

Research on the Theoretical Evolution of Revolutionary Subject

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Abstract

The problem of revolutionary subjects has always been a core problem within Marxist philosophy. In the classical Marxist philosophy, the revolutionary subject is naturally endowed with the working class, and the working class was identified as the bourgeois gravedigger. However, in the post-war capitalist society, the working class's living conditions greatly improved, forcing many Marxists to rethink the revolutionary subject. Many studies on the subject of revolution have emerged. The aim of this research is to sort out these theories and conduct a systematic study.

Keywords

Revolutionary Subject, Proletariat

1. Marx's Theoretical Elaboration on the Revolutionary Subject

In Marx's and the classical Marxist theory, the subject of the revolution is certainly the proletariat. Marx believed that the development of capitalism, on the one hand, prepared material conditions for its transition to socialism, and on the other hand, it prepared for its destruction—the proletariat. Through the analysis of Marx's classical works, we can find that the proletariat is the revolutionary subject of Marx. In the Critique Introduction of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx said: "The possibility of Germany's liberation lies in the formation of a class that is completely bound by chains, and this class is the proletariat. It is a class that cannot liberate itself unless it liberates itself from all other social spheres and simultaneously liberates all other social spheres. In short, it is a class that represents the complete loss of humanity and can only restore itself through the complete restoration of humanity." (Marx & Engels, 1958) At this time, Marx believed that the

members of the proletariat were mainly “artificial” poor and the masses caused by the rapid disintegration of society. During this period, Marx mainly analyzed the proletariat from the theoretical level. In the period of 1844, Marx tried to reveal the essence of bourgeois society from the perspective of political economy and set his vision in real life, paying attention to the life of real workers and analyzing the working class from the perspective of “alienated labor”. Marx believed that the workers’ labor is the only source of wealth, but the workers in the process are in the lowest level. The labor of workers has also become alienated labor. Not only workers are alienated from their own labor products, but also workers are alienated from their own labor, people are alienated from their own class nature, and then people are alienated from each other. Therefore, alienation should be discarded. The German Ideology is not only the birthplace of historical materialism, but also the birthplace of scientific communism. Marx pointed out that only proletariat can realize communism. Only the proletariat can overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie and the new society can be established.

In the period of the Communist Manifesto, Marx declared the historical inevitability of “the demise of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat”, pointing out that the proletariat was created by the bourgeoisie itself, “the bourgeoisie not only forged the weapon to kill itself; but also created the weapon who will use it against its own—the modern worker, namely the proletariat.” (Marx & Engels, 1958) Among all the classes opposed to the bourgeoisie, only the proletariat is the revolutionary class. If they want to win the victory of the revolution, they need to establish the Communist Party. The mission of the political party is to unify the proletariat as a class, overthrow the bourgeoisie, and seize power. This is only the first step; the proletariat also needs to seize all the capital of the bourgeoisie and concentrate social capital to increase total social output. When the proletariat eliminates the old relations of production and the conditions for the existence of class antagonism, he eliminates all classes. At this time, the society will be a union of “the free development of all people as the conditions for the free development of all people”.

The result of the French Revolution in 1848 was not as good as Marx expected before, and the proletariat did not overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, which prompted Marx to develop and perfect the theory of revolutionary subject. In this context, Marx wrote the Class Struggle in France and the 18th Day of the Fog Moon. Marx realized that as long as there was a chance for employment and money, the proletariat would give up their own interests, lose revolutionary morale, and accept the rule of the bourgeoisie. It was also doomed to their independent labor, and they still had to rely on the proletariat to survive, and this is how the bourgeoisie wore down their will. What about the farmers, who make up the vast majority of the people in France? Marx found that they, like the proletariat, were deceived by ideology and worship. Louis Bonaparte got the support of farmers only by abolishing the wine tax commitment, and this is just because they mistakenly placed their good wishes for Napoleon on Bonaparte, hoping he can like

his uncle, for the benefit of farmers. On the contrary, they received a “gift” of restoring the wine tax. At this time, the farmers vaguely realized the wrong, beginning to get close to the proletariat and embrace socialism, and this process shows a lot of passivity. In the whole process, the revolutionary subjects are blinded by ideology and fetishism, so how can they win the revolution? In the *Class Struggle in France*, Marx established a dependency between a revolution and an economic crisis, which is a revolution that is possible only when the modern productive forces and the bourgeois mode of production are contradictory... a new revolution only occurs after a new crisis. But a new revolution will surely come as a new crisis.

