

On Privacy between China and the West

Author Details:

Xiaoling Yang-Foreign Language School-Nanchang Normal University

Abstract: *Privacy is the natural right of a person, and since human used the leaves to hide the embarrassment, privacy has existed already. Because of the different cultural history between China and western countries, Chinese and western people have different value views. Therefore, Chinese and western people have different views on privacy's meaning, degree of emphasizing and legal status. In the communication between Chinese and western countries, the cultural conflict occurs frequently, and it seriously influences people's mutual connection. This thesis not only discusses the different embodiment of privacy between Chinese and western people but also discusses the reasons for different views on privacy.*

Keywords: *Privacy; Cultural differences; Reasons*

I. Introduction

In the cross-cultural communication, the discrepancy of privacy concept is due to the discrepancy of culture, and it is also an important factor of causing the communication barriers. Because of the different cultural history, this kind of trouble between Chinese and western countries is out of control. However, although the trouble cannot vanish thoroughly, we can avoid it as possible as we can. The basic method to avoid it is to know the exact differences of privacy concept between China and western countries. After learning the differences, Chinese and westerners can avoid the unnecessary trouble during the communication and cooperation and make the relationship more harmony and relevant.

II. The different embodiment of a privacy

Privacy is a common phenomenon with obvious cultural characteristics. It exists in different cultures, but the way and degree of its expression vary with different cultures. And in different cultures, people's pursuit of privacy has different emphasis and intensity. They have different embodiment in meaning, people's degree of emphasis and legal status.

2.1 The different embodiment in meaning

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, except for secrecy, privacy also means the state of being away from other people so that they cannot see or hear what someone is doing, undisturbed private state and avoidance of being noticed or talked about publicly. In this way, privacy becomes a protective concept for individuals or groups to guard against external contact and interference and a regulatory mechanism to control their interaction with others. The Chinese word "privacy" has a somewhat derogatory meaning, referring specifically to "personal things that are unwilling to inform or disclose." However, Chinese people don't approve "privacy," and the personal right is considered as private interests. Chinese people have hardly any concept of personal rights. Therefore, there is no equivalent to "privacy" in Chinese. Now, the "privacy" is usually translated into the right of privacy, and it is not necessarily exact, because the word "privacy" in Chinese originally means skeletons in the closet.

In addition, western people generally believe that privacy has the following four functions, which are individual autonomy, emotional relaxation, self-assessment, and limited protection of communication. Society is the foundation of cultural generation and production. For thousands of years, four-fifths of Chinese people have lived in the countryside. A family often multiplies in the countryside for generations, and people are very familiar with each other and care about each other. So, until now, people

often greet each other with “Where are you going?” at the beginning of the conversation, and they often talk about family, salary and other personal issues.

2.2 The different embodiment in people’s degree of emphasis

Western people attach great importance to individual privacy, and their concept of individual privacy covers a wide range of ideas, including private time, private space, private sphere of activities and the protection of private rights in such matters. For example, in order to respect other people's private time, western people invite others to eat or participate in social activities, which will be notified in advance, giving others enough time to prepare the activity. While maintaining the privacy of the house, Westerners have a stronger desire to protect personal privacy. Home is the castle is another important doctrine in the West, which expresses the western concept of individual privacy. Western people have a strong sense of boundaries and will never enter other people's territory without permission. For example, in western countries, even parents have no right to enter their children's room without authorization. Otherwise they will be considered impolite or disrespectful of others' privacy. Individualism-oriented Americans advocate the word "private" very much. They have private rooms, private cars, private telephones, private bathrooms, private doctors and so on. American children also have their own private rooms. They have a private area for socializing with others, walking in the street, queuing for shopping, etc. In addition, any personal privacy, such as personal status, political concepts, religious beliefs, personal behavior trends, cannot be directly questioned.

However, Chinese people take the issues about asking other people's age, occupation, income, marital status and children for granted and often use them as topics of conversation. Therefore, western people like to greet each other in words that are not personal and will not cause trouble. They like to talk about the weather and other topics that do not involve personal matters. Another example is that Chinese people ask others directly about the price of the goods they buy. In the eyes of western people, it is impolite, because that behavior will be considered as asking about other people's economic conditions. And it is also the privacy of western people, belonging to the question that should not be asked directly. Chinese people pay much attention to group privacy. For example, Chinese people use fences to protect their families or groups from infringement, while the family or groups are open to inner people. Their personal privacy awareness is very weak, and the requirement to protect individual privacy is not strong. For example, in China, it is inconceivable for western people that old friends can enter the room without knocking at the door or informing them beforehand.

