

Interdisciplinary relationship between sociology, politics and public administration: Perspective of theory and practice

Abstract

There is a long debate about the relationship among sociology, politics and public administration. This study intends to contribute to the existing debate through focusing interdisciplinary relationship among sociology, politics and public administration in terms of theory and practice. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship among sociology, politics and public administration. A qualitative approach has been employed particularly desk review. A number of secondary sources have been consulted to substantiate the argument. This study reveals that though sociology, politics and public administration have their own identity as a discipline but there is a strong relationship among sociology, politics and public administration in terms of theory and practice. It also reveals that there is a narrow demarcation among these three disciplines but all of them come from philosophy, so their nature of dealing is almost same to each other. All these three disciplines are working on human, society, culture and practices.

Keywords: sociology, public administration, governance, research, multidisciplinary

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Introduction

Interdisciplinary research is now a global agenda to scholars due to its interconnection between disciplines.¹ Since scholars have expertise on specific field which sometimes may not effective to make link with other related discipline, interdisciplinary helps to discover new things though making interaction between discipline by removing limitation of knowledge.^{2,3} Politics is a social science subject that studies how political subjects, especially states or governments, make public decisions and distribute social values by virtue of public power, with political phenomena, political relations and political processes in human society.^{4,5} Political practice is the object of study to provide political knowledge. Politics is also defined as the science of studying the form of public power and its rules of operation.⁶ Politics in other sense, as far as the narrow sense is concerned, the activities, forms and relations of the state and its development law are the research objects of political science.⁷ In a broad sense, the form and relationship of social public power on a certain economic basis and its development law are the subjects of political science.^{8,5}

According to the above definition, we can analyze that politics is the discipline of people to set and realize specific rights on certain economic basis, around specific interests and social public power. In particular, political science should not only study the activities and laws of political subjects (individuals, groups or organizations) in the process of power allocation and operation, but also study relevant political subjects using public power to carry out the authoritative distribution of social interests and obtain the laws of legality.^{9,10} There is a long debate about the relationship among sociology, politics and public administration. This study intends to contribute to the existing debate through focusing interdisciplinary relationship among sociology, politics and public administration in terms of theory and practice. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship among sociology, politics and public administration which will help to understand clearly for all concerned.

Review of literature

In the different stages of the development of modern politics, its branches are also changing. The new Handbook of Political Science, which was prepared by the International Political Society in 1996, divides the branches of politics into eight basic branches of political system, political behavior, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public policy, public administration, plutonomy and political science methodology.¹¹ From the point of view of branch of discipline, the development of contemporary political science has several basic trends: First, interdisciplinary research, especially the integration of politics and economics, has become a basic trend in the development of political science. Political science and other disciplines of the social sciences and natural sciences have also produced branches such as political sociology, political anthropology, political psychology, political geography (geo-political science), ecological politics, science and technology politics, and analytic Politics (econometrics).^{12, 13, 14,3}

Second, the political science is paying more and more attention to the realistic and urgent social and political problems, and its reality has been strengthened, "reflecting the way of knowledge generation of contemporary social sciences-from the discipline-centered to the problem-centered transformation", which leads to the rise of branch discipline which directly solves the realistic social political problems.¹⁵ The basic function of political science, like other disciplines of social science, is to solve the problem of social politics.¹⁶ However, political science, especially in the United States for a long time, too much emphasis on the scientific political research, ignored the basic problems of human society development research, pay attention to the small, local problems research, ignoring the major, urgent issues of research.¹⁷ Too concerned with factual analysis and excluding value research. Therefore, political science theory is divorced from practice, and political science cannot fulfill its function of solving political problems. In order to solve the above problems,

the “post-behaviorism Revolution”, which appeared in the early 70 of the late 1960s, calls for the slogan “Association and Action”, which requires the study of the value of political science, the solution of social and political problems and the development direction of human society, and other subjects and schools that pay attention to such as environmental politics, science and technology politics, geopolitics, feminist politics, etc.¹⁸

Methodology

A qualitative approach has been employed particularly desk review. A number of secondary sources have been consulted to substantiate the argument. The research study is descriptive in nature. Research for this study mainly used first-hand materials, journal articles, books, newspapers, national and international academic articles, and reports to conduct qualitative analysis and substantiate the argument.

