

Murray Edelman's Research on Political Symbolism

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Abstract: In our daily life, things with symbolic significance can be seen everywhere, they can stimulate people's political feelings, gather people's ideals and beliefs to change people's political behavior, and promote the change of national political operation state. Therefore, the study of political symbolism is of great significance for us to better understand the operation law of the political system. Murray Edelman, on the basis of summarizing the experience of predecessors in the study of political symbolism, criticized the thinking of instrumentalism in the study of political symbolism and regarded the whole political life as the application of political symbolism. He devoted his whole life to the study of political symbolism. From the study of the meaning of political symbolism to the types of political language to the combination of art and politics, Murray Edelman's political symbolism research process is long and tortuous. Therefore, Murray Edelman's thought of political symbolism provides us with valuable theoretical reference for the study of political symbolism in modern times. This paper will focus on Murray Edelman's thought of political symbolism, trying to reveal the symbolic characteristics of political life more clearly, restore Murray Edelman's academic thought system, so as to deepen the academic cognition of political symbolism.

Keywords: Political Symbol; Political Message; Political Cognition; Identification

Murray Edelman's political symbolic thought theory came into being in the specific social background of 1960s America. Based on this special social background, he made an attempt to surpass his predecessors. He criticized behaviorist politics and rejected the theory that the scholars who studied political symbolism regarded symbol as a tool in the past. He

proposed the immobility of political life and the taking of roles, and regarded the whole political life as the application of political symbol. Therefore, his thought of political symbolism had a great impact on the political and communication circles at that time, and also served as a theoretical reference for people's later research on political symbolism.

1. The Background of Murray Edelman's Political Symbolic Thought

1.1 The Turbulent Social Conditions of the United States in the 1960s

After the end of the Second World War, the United States claimed to be the "leader of the free world" and tried to remake the world political order according to its own ideology. However, in the process, practical problems emerged one after another and accumulated in secret. By the early 1960s, the interweaving of various contradictions had caused the American society to enter a period of considerable turmoil. Murray Edelman, by observing the existence of a large number of conflicts, inequalities, poverty and other phenomena in the American society at that time, asked why these political phenomena could be accepted by the public? According to the view of modern political science, interests should be distributed in a democratic way, but the fact is that only a few elites own most of the wealth and power in the society, so this does not meet the requirements of democratic theory. In addition, social policies are usually formulated by administrative agencies and interest groups through consultation, so the creation of policies does not mean that they can represent the interests of the majority of the people. In spite of this, some of the government's social interest distribution behaviors and policies have not been strongly resisted by the public although they have not taken into account the interests of the majority of the people. Moreover, in the face of social conflicts, although some administrative policies and political discourse proposed by

political elites have not been well implemented in real life, social conflicts are still within the scope of control.

Murray Edelman thought about this political reality and believed that the emergence of this phenomenon must be the government's other means to make the public recognize the existing policies and order. Thus, Murray Edelman found that political discourse and administrative policies have not only practical value but also symbolic value. Therefore, he proved that there exists a "symbolic interest" in politics so that the people who can not get practical interests can hold no opposition to politics through some form of "symbolic interest". The symbolic effect of politics is to use political discourse and administrative policies to generate the psychological state that "the public sometimes needs to be comforted and sometimes needs to be threatened", so as to stimulate the emotions of the public, so as to better understand how politics affects what they want from the psychological level. According to Murray Edelman, in real political life, most people are unorganized, so they are more likely to respond to the symbolic effect of politics. Political elites first formulate policies and interact with the public through the medium of language and goals in public policies to obtain political significance. This political meaning, in turn, achieves certain political symbolic effect by comforting or threatening the public's psychology, controlling the conflict within a reasonable range, thus forming a state of political immovement and maintaining social order.

