

# Time-Space Dynamic Mechanism of the Formation of Public Domain

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**Abstract:** In view of the formation of modern public domain, this paper analyzes the embryonic form of public domain represented by group talks, religious pamphlets and aristocratic debates, as well as the formation of public domain marked by modern newspapers, books and other public media. Then, it explains the dynamic mechanism of the development of public domain from its embryonic form to final formation, introduces the theoretical perspective of “time-space”, and discusses the causes of the formation of public domain.

## 1. Embryonic form: group talks and religious pamphlets

Between 1645 and 1646, the British royal army was defeated, making the parliamentary forces being able to breathe. During such a rare period of leisure, soldiers of parliamentary forces from different regions and with different backgrounds began to discuss the direction of the revolution and came to a conclusion that they would be rewarded for their success in resisting the tyranny of kingship. Centering on this consensus, and to address the problem of the distribution of benefits, they formed a political faction called “The Egalitarians”, which “demanded a redistribution of political rights, with a requirement that the interests of the wealthy peasants, retailers and self-employed workers be firstly considered.”

Here, the army provided a meeting place for the people coming from different areas. Before that, due to the infrequent economic exchanges between different regions in the country and that the economic activities were mostly charged by professional businessmen, people from different regions did not communicate closely and could hardly understand each other's ideas. This state of interpersonal isolation, to some extent, restricted the formation of broad public opinion.

For early Democrats, the question of how broad public opinion is shaped is a moot one. They tended to believe that “The will of the people lives on” and that “With the proper voting and representation as the basis, it is possible to build a complex and cooperative community”. Later, Rousseau's theory of “universal will” put some restrictions on this view, demanding that “society must be built on the basis of pluralism, and all groups in the community must be able to develop and clarify their views...have opportunities to consult with other groups and find a solution that is acceptable to all.” The modern democratic constitutional system based on the theory of Enlightenment represented by Rousseau regards political parties and parliaments as the basic institutions for achieving this goal. However, the parliamentary system has its natural flaws. Firstly, the early parliamentary system had a high barrier to entry. The British bill passed in 1429 stipulated that only landowners with real estate worth £20,000 per year were allowed to participate in the election. More people were left out. For the next 400 years, this standard had been strictly enforced. Although this standard had actually continued to decline due to inflation and land appreciation, the number of voters still didn't show any rise. Without a large number of high value real estate proletarians and small property owners, there would be no “proper voting and representative units”, and the so-called “public opinion” formed in the parliament had nothing to do with these proletarians and small property owners, nor did it represent their opinions.

Secondly, it is far from enough to merely take the parliament as a forum for developing and clarifying views. In the same period of extensive discussions among the soldiers of the parliamentary forces, in 1647, at the debate held at the Temple of Patney, Cromwell and his son-in-law Henry Elton, as representatives of senior officials, launched a tit-for-tat debate with William Rebello. Henry Elton insisted that only those who owned property should be eligible to

vote, while William Rebellio cited the “Born Free” principle of God's law and pointed out that the current legal policy was a violation of the principle of equality. Since the British society had no chance to reach a consensus before the discussion, this discussion was of course inconclusive -- the discussion itself was divided between the aristocrats and the general public, and whether or not such a discussion came to fruition, it lacked a broad public opinion base.

In summary, in Britain in the 17th century, between regions and between classes, there was a serious isolation. There was no “container” that could accommodate people from different regions and different backgrounds “ to develop and clarify their views... ... have opportunities to consult with other groups and find a solution that is acceptable to all.”

However, the civil war had shaken this state of isolation. The people were forced to join the army and migrated to different areas as the army marched. Even those who had been unqualified to serve in the local army because of their lower-level social status were also recruited into the army. Since the royal army had its own aristocratic position, this situation had more to appear in the parliamentary forces. In this regard, the royalists, in their own newspapers, openly accused the parliament of “associating with the 'rioting scum' of the people”.

This accusation showed from the opposite side that regardless of winning or losing, the parliamentary forces had objectively achieved some unobtrusive but crucial goals: to strengthen exchanges and contacts between the people, to express their opinions on state affairs, and to form some consensus - although very limited.

Here, the royalists used a weapon of public opinion which looks very useful today - the newspapers. But the newspapers had not been able to exert influence on the general public, while a variety of evangelistic manuals did. Thanks to the rise and popularity of printing technology, more than 200 million copies of *Gutenberg Bible* were printed in Europe over forty years from its publication to the end of the 15th century. In addition to the bible, a great number of religious pamphlets were printed, such as the *Book of Revelation*, John Fox's *Book of Martyrdom*, and various sects emerged, and these religious pamphlets were distributed in large numbers along with the acts of preaching. Centering on these books, people discussed how to build a more godly church hierarchy system.

