

# **The Crisis of National Characteristics and the Construction of National Identity--Based on Who Are We?**

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**ABSTRACT.** *In the era of globalization, the construction of national identity is a common problem faced by all multi-ethnic countries. Each country also takes various countermeasures in its own political and social environment. These policies and measures are not only based on the differences of different social conditions of different countries, but also have common and universal significance. Critical reflection and absorption of these experiences can provide some reference and reference value for the construction of Chinese national identity. This paper is based on Huntington's Who Are We? From the definition of American national characteristics, this paper analyzes the multiple challenges faced by American national characteristics and its future development trend, so as to get a further understanding of the crisis of national characteristics and the construction of Chinese national identity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *National characteristics, Crisis, National identity, Construction*

## **1. Introduction**

Samuel P. Huntington in his book *Who Are We? The Challenge of American National Characteristics* discusses in detail the changes of American national characteristics in its relative importance and content, as well as the crises and challenges it is facing in today's American society. The United States is a multi-ethnic and multi-ethnic country. The vast majority of the population comes from immigrants. Its society is a multicultural society composed of ethnic groups with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who migrate from different regions in different periods. Since the independence of the United States, the national identity of the United States has been continuously challenged by multiple internal and external challenges. Analyzing and mastering the problems faced by the national characteristics of the United States can provide certain reference value for the construction of national identity in such a multi-ethnic country as China.

## **2. The Definition of American National Characteristics**

“Identity” refers to the self-cognition of a person or group. People's definition of their own identity and characteristics affects people's behavior and interpersonal communication. People's identity and characteristics are the result of the construction of self-consciousness, but at the same time, they are also the product of the interaction between self and others, so they are affected and restricted by external factors. People can define their own identity only after they have made clear the difference between themselves and others. The “identity” of a country is its national characteristics. By fighting, people form a sense of identity with their own people, distinguishing themselves from people whose language, religion, history or geographical location are different, thus establishing their own national characteristics. The national characteristics has different components, and the importance of each part is variable.

The four components of American national characteristics are national attribute, ethnic attribute, culture and ideology. At the core of this is the Anglo Protestant Culture from the early American settlers. The important factors of this culture include: English; Christianity; religious obligations; British concept of rule of law, the concept of ruler's responsibility and personal rights; Protestant values against Catholicism, including individualism, work ethics, and the belief that people have the ability and obligation to create a heaven on earth, that is, the “city on the mountain”. Huntington believes that the Anglo Protestant Culture makes Americans have something in common and makes them different from other people. In order to consolidate and defend the national characteristics of the United States, it is necessary to carry forward the Anglo Protestant Culture again. “American faith”, including freedom, equality, democracy, individualism and so on, has been regarded as the dominant factor of American characteristics since the 1990s. However, it needs to be clear that American faith is the product of Anglo Protestant Culture, and it is only a part of the national characteristics of the United States. The essence of Anglo Protestant Culture is Protestant spirit, and American faith is the secular expression of Protestantism.

## **3. The Multiple Challenges of American National Characteristics**

From the 17th century and the early 18th century to the twenty or thirty years before the war of independence, the American sense of identity began to appear; after the independence of the United States, the local identity suddenly came out of the national identity of the United States, and the national identity of the United States was challenged by other identities; after the end of the civil war, the national identity of the Americans was higher than other identities, and the two World Wars made the national identity of the United States become more and more important. However, since the 1960s, national identity has been challenged from both inside and outside, and began to decline. In the 21st century, “9.11” incident restored the highest status of American national identity, and now, the national characteristics of the United States is facing new challenges.

From the perspective of national characteristics, it has experienced the deconstruction movement. Racism, bilingualism and multiculturalism have challenged American faith, English and core culture. First, the deconstructionists believe that the United States is not a family of people sharing common culture, history and beliefs, but a polymer of different races and different sub-national cultures. Its status is not defined by the common national characteristics, but depends on which group it belongs to they wanted to deconstruct the national identity of the United States and replace it with a sub national characteristics. Secondly, the problems of inequality, racial discrimination and slavery in the real society of the United States conflict with the principles of the United States and challenge the American belief. The existence of racial discrimination makes it difficult for the United States to realize equality on this basis. Third, English played an important role in maintaining the identity of the United States. However, in the late 20th century, the voice of advocating the use of minority languages and belittling English began to appear, and the status of English as the only official language was impacted. Fourth, history education is an important part of patriotic education, and American schools have long neglected the history education in the United States, leading to the weakening of national identity. In particular, the multiculturalism movement, which began in the 1970s, wanted to replace the mainstream Anglo Protestant Culture with various other cultures, and the core culture of the United States was challenged.