1.2 Criticism of Behaviorist Politics

The study of behaviorism politics became popular in the United States in the 1950s, but with the development of time, behaviorism politics has gradually exposed a series of drawbacks such as overvaluing methodology, trying to exclude value components, and only studying "what is" instead of "how should be". Based on his criticism of the current situation that behaviorism politics could not meet the needs of social development at that time, Murray Edelman turned his research attention to a more unique thinking direction, that is, "Why people can accept it?" . Murray Edelman provides a critique not only of behaviorist politics, but also of scholars who

study political symbolism under the influence of behaviorist political theories. As a researcher of political symbol theory, Lasswell was deeply influenced by behaviorist politics. He regarded political symbol as a tool for elites to rule over the common people, and did not judge its value. Instead, he studied political symbol as a neutral fact. Murray Edelman's political symbol theory, on the other hand, tries to distance himself from the instrumentalist thought that regards political symbols as tools for elites to rule the people. His efforts are mainly embodied in two aspects: promoting the importance of political symbols and denying the instrumentality of political symbols.

In promoting the importance of political symbolism, Murray Edelman mainly put forward the "motionless state", emphasizing the wide application of political symbolism in the overall political life. According to Murray Edelman, there is a universal "ambivalence" in human beings, that is, the desire for comfort and the need for a certain threat. It is by satisfying this complex psychological need that political symbols can trigger emotional fluctuations among people and thus achieve specific political effects. In refuting the instrumental view of political symbolism, Murray Edelman clearly pointed out that although political symbolism can keep people in an emotional "immobile state", it is not a tool for political elites to manipulate public thinking. In the process of the influence of political symbols on people's political life, elites do not consciously shape political symbols for their own purposes, but play their respective roles on the stage of symbols. The concept of "role taking" is included in Murray Edelman's theoretical framework of political symbolism, which mainly describes that political elites think about problems from the standpoint of ordinary people or interest groups, and predict their reactions to specific policies, behaviors and utterances. Accordingly, the elites adopt corresponding appeasement or threat strategies to arouse the public's emotion, guide the public's behavior and win the public's support.

2.The Main Content of Murray Edelman's Political Symbolic Thought

2.1 Administrative Institutions as Symbols

In political life, the administrative organ is not only the core force for announcing and implementing public policies, but also the direct symbol of public identification and trust in those policies. When the public believes that a certain policy is promoted by a state administrative agency, they will have certain psychological expectations about the credibility and legitimacy of the policy. From Murray Edelman's point of view, administrative agencies often pursue two main political goals when communicating policies and programs: the actual allocation of resources to specific groups, and the symbolic allocation of resources to the public. By analyzing regulatory policy in executive agencies, Murray Edelman focuses on its symbolic role, especially its function in monitoring violations by executive agencies. In reality, regulatory policies are implemented more to ensure that symbolic benefits can be fairly distributed in society. The introduction of such policies plays a crucial role in calming public discontent.

The emotions and opinions of ordinary people often occupy an important position in political life, so how to effectively placate and satisfy their needs is of profound significance. The emotions of a single person may not trigger a significant reaction, but when a large number of people's emotions come together, their influence and response will be significantly enhanced. Therefore, if administrative policies are implemented unfairly and there is a lack of effective supervision over the actions of administrative agencies, popular discontent may quickly accumulate and erupt, leading to political turmoil and chaos of social order. It can be seen that the introduction of regulatory policies is more to show its function of appeasing people's emotions and alleviating social discontent.

2.2 Political Language as a Symbol

If we regard political life as a process in which political elites and institutions compete for and distribute social resources through specific means, then individuals or groups in this complex game can no doubt not be separated from the communication of language. Therefore, language itself has become a profound political symbol. Murray Edelman pointed out that in political communication, people can infer the status and influence of the

