as the key to China's problems, but advocates to focus all resources to develop industry and commerce, so as to drive rural improvement. Wu Jingchao, its representative, believes that the decline of rural areas is due to the fact that competition cannot compete with the western modern industrial system and the large farm model. To solve rural problems, in addition to reclaiming wasteland and implementing family planning, the most fundamental thing is to develop industry and commerce, to absorb the surplus population in rural areas, and to use the developed industry to feed agriculture. Through the development of industry and commerce to achieve the goal of saving the countryside.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's domestic development and construction process basically confirmed the assumption of the industrialization school that industry feeds back agriculture. However, with the progress and development of society, new contradictions are emerging, such as insufficient construction of ecological civilization, the urgent need to restore traditional culture, the need to improve national soft power, and the need to improve moral order.

New problems call for new research paradigm to study and solve. Under such a historical background, a new school of construction emerged, and its representative was Mr. Cai Shangwei in China. Originating from the "Wangjiang School" in China, this school stresses "entering the world inside, leaving the world outside, staying at the same time, staying at the same time". It is based on the "mind to enter the world" and aims to promote the solution of practical problems and the deepening of academic theory through the construction of scientific methodology.

Cai Shangwei and other scholars believe that the ideal form of criticism should be a constructive technical criticism that absorbs cultural, political, moral criticism and other factors and has a certain cultural background. Such criticism can have both "learning" and "skill", instead of being reduced to the expression of stage emotions and individual emotions. The foundation of the construction school is criticism, but the direction of this criticism is construction. It is the discovery of laws and the establishment of rules, which is also the main purpose of the construction school.

From the perspective of the thinking basis and methodology of research, the construction school takes dialectical materialism as its speculative basis, adheres to the combination of theory and practice, history and logic, and reality, and adopts empirical methods such as field research, comparison, and experiment as its main research methods. In addition to theoretical research, scholars of this school actively practice this academic idea. It stresses the repeated combination of theory and practice.

From the perspective of research theme, the construction school devotes itself to the improvement and development of society as the academic goal, conducts in-depth and continuous research on the practical problems existing in society, and actively participates in social practice, so as to achieve the constructive goals of solving social problems and promoting social progress.

From the perspective of theoretical sources and historical context, the construction school inherits the two blood lines of experience and criticism, and inherits the spiritual core of the rural construction school in the last century, which set out from the social reality and actively undertook and practiced the transformation of society. At the same time, it absorbs the nourishment of other humanities and gradually develops based on the actual domestic problems.

For example, the Aristotelian school and the Pythagorean school in the field of philosophy are used to being critical of previous theories; The latter focuses on the study of numbers, and believes that numbers are the basis of everything; In the economic field, there are Cambridge School and New Institutional School, which focus on empirical research and quantification of problems.

For example, referring to the Chicago School and the Frankfurt School in the field of sociology, the former generally attaches importance to empirical research and applied research focusing on solving practical social problems (especially urban problems), while the latter is regarded as the representative of the critical school, combining theoretical criticism of positivism with political criticism of liberalism.

Another example is to learn from Yangming School, Cheng Zhu School of Philosophy, Cultural Construction School and other schools in the cultural field, among which Yangming School advocates the unity of knowledge and practice, and practical application; Cheng Zhu's philosophy stresses the thorough study of problems and knowledge based on facts; The cultural construction school is committed to the correctness of methodology and the reconstruction of new culture; The historical field includes the Annals School and the Qianjia School. The former pays attention to the unity of academic and social functions, while the latter focuses on rigorous textual research and research process.

Another example is the field of news communication, which is also the birthplace of the construction school, including the empirical school represented by Lasswell, Hovland, and the critical school represented by Adorno, Baudrillard, and others. The two schools have their own emphasis and strengths. The former focuses on experience, practicality and concern for problems; The latter is more concerned with the value and spiritual significance behind the problem.

## 5. Summary

In general, the construction school is in the ascendant. Although it started late, it conforms to the historical development trend and has formed a relatively complete research system. It relies on the spirit of dialectical materialism, adheres to the academic concept of being proficient in exploration and brave in undertaking, adopts empirical research, comparative experience methodology of fieldwork Tools, try to propose reasonable and operable system solutions to the existing problems of society, and promote the development and progress of human society. This school combines the experience advantages of many schools and refines internalization, which is the academic crystallization of the long-term development of human social science. Its boldness of doubt and discovery is the inheritance of the critical school; Its empirical spirit of careful verification and strict consideration is a good grasp of the empirical school. Facing the domestic practical problems, it is also an inheritance and development of the spiritual core of the rural construction school to solve social contradictions, take an active role, dare to practice, and promote the construction of a true, good and beautiful world.

Today, the country is in the historical period of structural transformation and major adjustment and development of supply side reform, and the construction school coincides with its meeting. We have reason to believe that under the continuous research, improvement and innovation of domestic scholars such as Cai Shangwei, China's construction school will grow in practice and gain more recognition in practice.

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