In Marx’s view, the prosperity of industry and commerce would hinder the proletariat from making any attempt at revolution, because the proletariat was blinded by the ideology and fetishism of the bourgeoisie, and even gave up the class interests of the class and lost its revolutionary morale. And when the economic crisis occurs, the industry and commerce are paralyzed, and the proletariat gets rid of the blind of fetishism, and will resist for its own class interests. More precisely, it is possible that the revolution will win only when the contradiction between the capitalist productive forces and the relations of production reaches the pole. As the main body of the revolution, the proletariat bears the sacred mission. To overthrow the rule of capitalism, establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and realize communism, it is not possible to rely solely on the proletariat. The future revolution will be towards the union of the proletariat and the peasants and realize the alliance of workers and peasants.

2. The Theory of Revolutionary Subject Changed after the War

In the 20th century, especially since the Second World War, facing the changes in the distribution relationship and class structure of contemporary capitalism, some scholars propose to find the subject again, and others believe that it is not feasible to find the socialist revolutionary subject outside the working class. The current international economic crisis shows that the fundamental change in Western society still depends on the working class, but to achieve this, we must first awaken and enhance their class consciousness and revolutionary consciousness.

2.1. The Changes of Subject Theory of British Marxism (Xue, 2018)

After the war, the class consciousness of the British working class was deeply influenced and bound by social changes and capitalist cultural hegemony, and it was weak to the “cultural sense of no class”. The British Marxists pointed out with some concern: “What about the working class who was once called by Marx the capitalist gravedigger today? For a century, the tomb has not been dug, and the future heirs of capitalism, though no longer as vibrant as their ancestors, do not have the serious threat of death.” (Giddens, 2007) At this time, can the working class still undertake the historical mission of overturning capitalism to liberate all

mankind? In view of this new problem, the British Marxists showed their profound reflection on the problem of revolutionary subjects, and successively put forward three theories: the empirical subject under the perspective of culturalism, the construction subject under the perspective of structuralism and the multiple subject after structuralism.

2.1.1. The Empirical Subject under the Perspective of Culturalism

Under the influence of the cultural research model, British culture Marxism believes that culture is a “whole way of life or way of struggle” that exists in ordinary life. As the subject of practice, people will form their own cultural consciousness in their daily life experience and social experience, thus becoming the cultural subject. So, in view of this situation, Thompson and Williams British pointed out that to ignite the revolutionary passion of the working class, must through enlightenment again change the current workers’ slightly decadent ideology, clearly clarify the revolutionary subject theory in order to promote the process of the British socialist movement. Such changes must be made through “culture”, because culture has a guiding role on human experience, “culture is able to keenly explore and reconstruct the nature of society with human experience...has an important guiding role on social value”. (Hoggart, 1995) British Marxists affirmed the basic role of practical experience in social subjects, believing that social subjects are formed by specific individuals in their daily life experience and that the passion of socialist revolution can persist in the people. Therefore, in order to restore the vitality of the socialist movement, we must go deep into the people, experience their life experience and life experience, and discover the masses’ revolutionary appeal, awaken, excavate, mobilize, motivate and even transform their potential, and then carry out deep cultural processing, so that can better shape the revolutionary subject intention of the working class.

2.1.2. The Construction Subject in the Structuralist View

In structuralists’ view, the revolutionary subject is not the product of experience but a product of ideology, which means that the subject is the result of ideological construction rather than the product of specific personal experience. The revolutionary subject is not the natural way of existence, but a social structure of “subject position”, and the implication is not specific personal practical experience and cultural significance, but a way of the social structure of power and ideology. Therefore, the so-called subject is the subordinate subject constructed by the social structure. They believe that since the social main body is the product of social structure and ideological construction, the socialist revolution subject must be educated by socialist theory. Namely, the working class’s consciousness must be based on Marxist theory. They will build and develop the task of advanced social theory to intellectuals, because only this group, can achieve the current cultural status to a thorough hegemony transformation. That is to say, the working class must accept socialist consciousness, under the guidance of advanced intellectuals realizing the victory of political practice, to form the socialist revolution’s main body.

2.1.3. The Multiple Subject after Structuralism

After the 1980s, the theoretical model of structuralism gradually declined, the emerging social movement gradually emerged, and the distinctive theoretical appeal of “diversity” developed. This “diversity” also led to the negation of a unified subject after structuralism, resulting in the emergence of many new political subjects. In this social situation, women, students, youth, race, and other members of marginal society form new political subjects, so it is not enough to focus only on the dimension of productive relations. People should not only stipulate the subject problem from the perspective of production relations, but also treat it in various ways, so as to stipulate the connotation and characteristics of different subjects, which leads to the British Marxist subject theory inevitably moving towards the mode of multiple subjects. In order to deny the unity of culturalism and structuralism in the theory of the subject, the theory of multiple subjects connects with the concept of “identity” and “subject”, so that the former adheres to the latter, so as to emphasize the pluralism and variability of the social subject.