2.3 The different embodiment of legal status

The differences between Chinese and western people's privacy rights also reflected in the awareness of using the law to safeguard privacy rights. As a legal right, the right to privacy was first proposed by two American scholars. In 1890, Samuel Diallel and Louis Brandis, professors of law at Harvard university in the United States, classified privacy as a natural right of human beings and put forward the concept of privacy. Since then, privacy has been included in the field of legal research. With the passage of time, the rights to privacy have become more and more important in the hearts of westerners. In contemporary society, if someone infringes on the privacy of others in western countries, the infringed one will alert or complain about the person who infringed his or her privacy, and even take the person to court, so as to safeguard their legitimate privacy rights and interests.

In China, legal circles have always equated privacy with a shameful secret, and interpret privacy as the right of personal secrets between the sexes. For a long time, China has not defined the right of privacy as a

specific right of personality. In the 1980s, the right to privacy was introduced, and its research and protection began. But it only indirectly protects the right to privacy through the right to reputation and general infringement. On March 10, 2001, the Supreme People's Court officially established the right to privacy in the Interpretation of Several Questions Concerning the Determination of Compensation Liability for Mental Damage in Civil Tort. At present, the theoretical research and legal protection of the right to privacy in China lag far behind the western countries. The Chinese people's awareness of using the law to safeguard their right to privacy is also weak.

III. The reason for different views of privacy

Since there are so many differences in privacy concepts between Chinese and western people, what are the reasons for these differences? Obviously, as different countries, China and the West naturally have a different political background, cultural background, and economic background. It is precise because of these different backgrounds that Chinese and western people have different views on privacy.

3.1 The reason for historical background

Western countries mostly believe in religion. Therefore, the concept of privacy of westerners is more or less influenced by religion. The existentialist philosophy of the 20th century focused on existence and life and emphasized that everyone should be responsible for their own choices, which developed the individualistic world outlook in western culture to the extreme. Western culture is a kind of "right culture." According to classical natural law, rights are regarded as inherent moral qualities of individuals and have an inalienable nature. Their legitimate requirements (self-protection, survival, freedom, and acquisition of property, etc.) originate from natural law and are protected by the actual legal system of the state. Here, the subject of rights refers to every rational individual, not to a member affiliated to a political group or religious sect. This concept of right affirms an individual image independent of others, independent of groups, and with an inherent depth: the individual is not only physical existence but also conscious, emotional, psychological and linguistic existence. Therefore, westerners believe that no one can decide their own way of life or the meaning of something for themselves instead. Without talking about other people, the existence of each individual is a meaningful thing for oneself. This strong individualism has led westerners, especially Americans, to attach great importance to privacy and to a clear sense of boundaries.

China has vast land and vast resources, and the mature farming economy tie people to the land, during the formation of the idea of relocation, people are closely cohesion or confinement in the family. Therefore, Chinese people attach more importance to group privacy than personal privacy. The reason why an individual is valuable is that he is a member of a group whose destiny and interests are determined by the group. There is no personal concept in China, and people do not seem to exist for themselves, they live in order to do their duty. In China, it's the duty-minded people who permeate the country. Chinese culture is a kind of "compulsory culture." In the family network and social structure, group-oriented Chinese should act in accordance with their roles and identities and be bound by ethical relations such as courtesy, leniency, trust, sensitivity, benefit and filial piety. Otherwise, they would be ignorant of the general situation and disregard the overall situation. People have become an appendage, only a kind of existence. Individual as a subject that has no independent personality and status. The reason that individual works are to safeguard collective interests. Group orientation also leads to other people's orientation; that is, when doing things, the first thing to consider is what other people think and say.

3.2 The reason for cultural background

Fundamentally speaking, the differences between Chinese and western views of privacy are caused by

different values under the influence of different cultures. Western culture, represented by the United States, has created values centered on individualism, that is, philosophy of life-based on the individual. Its main content is to believe in personal value, attach great importance to personal freedom, emphasize personal self-control, self-development. On this basis, a western concept of privacy, which attaches great importance to individual privacy, has been formed. Individualism is the core of values in western countries and is defined as “the theory of advocating individual freedom of action and belief.” It includes such aspects as self-motivation, self-choice, self-reliance, respect for others' individual freedom, respect for privacy and so on. Western individualistic values are individual-centered, individual behavior is based entirely on their own internal emotions and motivations, and opposes the strangling of individuality and the violation of individual rights. In English, "I" is always capitalized in terms of language. Moreover, in English names, the "name" which represents the individual precedes the surname, and also shows the central position of the individual in the western ideology. At the same time, all the concepts associated with individualism, such as freedom, equality, and independence, all occupy the supreme position in the hearts of westerners. Westerners like to establish mutual relations with others on the basis of personal feelings and equality, even between parents and children, so parents should respect their children's privacy, and children can also call their parents' names directly. Western culture originated from Greek civilization. The western modern theory of natural rights and social contract think that people's freedom and natural rights come from natural authority, not from the gift of the monarch, and state power comes from the transfer of individual rights. This marks a major breakthrough in a western understanding of individual rights. In a word, the emergence and development of western individualistic values are the results of the continuous accumulation and inheritance of the core values of western culture, along with the enrichment and deepening of the western understanding of human nature. Therefore, under the guidance of individualism, westerners attach great importance to personal privacy and regard it as a legitimate right.