Results and discussion

Research perspectives

The research perspective of politics is the basic way, law and guiding strategy for people to study political phenomena and political activities. The division of discipline and the synthesis of disciplines have been the two parallel forces in the development of modern social science.¹⁹ The research perspective of political science has been greatly developed, mainly from the perspective of philosophy research, from the perspective of economics research, from the perspective of sociology research, from the perspective of historical studies, from the perspective of law research.²⁰ It also considers management research angle of view, psychology research angle of view, pedagogy research angle of view, ecology research angle of view, anthropological research angle of view and so on.^{21,22}

The research approach of political science refers to the theoretical model and analytical framework used to analyze politics and political activities, and it has a certain principle and structure.²³ It analyzes the political phenomenon and the procedure of political activity, and put the variables of the research object into a certain theoretical framework.²⁴ Because the research approach is the general rule which the particular school studies the political phenomenon, it is also called the “meta-theory”. The main research approaches in the field of political science are systematic theory, group theory, process theory, Elite theory, System theory and game theory, which are basically the product of behaviorism politics.²⁵ Since the 20th century 60, the research approaches of political science have developed in succession, which has produced the research path of public choice theory and new system theory. Among them, the system approach is to use the basic viewpoints of system theory, put politics in the form of the system to examine a method. Group theory is based on the behavior of political interest groups and investigates the political phenomena by studying the nature and interaction of political interest groups.¹⁰ The elitist theory investigates and analyzes the political phenomena by analyzing the behavior of rulers and eminent personalities. The process theory mainly investigates and analyzes political phenomena by studying the movement and change of political phenomena (i.e. political process). The system theory is a research approach to analyze political phenomena by the political system and government institutions, through the research system and the specific political situation of institutions.²⁶ The new system theory holds that the decisive role in the political life of the society is not people’s general political behavior, but the institutional political behavior, which is based on the analysis of reality and the interpretation of history. The theory of public choice combines the hypothesis of “economic man” with the political paradigm “as a complex transaction process” to study political issues. Game theory is a way to investigate political phenomena by analyzing the rational response behavior or decision-making behavior of political participants.²⁷

In order to make political science research into accurate and scientific orbit, it is necessary to adopt some programmed means and techniques in the concrete research, and this is the method of political science research, including economic analysis method, class analysis method, historical method, comparative method, interdisciplinary method, measurement method and so on.^{28,29}

The research perspectives, ways and methods of political science have exerted a profound influence on the theory and practice of public administration. As an important branch of political science, public administration can be said to be synchronized with the formation and development of modern political science. As far as the theoretical perspective is concerned, the political science provides the ideological basis for the development of public management.³⁰ Early morning public administration scholars such as Wilson and Good now envisage political and administrative separation (the second law), the formulation of political design policies and laws, and administration as the implementation of policies and laws, which provide a research object for the development of public management in later generations.¹³ Second, the development and perfection of the public management theory of later generations inherits and develops the research perspective, ways and methods of political science, such as system theory of political Science, group theory, process theory, Elite theory, System theory and game theory, which have exerted far-reaching influence on the development of public management. As far as practice is concerned, political science is paying more and more attention to the research of the urgent social and political problems, and it is becoming more and more realistic, and reflects the way of knowledge generation in contemporary social science, which is changed from subject-centered to problem-centered.³¹ Many theoretical ideas of political science also provide important guidance for solving practical problems in public administration.

Relationship between sociology and public administration

The subject cognition of sociology is roughly divided into four types: one is to focus on the whole society as the research object, and create the sociological tradition of positivism in sociology, whose representative characters are Comte (A. Comte), Spencer (H. Spencer), Durkheim (E. Durkheim).³² The second is to focus on individuals and their social behavior as the object of study, creating a sociological tradition of humanism in the sociology, and its representative figure is Weber (M. Weber). The third is to focus on criticism-oriented, creating a critical tradition of sociology, the representative of Karl Marx. Four is the “surplus said”, “the discipline says”, “the investigation says” and so on in the modern times. In the sociology course, Yang defines sociology as social science, which studies social structure and its function, social process and its causes and laws from society as a whole, through social relations and action.