According to the British Marxist pluralistic subject theory, the subject of discourse construction includes specific individuals or specific identities of different classes; that is, the specific subject is diverse and is only combined by temporary interests. Meanwhile, a specific individual can participate and represent various subject positions according to their identity, and the subject position of discourse construction is also pluralistic. After structuralism, the subject theory is based on the difference of class composition rather than unity, and it pays attention to the multiple composition of subjects. In this way, the unified subject theory is completely denied. Since the subject is diverse, how can we form a consistent force against capitalism? The multiple-subject theory puts forward a new theoretical term—“engagement”—in order to reveal the external connection between things. In this way, they will shift the socialist struggle from the category of practical practice to the category of discourse symbol, from the political and economic criticism to the criticism of discourse hegemony, and from the realistic subject of the working class to the discourse subject of all strata.

2.2. The Revolutionary Subject Theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany

In the post-war capitalist society development, the main capitalist countries have experienced an economic boom. The rapid economic development not only brought rich profits to the bourgeoisie but, at the same time, gradually let the original in Marx’s, the proletariat, out of the destitute. The effect of the promotion of the working class’s living standards is that at the working class’s spontaneous level, they are no longer keen to overthrow the bourgeois revolution. In fact, Lukacs was expected during the Hungarian Revolution, and that was why Lukacs raised the question of the class consciousness of the proletariat. Marcuse, one of the core figures of the Frankfurt School in Germany, proposes that the rapid economic growth after the Second World War and the extensive implementation of the welfare state led to the disappearance of the negative side of the capitalist society—

namely, the disappearance of the proletariat as a revolutionary force in capitalist society.

2.2.1. Marcuse's Theory of Revolutionary Subject

Marcuse believes that since entering the developed industrial society, both individuals, collectives and society have gradually lost their critical thinking in the use of machinery and tools, and become a one-way human and one-way society. (Marcuse, 2008) Marcuse pointed out that in industrialized society, the modern capitalist society gradually integrated politics, life, and culture, among which the proletariat was more assimilated by capitalism and gradually lost its critical and revolutionary nature. Marcuse believes that the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the Marxist period mainly stems from the endless economic exploitation and oppression of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, and the class and revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat were produced under the oppression and exploitation, and the resistance to the desperate life. In Marcuse's view, the modern developed capitalist society is no opposite of the society of the bourgeoisie, from technical control to demand and from thought control to false free control, which, step by step, made the proletariat. The era of the proletariat is no longer in the sense of the proletariat, and the proletarian revolution's main body status has disappeared, more than as a social revolution.

Subsequently, Marcuse began to focus on other social groups and classes and then looked for new revolutionary subjects. In Marcuse's view, this subject must first dare to say "no" to reality, dare to undertake the historical task of human liberation, and then they must, to a certain extent, away from the integration model of one-way society, that is, away from the sphere of industrial social influence. Marcuse first noted the oppressed and exploited people of the third world. In his view, the oppressed in the third world suffer from two kinds of oppression: oppression by their own rulers and political unfreedom; the second is the oppression and economic exploitation from the capitalist suitors. It can be said that the oppressed in the third world are politically undemocratic and economically poor. This group first satisfies the conditions of being oppressed and dares to say "no" to reality. But Marcuse's eyes did not last long. Subsequently, groups living on the edge of the developed industrial society attracted the attention of Marcuse, such as young students, intellectuals, vagrants and artists, whom Marcuse called the "new left". In the beginning, it was the young students that gave Marcuse the hope of social revolution. The rebel student of the sixties was born in the post-war economic boom period, when the student rebellion movement caused a great shock in the whole capitalist world. The wide range and influence of nature excited Marcuse, who was eager to seek his own theory and practice career. Not only that, Marcuse also joined the movement, and the students of the rebel movement regarded Marcuse as their ideological mentor and political leader, and he became the "spiritual leader" of that era. However, this mighty student rebel movement was fleeting. In the 1970s, the rebel students gradually changed their position and found their position in the society, or returned to their own middle class identity.

In this way, the young students were abandoned when Marcuse was still wait-and-see, or Marcuse once again lost his expected revolutionary lord.