The values formed under the influence of Chinese traditional culture take collectivism as the core, i.e., group-oriented, family-oriented, emphasizing the principle of state and group supremacy. Therefore, Chinese people value individual privacy and collective privacy, and their concept of privacy is relatively weak. Collectivism is the core of Chinese values. It is defined as "the idea of all proceeding comes from the collective and putting collective interests above individual interests," and it emphasizes individual obligations and responsibilities towards the collective, and the collective interests are paramount. Therefore, the "big ego" in the eyes of westerners is the "small ego" in the eyes of Chinese. In China, the smallest unit of a collective is the family. In the family, filial piety is the moral norm, emphasizing the dependence and obedience to the family, so the Chinese people have a strong family relationship and family concept. Chinese culture is based on Confucianism. Confucianism created by Confucius which aims at maintaining national stability and group harmony. It advocates the establishment of a society which is characterized by collectivism, emphasizing that collective interests are higher than individual interests. Only when individuals restrain themselves, obey groups and meet the needs of the state, can they live in harmony with the secular world. Chinese people have formed unique cultural values: emphasizing authority, ignoring facts, emphasizing collective, despising individual. Confucianism's thought of "harmony is precious" makes people believe that in order to achieve an overall harmony and collective unity, we should obey social etiquette and moral norms, and put collective interests first. Therefore, under the guidance of collectivism, Chinese people attach more importance to collective privacy than to individual privacy.

3.3 The reason for economic background

In modern western society, everything has been institutionalized, standardized, simplified and legalized. Western culture is based on "individual standard." "Individual standard" originated in the period of Cultural

Renaissance and is an important part of "humanism" culture. Humanism advocates opposing theological imprisonment on individuals, breaking feudal hierarchical order, advocating individual freedom and pursuing self-worth, so western economic ethics has its own unique features. With the development of economy, people pay more and more attention to protect their own legal privacy rights. As far as western countries are concerned, most of them are capitalist countries, which adopt an economic system dominated by private ownership economy. Therefore, western countries often highly value individualism in their daily work and life.

The foundation of the humanistic standard of Chinese culture is the very stable feudal social system in the past 2000 years. It can even be said that the humanistic standard and the feudal system are mutually causal. The feudal social system emphasized the hierarchical system. In order to achieve this goal, the rulers often ruled the people ideologically. China's tradition is to attach importance to agriculture rather than commerce. Family neighbors rarely migrate after they settle on one side, thus strengthening group relations. Unlike westerners, Chinese people emphasize the value of economic activities of social groups. Confucianism holds that the enrichment of a group belongs to a higher value, which transcends the individual and belongs to a social group. It is the coordination, stability, and happiness of a group. In other words, Confucianism believes that economic development should be subordinated to the overall progress of society. Generally speaking, the value of Chinese traditional culture to individual economic activities is limited; at most, it has the instrumental value of serving life. Under this economic system, China obviously has a strong sense of collectivism. Therefore, the privacy culture emphasized in our country usually requires that the enjoyment of privacy will not harm the interests of the country and the collective.

IV Conclusion

The concept of privacy reflects the restriction and influence of social culture and context on the use of language, and also reflects the requirements of different ethnic groups on the way of communication. In today's wider and wider cultural communication and exchanges, we should strengthen the understanding of the western concept of privacy, strengthen the understanding of cultural differences between China and western countries, so as to make communication more smoothly. At present, with the development of spiritual civilization in our country, the concept of privacy has gradually been accepted by our people. People begin to consciously protect their personal information and privacy in our traditional concept and begin to accept the influence of western concept of privacy unconsciously. In addition, the cultures of all countries are extensive and profound, and the study of privacy needs to be further strengthened, so as to adapt to the development of the times and be in a favorable position in international exchanges. Therefore, the study of language and culture can also be more applied to practice to achieve the real purpose of the study.

Bibliography

- i. Alan F. Westin. *Privacy and Freedom*[M]. New York: Athenaeum. First Edition. 1967.
- ii. Kay Paul & Chad K McDaniel *The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Color Terms* [D]. *Language*, 1978(3).
- iii. Samovar, Larry A and Porter Richard E. *Communication between Cultures* [M] Peking University Press. 2012.
- iv. Yan Tao. *The Comparison of the Rights of Privacy between China and The West* [J]. *Guiling Scientific and Technological University*. 2016.