Society is the community of human life, in essence is the sum of production relations, it is based on the common material production activities and interconnected people’s organic overall. Sociology is a comprehensive and specific social science on the condition and mechanism of benign operation and harmonious development of society.³³ Its function is: on the one hand, sociology can describe, explain and predict what the social phenomenon is and how it will change in the future. On the other hand, sociology carries out social norms, social criticism and education on the basis of description, explanation and prediction and by providing sociological perspectives and sociological methods to help people acquire new social knowledge. Sociology was introduced a long ago, mainly by two stages like stage of subject capital construction and systematic research.³⁴ With the development of the times, sociology, as a comprehensive and specific social science, has established a relatively perfect branch discipline system. These branch disciplines include: Sociology theory and methods, social psychology, development sociology, rural sociology,

urban sociology (urban Sociology)/family sociology, sex sociology, medical sociology, sociology of labor, sociology of education, population sociology, business sociology, industrial sociology, social anthropology, social work, Social science, social investigation, sociology of sports, sociology of law, etc. The value of sociology lies not only in the “instrumental” nature of Science, “The humanistic nature of sociology has determined that sociology should devote some energy to studying some basic problems such as people, group, society, culture and history, which lays a more solid foundation for the discipline construction of sociology.

Sociology is a dual knowledge system consisting of theoretical and methodological approaches. By transcending specific social phenomena, we form generalized and abstract concepts, paradigms, propositional representations, and then answer and explain how the social facts “how” occur and “why”. Sociological knowledge is the theoretical perspective of sociology, which has the function of observation, description and analysis of empirical facts, as the rules and procedures for acquiring and developing knowledge, and sociological knowledge is a systematic method of sociology. The theory is “the carrier of Knowledge”, the method is to construct and develop the knowledge means, the theory unfolds the process to present the method characteristic, the method application also cannot leave the certain theory support. Therefore, sociology is always the unification of theory and method.

Sociological research perspective can be divided into general, special, individual three levels, the first is the philosophy of science, that is, the general perspective. The second layer is a comprehensive social science, such as history, law and so on, that is a special perspective. The third layer is a single subject of social sciences, such as politics, pedagogy, psychology, and management.¹

There have been many controversies in the research ways of sociology, and there are various viewpoints on sociological research approaches, but it can be summed up as follows: holistic-individualism approach, macroscopic-microscopic approach and positivism-humanism research approach. It can be divided into three kinds of basic approaches: social fact paradigm, social interpretation paradigm and social behavior paradigm. The social fact paradigm generally studies the large social structure and social system, uses the question investigation method and the historical comparison law, belongs to this paradigm sociology has the structural function doctrine, the conflict theory and the system theory as well as the neo-Marxist sociology. The paradigm of social interpretation is to understand action, interaction and its consequences by means of subjective meaning, mainly using observation method, supplemented by questionnaires, sociological action theory, symbolic interaction theory, phenomenological sociology, ethnology methodology and other social behavior paradigms are the subjects of individual behavior. Generally used is the experimental method, belonging to this paradigm of sociological theory has behaviorism sociology and exchange theory.¹⁹

There are three kinds of sociological research methods, namely, positivism methodology, anti-positivism methodology and historical materialism methodology. Positivism methodology holds that social phenomena, like natural phenomena, are governed by objective inevitability that social facts are linked to social types and social environments, and that society must be explained in sociological perspective. Anti-positivism methodology opposes the absolute nature of natural science methods, emphasizes the subjectivity, consciousness and creativity of social actors, advocates the use of value-related, and requires that social facts and value judgments, theories and practices be dealt with separately in social cognition. The methodology of historical materialism is characterized by explaining social phenomena and their relations from economic conditions, but

at the same time it is important not to ignore other social factors that participate in interaction, and to avoid taking economic factors as the sole determinant.²⁰ Apart from three research methodologies, the main research methods used by sociology to collect data and analyze data include case law, investigation method, observation method, experimental method, historical method, comparison method and so on.

