

The Construction of National Consciousness in England in the Late Plantagenet Dynasty from the Perspective of Anglo-French Linkage

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Abstract

National consciousness is the premise of forming a nation-state and moving towards modernization. In the later period of the Plantagenet Dynasty, the national consciousness of England developed rapidly. In order to explore the reasons for the rise of national consciousness in England. This article aim to distinguish and analyze terms such as national consciousness, nation, and nation-state by taking the contradiction between Britain and France as a clue. And the relationship between the Hundred Years' War, the Prisoner of Avignon, Wycliffe's Reformation thought and the rise of national consciousness. The following conclusions are thus drawn: The Hundred Years War was the direct cause of the rise of national consciousness; the official boycott of the Pope after the Prisoner of Avignon was the most powerful support for Ethno-religious awareness; Wycliffe's religious thought, which influenced by the Hundred Years War and the Avignon Captive, provided theoretical support to the source of national consciousness.

Keywords

National Consciousness; Religion; History of Ideas; Hundred Years War; Plantagenet Dynasty.

1. Discrimination and Analysis of Nation, Nation State and National Consciousness

The concept of "English nation" was formally proposed in the sixth century AD. In his *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede referred to all the Germanic people who invaded and settled in Britain as "Gentis Anglorum" or "the people of English". And think they are composed of Jute, Cels, Saxones with common church, and unique language. [1]

As a derivative of "nation", national consciousness is a social consciousness that reflects people's various emotions and concepts about their own nation and the relationship between this nation and other nationalities. [2] Mr. Qian Chengdan mentioned in his *General History of England* that the late Plantagenet Dynasty was an important period for the "British nation" to become a nation-state, "the nation-state is the tangible carrier of modernization, without which modernization cannot start". Therefore, national consciousness provides the cultural and psychological cornerstone for the internal unity of the United Kingdom [3]. And studying the reasons for the rise of national consciousness is of great significance for the study of the rise of the British nation and the British nation-state.

Nation does not equal national consciousness. Nevertheless, there are not only differences between them, but also a natural connection.

In terms of distinction, "nation" is a mixture of thought and being, while "national consciousness" is a completely subjective category. In the West, the word "nation" first appeared in the *Iliad*, and it comes from the Latin "natio", which refers to a geographical or ancestral community. [4] However, the concept of "nation" in the modern sense has emerged. Benedict Anderson argues that the state is an imagined political community with limited

sovereign nature. [5] Lewis Henry Morgan, Friedrich Morgan Engels, Eric Hobsbawm, etc., give different definitions of "nation".

The definition of national consciousness is also inconsistent. However, it is manifested in the recognition and identity of the common characteristics within the group.

As far as the relationship between the two is concerned, due to the characteristics of the nation itself, not all individuals living within the nation have national consciousness. Individuals can belong to multiple nationalities at the same time, or they can belong to multiple countries in sequence, resulting in multiple national consciousnesses. On the other hand, due to various reasons, it is also possible for people to have a national identity with a nation other than themselves.

2. The Hundred Years' War is the Direct Reason for the Rise of National Consciousness

Wars and conflicts with other nations are the most effective catalysts for national consciousness. Late medieval English often fought other peoples in the British Isles or the mainland. These conflicts breed a sense of nationality and Britishness. [6] The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) emphasized the sovereignty and territorial division of the two sides, which directly led to the unprecedented intensification of the contradiction between Britain and France.

During the Hundred Years' War, the British people were generally aware of their identity and their shared traditions and history, which helped to form the national identity of the British nation. This "sense of identity" is a necessary prerequisite for the development of national consciousness.

2.1. The Hundred Years' War Inspired the National Consciousness of the English People

The Hundred Years' War was the longest and costliest war the English people have experienced since the Norman Conquest. This has undoubtedly contributed to xenophobia and a sense of internal identity between the peoples of both countries. During this period, the British people regarded hatred of the French nation as a form of patriotism. [7]

The citizens of London also played an active role in the defense of the war. According to records, in 1338, in order to resist the attack of the French fleet, the citizens of London built coastal warning systems in the city of London, Kent, and Surrey.[8]

During the Hundred Years War, the xenophobic sentiments and enthusiasm of the English people for the war were high, which helped to increase the national identity of the English nation. And provided an important impetus for the development of national consciousness.

2.2. The Hundred Years' War Pushes English to Become the Official Language of England

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the founder of comparative linguistics, believes that national languages are the external manifestation of national spirit.[9] Language as a collective representation of a group[10], bringing inexhaustible impetus to the growth of national consciousness.