From the outside of the country, the United States has experienced the problems of assimilation of immigrants, Mexican immigrants and Hispanic Chinese problems, problems from the international situation and the nationalization of elites. First, the assimilation of immigrants poses a threat to social security. The United States is a country that assimilates immigrants and their descendants into American society and culture although the assimilation of immigrants is one of the greatest achievements in the history of the United States, because of the development of modern transportation and technology, and the lack of attention to the Americanization of immigrants, immigrants to the United States can choose to become temporary “sojourners” instead of adherents, or become people with dual dependency relationship - both as American citizens and as Americans. Be a national of one's country of origin the emergence of this dual citizenship has made American citizenship lose its unique significance, and the assimilation of immigrants no longer means “Americanization”. Second, the challenge of Mexican immigrants and Hispanic is likely to transform the United States from an Anglo Protestant mainstream cultural society to an “Anglo Latin American” bicultural society. Due to the large number of Mexican immigrants and the concentrated distribution of living areas, the assimilation of Mexican Americans lags behind. The majority of Mexican Americans will eventually move to an autonomous region of the United States. At the same time, the Hispanics, who occupy a large population in Miami, continue to maintain their Hispanic identity and not assimilate into the mainstream culture of the United States, which is likely to lead to the eventual transformation of the United States into a country with two major nationalities, two languages and cultures. There are also threats to the transnational immigrant community in terms of ethnic attributes and culture. The government of the immigrant country may use

immigrants to find spies; immigrants may also influence U.S. policy for the interests of the motherland.

In terms of the international environment, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has no external enemies, and also lost an antithesis that can position itself this leads to the lack of an external force that can stimulate the vitality of the national identity of the United States, resulting in the decline of national characteristics. At the same time, with the advancement of economic globalization, economic elites participate in more global activities, leading to the weakening of the sense of national belonging and national identity of elite groups.

#### **4. Prospects for the Future of American National Characteristics**

According to Huntington, there are four trends in American society. Firstly, intermarriage reduces the racial attribute, which tends to disappear as a white American identity; secondly, because of the blurring and weakening of ethnic differences, white elites want to protect and restore the “white America” society before; thirdly, due to the increasing number of Hispanics, Hispanic has made a strong impact on Anglo Protestant culture and Spanish on English Fourth, in the United States, the public has a high degree of national pride for the country, while the elites are non-nationalized and prefer transnational identity and identity below the national level these trends may lead to local cultural protectionism that excludes immigrants, thereby reviving American characteristics.

After the 21st century, the characteristics of the United States have entered a new stage. The “9 · 11” incident made Americans begin to have a sense of national security, which makes the national characteristics rise again. In addition, Americans are increasingly turning to religion to get some moral comfort and psychological security. Religion is an important part of the national characteristics, which has the characteristics of Anglian Protestant Culture. Based on this, Huntington believes that in order to maintain the cohesion of the United States and prevent the disintegration of the country, it is necessary to revive religious identity and Anglo Protestant Culture, so as to enhance the national characteristics and national identity of the United States.

How Americans define their own national characteristics will determine what role the United States plays in the world, thus affecting the future of the United States and the future of the world. In Huntington's view, cosmopolitanism will set the shape of the United States by the world, which will make the national identity of the United States inferior to other characteristics, while imperialism will cause anti American forces of other countries to come to power. Therefore, the United States should maintain and strengthen its own cultural characteristics to make it different from the culture of other people. This indicates that it is very important for us to consolidate and defend the cultural characteristics of our country for the promotion of national characteristics and national identity. We should explore and carry forward the core and unique national culture and belief of our country in order to prevent the crisis of national identity.

## 5. Conclusion

If the existence and continuation of a culture is related to national characteristics and national interests, then the state should maintain the influence and dominant position of core culture on the premise of maintaining social freedom. In the era of globalization, we emphasize that the state should guard against the invasion of foreign culture. Therefore, the United States also needs to protect its own mainstream culture, that is, to revive Anglo Protestant Culture in order to maintain American characteristics. The culture of a nation is the memory of the nation. A nation is not only an imaginary group, but also a group in memory. If this memory is lost, it will not be a nation. In the book, Huntington uses detailed data and facts to show us the importance of a country's core culture for maintaining national characteristics and national identity, and makes us realize the importance of cultural construction and ideological work in today's country.

Will Kymlicka believes that a multi-ethnic country that recognizes that it has different ethnic groups can be stable only when it simultaneously cultivates a super national identity that members of all ethnic groups support and identify with. The "super national identity" mentioned by Will Kymlicka refers to the national identity above the national identity, which is based on the basic value concepts generally accepted and accepted by the social members in the process of a country's development, or the common cultural values of a country. It embodies the national value orientation and code of conduct, and plays a very important role in strengthening the centripetal force and cohesion of a multi-ethnic country.

Francis Fukuyama once put forward that the key to the success of national construction lies in the parallel national construction, and the essence of national construction lies in the creation of national identity based on national traditions, symbols, shared historical memory and common cultural customs. Nowadays, China is facing the complex international background of global economy and the impact of various nationalist thoughts. In order to strengthen the sense of belonging of all ethnic groups to the country and improve the cohesion of the country, it is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of the sense of community of the Chinese nation and construct the national identity based on the common cultural values, so as to consolidate and strengthen the identity of all ethnic groups to Chinese culture and realize the people The harmonious unity of ethnic identity and national identity. We should fully understand and respect the traditional customs and living habits of all ethnic groups, respect the unique value and peaceful status of different cultures, and inherit and carry forward the excellent elements of the traditional cultures of various nationalities. On the basis of affirming and respecting the excellent culture of all ethnic groups, we should constantly deepen the understanding of the excellent culture of the Chinese nation and strengthen and maintain the common cultural values of Chinese nation.

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