Sociological research perspectives, approaches and research methods have a profound impact on the theory and practice of public administration. As far as theoretical value is concerned, sociology helps public management to establish scientific social knowledge, focus on public property in public management through sociological and anthropological analysis, and use various research methods to pay attention to public real life, social mentality and social interaction. Expand and perfect the research of public management from many angles and multi-level. As far as practical significance is concerned, sociology helps public management to pay attention to social facts rather than relying solely on the research norms of data analysis, and help people to maintain and improve the existing social structure, social system, and reform of society.³⁵ It is unfavorable to social development, make public administration avoid blindness, enhance consciousness and make his social action more, more consistent with the regularity.³⁶

Relationship between politics, sociology and public administration

Public administration is a discipline developed on the basis of public administration discipline in the middle and late 20th century. Public management is a management system composed of government, non-government public organizations and people, and jointly manages the activities of social public affairs.³⁷ It includes two stages of government-oriented government management and social governance, and it is composed of five different modes, such as centralization of government management, democratization, socialization and autonomy of social governance, and multiple centers of social governance. Public administration means that public administration is to effectively provide public goods and public services, to ensure the fair distribution of social public interests, to promote the overall development of society, to properly apply public power and effective methods, Management activities for effective governance of social public affairs according to law 38.

The science of public administration was derived from political science and was once regarded as an important branch of politics. Political science focuses on the major issues of national politics, such as state, class, government, political party and democracy 18. The object of public management is basically the same as that of political science. And in the study of administrative organization, policy formulation and execution, and public sector management, the political process and its characteristics are important variables that public management cannot ignore. Therefore, in terms of the relationship between the two, political science provides a very important foundation and basis for the study of government behavior in public administration, which can be regarded as the originator of public administration.¹

Sociology is the equivalent of a “catalyst” or “stepper” for public administration. Sociology takes “social man” as premise of human nature hypothesis, emphasizing the cultural function and social structure, explaining the individual’s self-consciousness, identity and role playing, and considering the complexity of various behaviors in social activities,³⁹ we can better understand the influence of public management on the subject and object of society, and can become the idea and way of expanding public management. Method of bridge and tie. The sociological view is that the individual should be recognized in the field of the interaction of the political environment,

the concept consciousness and even the kinship, and the relationship between things can be understood in order to make people and things transcend the organizational boundaries, which will help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public management.⁴⁰

Concluding remarks

Political science provides a meta theory and method for the theory and practice of public management, which can guarantee the core value orientation of the development of public management theory and practice, and at the same time, the research of the theory and practice of public administration is positioned in the direction of public interest as the core orientation, so as to prevent the corresponding value. And how to realize and maintain the public nature, from the sociological perspective, theory, methods are given a very good inspiration. Sociology believes that society is a closely related area, interaction between people is not isolated, individual or collective behavior in all kinds of social interaction and network relations, public management practice should excavate those hidden in the behavior behind the motives, reasons and laws, rather than the superficial view of the economic logic dominated transactions.

At present, our country is in the key social transformation period, various interests and concepts are undergoing profound changes, with the Government reform-related measures continue to advance, the public management research needs are expanding, public management has received unprecedented attention. However, because of the inability to guide the practice very effectively, public administration has been criticized and questioned more and more in recent years, which compels us to re-examine the development tradition and development direction of the subject, and to realize and maintain the commonality in the process of public management. On the other hand, the author thinks that the revelation of political science and sociology to public management is that the public value, which is repeatedly demonstrated by political science and sociology, is a pluralistic value system which includes economic value, political value, cultural value, social value and ecological value, which requires the government to carry out public management to ensure political. The importance of economic value must pay attention to balance and promote other kinds of values, and better realize the social development with the ultimate goal of national happiness. On the other hand, the public management borrows a lot from the political science, the sociological angle of view, the theory, the paradigm, lacks the public management. The unique innovation, therefore incurs the other discipline scholar to question this discipline independence. This requires that public managers, both in theory and time, should be transformed from traditional program actors into value creators, from passive implementation to actively seek innovation and breakthrough, in respect of local realities and local knowledge, to maximize cohesion of consensus, the formation of discourse system, to provide a realistic path for public value.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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