## **2. Question of Time in the Public Opinion Field**

Small talks and religious pamphlets are inconspicuous acts and objects, but they form the embryonic form of public domain. An in-depth analysis of these embryonic forms of public domain can also reveal some features of the public domain.

Let's take a small talk as an example. Suppose A and B start to talk about a certain public issue, then there is a possibility to open up the public domain centering on this public issue. As more and more people join the conversation, the field of public opinion on this public issue will be formed, which then constitutes a part of the public domain as a whole -- and the public domain consists of innumerable such public opinion fields. The same is true of the public opinion field formed centering on religious pamphlets. When people gather to read these works, they can feel the same power working for them. The field of public opinion on this particular topic is formed when they begin to discuss the path and possibilities of institutional change in the state in relation to the contents of these religious pamphlets. When enough topics are generated and enough people participate in the discussion, the scale of individual public opinion field will be expanded, and the scope of the public domain as a whole will also be expanded.

However, whether it is a small talk or the reading of a religious booklet, these actions are based on face-to-face interactions between people. Prior to the digital communication era, the exchange of information relied heavily on the common possession of physical space and required that such possession be synchronic. Cafes and bistros are typical places for information exchange, and are often found in literature: “Cafes in the Montparnasse area are open all day and become meeting centers for newcomers. They exchange addresses, discuss job possibilities, talk about the latest news in Germany, and sometimes receive a few Berlin newspapers, which will be passed on from one table to another for them to have a complete summary of what happened during the workday.”

Once the face-to-face shared physical space disappears—that is, when people return to their separate lives—it seems that the field of public opinion disappears.

But this is not the case. If we look at the field of public opinion with a more abstract thinking, then it will be “a place of information production, exchange, and circulation.” Here, the information held by different individuals is placed in the same space, and then aggregated into a total information, which is afterwards distributed to each participant. In such case, even if the total amount of information does not increase significantly, the amount of information that each individual has is increased. In this way, even if each individual involved in the talk returns to an independent state, he has obtained more information than before. Then, when one of these participants organizes a new public opinion field in the same pattern, this new field can be seen as a continuation of the previous field, as they center on the same topic. As a result, the public opinion field breaks through the limitation of synchronicity and continues in diachronicity.

On the other hand, face-to-face talk is always limited to a certain number of people, and when the number of participants reaches a certain size, the talk will no longer be effective. The joint possession of physical space and the effectiveness of communication limit the space scale of public opinion field. However, by means of the secondary distribution of information, theoretically, there can be an infinite number of public opinion fields discussing the same topic, which can contain an infinite number of people. From a synchronic point of view, different groups of people can simultaneously launch the same kind of public opinion field; from a diachronic point of view, on a continuous timeline, the public opinion field can be unfolded anytime and anywhere. Therefore, in theory, the public opinion field can finally accommodate the participation of countless individuals, and the amount of information held by each person will increase.

Introducing the concept of time into the development and expansion of the public opinion field effectively breaks through the limitations of physical space and communication effectiveness, but it also brings new problems. Whether seen from a synchronic or diachronic perspective, countless secondary public opinion fields are isolated from each other. The distribution of information in a single secondary public opinion field is independent, and if there is a lack of communication with other public opinion fields, it actually loses some of the information. However, communication is very difficult, and it depends on the progress of communication tools and that of information distribution mechanisms.

### **3. Books and newspapers: blurred spaces**

The reason why small talks, arguments about religious pamphlets, and debates among aristocratic officials are called “embryonic forms of public domain” is that they have only two elements: the public and public opinion, while there is no public medium. Let alone that, as mentioned above, the “public” here is not wide enough, and they are also in a state of separation. Therefore, the “public opinion” formed is inherently inadequate in public nature.

That is to say, as long as the exchange of information still relies on face-to-face communication, the place of information exchange can never be separated from the synchronic possession of physical space - it can break through the limitation of physical space, but it can never completely get rid of its dependence on it. The dissemination of information in the field of public opinion can reach infinite “destinations” in theory, but the reality is that in pre-modern society, the dissemination of information is still subject to strict geographical restrictions. At the same time, before electronic communication technology was invented, the transmission of information took a lot of time and the formation of public opinion was limited.

The flow of information must be stabilized in some form, so that it can be spread more widely and accurately, and continue to cause public opinion to respond. As described above, books are a way to select. With the spread of printing technology, printing presses existed in more than 110 European towns as early as in 1480, with 50 in Italy, 30 in Germany and the rest in several major European countries. By the 16th century, books were available to anyone who could read them.

For the information recorded in books, as one of the most widely accepted literary concepts goes: when you read them, it seems to be talking to the author. From the previous analysis of the public

opinion field, it can be concluded that when a book is read, a quite private public opinion field is born. However, books are unlikely to be printed only once. "Printing industry" means that printing becomes a profitable business activity, and mass printing is more in the interest of merchants. In the 18th century, the average print volume of books was about 4,000. This means that within a period of time, the same book evoked thousands of "private conversations." The same information was passed to the readers of the book, who began to think about the same thing, even though they were separated from each other and did not exactly know the existence of each other.