other party through the reaction and interaction in the dialogue. Meanwhile, there are many symbolic exchanges rich in symbolic meanings in political dialogue. However, whether the dialogue in political life is authoritative depends not only on the power of words, but also on whether people feel the emotional needs and practical necessities. It follows from this that the use of language plays a crucial role in the interaction between political elites and the public. It not only conveys the meaning of authority, but also reflects political values. Therefore, language has become an indispensable political symbol. Murray Edelman recognizes that the different styles of language spoken by political elites are closely related to the political environment around them. He divides political language into four styles: persuasive language, legalistic language, administrative language, and transactional language. Exhortation and persuasion language is usually suitable for occasions when seeking policy support. Political elites will use some beautiful words such as "democracy", "freedom" and "justice" to express their prospects for the future political life, so as to generate people's expectations for the future psychologically and relieve tension and unease. Legal-rational language refers to the language style used in legal judgments and legal dictionaries. It clearly warns the public of the limits of violation of the law and the severity of punishment, so as to prevent some people from taking drastic actions and endangering social security. Administrative language is mainly used in administrative situations. Political elites convey the connotation of policies to the public through administrative language, and as a symbol of political will, thus forming the political expectations of the public. Transactional language is mainly suitable for more private scenes, not for public scenes. For example, in the process of election, the candidates formed private transactions.

3. The Role of Political Symbolism in Murray Edelman's Perspective

3.1 Strengthening the National Psychological Identity of the State

As a unified country with a large population and multi-ethnic integration, how to cultivate citizens' sense of identity and belonging to the

country has become an important topic in domestic political studies. In order to build such a sense of national belonging, it is not only necessary for the people to identify with the national political system, but also to start from the deep psychological dimension and forge the internal identity of the people to the country. In his research on political symbols, Murray Edelman regards political life as the symbolic interaction between political elites and the public, and the psychological state and emotional issues of the public are important issues that political elites should be concerned about. As an entity, the image of a country is mainly displayed through political symbols. Therefore, in order to understand the image construction of a country and the common people's identification with the country, it is necessary to construct the emotional basis of individuals for the country from the psychological level.

Political language and the political goals set by administrative bodies play an important role in influencing popular emotions. For both political elites and ordinary people, political language plays an important role in the process of acquiring social resources. According to the political language, people can judge the actual interest needs and arouse the common psychological perception. Through the proper use of political language, political elites can demonstrate their authority status and convey values to the society. Political elites should exert their symbolic leadership, use various political language and set political goals in line with the people's expectations in the election process or in speeches for major events, so as to expand their political influence and meet the people's political expectations, so as to strengthen the people's identification with the administrative institutions. As a powerful bridge connecting individuals and the state, exploring the role of political symbols in political life and how they quietly shape the people's perception of the state has far-reaching implications for our real life.

3.2 Ensuring the Legitimacy of Political Power

Murray Edelman's research focuses on how the general public and elites skillfully use political symbols to maintain the harmony and stability of the political order. In particular, the

state administration, as the center of power, plays an important symbolic role. In promulgation and implementation of policies, political objectives should be carefully set and political language should be skillfully used in order to appease the hearts and minds of the people and enhance their sense of trust in the executive. As a country with a vast territory and a large population, there is a certain imbalance in the relationship between the central and local governments. In addition to making adjustments at the institutional level, we must also pay attention to the role of political symbols in maintaining the legitimacy of power, which is essential for the steady operation of our political order.

Murray Edelman cleverly draws on Mead's social role theory in his in-depth analysis of the symbolic phenomena of political life. He pointed out incisively that it is through a series of symbolic symbols that people communicate and interact in society. These symbols not only regulate people's behavior patterns, but also shape various social roles. Murray Edelman extends this unique theoretical perspective to the field of politics, where he explores in detail the complex interactions between political elites and ordinary people. The introduction of various symbolic policies is actually a kind of symbolic interaction between policy makers and recipients, which invisibly constructs a set of policy priorities and creates a unique context for the implementation and acceptance of policies.

4. Conclusion

Through the study of Murray Edelman's thought of political symbolism, we can gain a clearer understanding of the psychosocial dynamics behind political decisions and their profound impact on political stability. In modern politics, popular identification and support often depend on how effectively political elites communicate and behave symbolically, which is especially important in times of uncertainty and crisis. Therefore, the leadership of political elites is not only reflected in the content and implementation of their policies, but also in their ability to maintain social identity and collective psychological stability through appropriate symbolic actions. In a word, Murray Edelman's thought of political symbolism provides us with a new perspective and helps

us to understand more deeply the psychological mechanism of political behavior and its social significance.

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