During the Hundred Years War, the status of English in the Plantagenet Dynasty has risen rapidly, while the status of French has been declining, which is unprecedented. The Statute of Pleading in 1362 required all subsequent court proceedings to be in English. [11]In 1376, the English private treaty appeared. In 1385, French classes were abolished in primary schools and children switched to English. In 1399 Henry IV (reigned 1399-1413) became the first English language to be used after the conquest of England by the Normans. English proclaimed the king who succeeded the throne. [12]The intensification of ethnic conflicts caused by the Hundred Years' War is an important factor in the continuous rise of the status of English. On the other

hand, during the Hundred Years' War, the structure of soldiers changed dramatically. English-speaking civilians became an important source of troops on the battlefield, contributing to the rise of civilian power, which is also a significant factor leading to the status of English.

The emphasis on national language can be seen as a manifestation of the development of national consciousness in England. Therefore, the rapid improvement of the status of English also has an important adverse effect on the construction of national consciousness in England.

2.3. Environmental Factors that Promote the Development of National Consciousness

On the other hand, the geographical environment has a great influence on people's ideas. The Hundred Years' War brought British territory back to British Isles for the first time since the Norman Conquest. The sea again separates the UK from the mainland and also divides the British Isles into a territorial whole. This is conducive to the development of the overall identity within the island, which in turn promotes the rise of national consciousness in England and even the United Kingdom.

3. The Influence of Avignon Prisoners on the Development of National Consciousness

3.1. The Official Boycott of the Pope after the Prisoner of Avignon is a Strong Support for Religious and National Consciousness

In 1342, Clement VI, who was firmly on the side of France, succeeded Pope of Avignon. At the same time, both England's Plantagenet dynasty and Avignon's pope were plagued by financial problems, sparking a fierce battle between the two over the imposition of religious taxes.

British aristocrats and commoners have repeatedly sent letters to Edward III calling for a boycott of the Pope's orders. Edward III also made a series of moves against the Pope. [13] In 1351, Parliament passes an act of priesthood ordination, which required clergy to abide by English customs, a major move to promote the localization of the Church of England. In 1353, the Act Against Crown Power was passed, restoring the right to appoint priests from the Holy See to King of England. Since then, these bills have been reiterated and refined over and over again.[14] It is unprecedented in the past that the British regime has frequently issued decrees against the papal power and monitored the implementation of the laws for a long period of time.

3.2. Wycliffe's Religious Thought, Influenced by the Hundred Years' War and the Prisoner of Avignon, Provides Theoretical Support for National Consciousness

The famous English theologian John Wycliffe was a Doctor of Divinity from Oxford University and a Reformer in England. In 1374, he entered into long negotiations with Pope Gregory XI of Avignon. Between 1373 and 1376, he wrote *De dominio divino*, *De Civili dominio* and other articles, which laid the foundation for his theory. Wycliffe believed that the glory of England stemmed from its being an independent people. [15]He advocated for the establishment of a national church based on the Bible rather than the Holy See.[16]

Wycliffe translated the Bible into English and advocated holding Religious ceremonies in English. And everyone should have a Bible[17], not from the Holy See of France be comforted. The failure of negotiations with the Pope of France was the immediate cause of Wycliffe's reformed thought. This negotiation was closely related to the Act against the Papacy in Avignon promulgated by Edward III. Therefore, the Hundred Years' War and the captivity of Avignon are important reasons for the formation of Wycliffe's ideas.

Wycliffe's ideas provided theoretical support for the establishment of the English National Church. Moreover, he translated the Bible into the language of the English nation and advocated

the use of English for religious ceremonies, which also created conditions for the development of national consciousness from the perspective of language.[18]

4. Summary and Reflection

The contradiction and interaction between Britain and France in the later period of the Plantagenet Dynasty was an important factor in promoting the prosperity of the national consciousness in England.

National consciousness is the spiritual bond that maintains the nation-state. It promotes the construction of the nation-state, and enhances the centripetal force and cohesion within a nation. But in its essence, national consciousness is a kind of ethnocentrism, and an intellectual tool for constructing an "imagined community." Karen Armstrong said: "In the 20th century, we have witnessed violence on an unprecedented scale. Sadly, our ability to harm and destroy one another has rivaled the extraordinary economic and technological progress of humanity." Since the 20th century, from the Sarajevo incident to the Nazism, and even today's "Pan-Turkism", national consciousness is the soil on which it lives. Extreme nationalism can lead to arrogance and foster xenophobia. At this time, the word "nation" provided people with a seemingly righteous name so that they could attack each other. This undoubtedly brings certain dangerous tendencies.

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