Nevertheless, the reception and reflection of such information are well prepared for the coming public discussion. In the Latin era, only a few people were able to read, but with the rise of national language, more and more people began to be able to read and spell, and the possibility of public discussion was expanded. Whereas, the expansion of the reading community has brought about an important "side effect", that is, the birth of a sense of national community. Books are a kind of special commodity. It is easy for people to buy foreign material consumer goods. However, due to the language barrier, ordinary people rarely buy foreign books. Therefore, books written in a specific language are often circulated only in the corresponding countries and regions. When people read the "social scene depicted by the cautious and general details" recorded in their own language, they will have a similar understanding of the living environment of their own people, and it is on this basis that people have a common understanding of the imaginary community.

Books still have a certain personal touch feature. Since books are rarely shown publicly, and the information recorded in books is often read by readers after a period of precipitation, they can only help readers form a general, vague impression of the community. The newspapers that followed were a more efficient means of disseminating information.

For newspapers, there is a typical view that newspapers should become "printed logs of hometown." Li Puman pointed out: "Everyone likes to evaluate the newspaper according to how it treats the news related to them." "The most capable responsibility of the newspaper is not to face the average reader, but to face those who pay special attention to news related to their own experiences, or, more simply, "readers want to read things related to themselves." Therefore, early news organizations, especially local newspapers, took individual life events as important local news, such as weddings, funerals, outings, awards, birthday parties...Individual life began to enter the public vision. Public affairs and personal life were also mixed, and it was difficult to truly distinguish the boundaries between them. In the process of reading the news that happened around them, the readers further confirmed the existence of the community. Community awareness is very important. Only when readers realize that paying attention to the events around them is to pay attention to themselves, the public domain is truly formed.

A distinctive feature of newspapers is its strong timeliness. As one of the earliest commodities for industrial production (large-scale printing), newspapers have shown the characteristics of late capitalism, that is, mass production and rapid abolition in a short time. This requires news organizations to compile news from wide sources, which, according to Lippmann's analysis, required news organizations to develop standard processes, thus opening the path for news professionalization. What followed was the rapidly growing operating costs and the convergence of journalism and the advertising industry. In order to win over manufacturers, news organizations used circulation as an important measure of their value, which in turn required news to be attractive enough to readers. As a result, newspapers has gradually expanded from the early tabloid form to the present size, namely, the number of words it contains can be read in one hour, and it covers all aspects of society, so as to win a wider range of audience. The huge amount of printing of newspapers means that in a same time period, there are enough people involved in the reading of the same event, which forms the synergy of public opinion. In the above-mentioned diachronic characteristics of the public opinion field, limited by the inefficiency of information dissemination and the physical conditions of the formation of the public opinion field, the public opinion field is dispersed for a long period of time, and it is difficult to form the synergy of a topic. However, the arrival of newspapers has greatly changed the dispersed state of public opinion field, which almost semi-compulsively requires people to discuss a certain social event or public policy in the same

period of time. In this way, the public domain is fully developed, and newspapers are finally promoted to public media, making the conditions for the formation of the public domain fully mature, and the public domain formally appears.

Comparing the embryonic form of public domain (group talks, religious pamphlets, aristocratic debates) with the public domain marked by the emergence of modern times, it can be found that the concept of time-space plays an important role in the emergence of the public domain. First of all, with the flow of population, the formation of public opinion field still depends on the synchronic possession of physical space, but in the diachronic direction, it can completely survive. Secondly, the emergence of books has led to the formation of community consciousness. Centering on the books written in their own national language, people begin to realize and pay attention to the community in which they live, and this consciousness is not limited by time and space. As Giddens said, the separation of space and place marks the formation of blurred space, which makes the concept of space break through the physical boundary, and that the spatial dimension of social life is no longer dominated by “presence” -- that is, regional activities. Thirdly, the rise of newspapers further developed blurred space, while the characteristic timeliness forced newspapers consciously or unconsciously to guide people to read about major events concerning themselves in a same time period, resulting in a wide range of discussions, known as “hot spots” (this word is dissimilated in the context of the new media). This kind of discussion is fully developed in the blurred space, that is, the community, and time is so concentrated that it becomes a public opinion that cannot be ignored by any political force.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The paper mainly discussed the emergence of modern journalism and the birth of blurred space and hot concepts. Many media forms that have emerged since then are all linked to the time-space concept. Specifically, this paper introduced the time-space problem into the formation of the public domain, aiming to solve the dynamic mechanism problem of the formation of the public domain. As for the dynamic mechanism of public domain reform, it can also be discussed from this perspective.

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