2.2.2. An Analysis of Marcuse's Theory of Revolutionary Subject

According to Marcuse, "Marx's Manuscript not only cares about people and studies people, taking human liberation as the highest purpose, but also emphasizes the central position of man in all beings." (Wu, 1993) Therefore, he interpreted humanitarianism as the basis of Marx's historical materialism and Marxism as a whole, and took it as a concern of his own theory. Marcuse pointed out that a high level of material civilization is only one pole of the modern society, and the other pole of this society is the repression of human nature and human spiritual pain, and heavily criticized the inhuman and dehumanized tendencies of capitalism. This judgment has a strong practical significance, not only for the people living in the modern capitalist society but also for us who are carrying out the socialist construction of modern, have inspiration. At the same time, Marcuse faithfully revealed that in the contemporary capitalist society, "the low level of revolutionary potential is consistent with the highest stage of capitalist development"—his unique historical phenomenon. "Without a revolutionary consciousness, there can be no revolutionary action." Marcuse is in this background to explore the new revolutionary motivation in contemporary capitalist society, to criticism both superficial but also can confuse the economic point of view, recognize the nature of capitalist society, through the life rich this appearance, find the reason to fight with the society opened up a new field of vision. In addition, Marcuse clearly revealed the objective reality that the Western proletariat is "silent". At the same time, he also stressed that it is extremely difficult for the proletariat to have a revolutionary consciousness at present, and it has to encounter great obstacles. The value of Marcuse is that he was sensitive to the difficulty and emphasized it, and although he exaggerated it to an inappropriate point, Marcuse's view raised the question of the proletariat how to maintain the dominant position and advanced nature of the socialist revolution and construction.

Marcuse's theory of revolutionary subjects also encounters a theoretical dilemma. First of all, Marcuse deviated from the revolutionary subject thought of Marxism (Zhang, 2017), whose denial of the social revolutionary subject status of the proletariat itself is a pessimistic revolutionary theory. Marcuse only defines the class contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie from the economic level, and believes that the economic poverty of the proletariat is the reason for their revolutionary consciousness, which is undoubtedly one-sided. Secondly, the revolutionary subject that Marcuse has found is, in a sense, a fictional revolutionary subject. This fiction is derived from his sentimental romanticism. Finally, Marcuse described the progress of contemporary capitalism: "technological progress = the growth of social wealth (growth of GDP) = the expansion of slavery" (Marcuse, 1982). This fully shows his dislike of contemporary capitalist civilization and desire to destroy the civilization. However, his analysis did not touch the substantive problem. He mistakenly believes that science and technology itself

have the function of ruling people.

2.3. The Evolution Process of the Subject of French Marxism (Lan, 2016)

In real politics, the withdrawal of the proletariat as the subject forced the French Marxist theorists and thinkers at that time to rethink the subject problem of Marxism on another level. Where the real political subject exits, the ideological metaphysical subject leaves the ground. That is to say, when the specific class no longer becomes the subject, the subject is soon turned metaphysical. Koyev introduced an important concept to French Marxist thought, namely, the concept of the other. In Koyev's master-slave dialectics, the individual, just like Koyev's master, always has to face the existence of another as a slave. In this context, the subjective resistance of French Marxism has changed from the resistance of the oppressed to the oppressor to the abstract self to an absolutely present capital, and the capital has become my absolute bully. French Marxists must find a realistic foothold for the resistance of the subject, and the body becomes the place where they shape the possibility of resisting the bourgeois ideology and system.

1968 was a turning point for the development of the Marxist subject concept in France. On the one hand, the practice of the May Storm broke the silent subject in speculation, and the concept of the existential subject became goal-directed by the May Storm. On the other hand, the rise of Structuralism of the existentialist subject concept has a great impact. Thus, the existentialist Marxism living body is resolved into an abstract derivative of bourgeois ideology; the real subject became tied to the capitalist society and ideological structure of the cross of the sacrifice. Althusser undoubtedly played the most important role in this process. Althusser has a classic proposition for the subject deconstruction of existentialist Marxism, that is, "history is a process without subjects". It can be said that Althusser's interpretation of the "subject" in history revealed a core level of his thoughts. That is, the so-called "subject" is just one of many factors of a complex historical system or structure, and the "subject" itself is unable to create the whole history.

While Althusser is in a deep paradox, other French Marxists and the left are trying to regain the subject. Alan Baddeo's thinking on the subject problem has become another way, that is, the subject's historical situation with some "one" concept to structure the history after the event, and is operated on the basis of the event. Thus, in a sense, the subject is loyal to the event. Subject is not universal; that is, not all individuals have been able to act as subjects in history. In Baddeo, only those who really face the events and history can embody themselves. Baddeo's subject theory represents a new tendency of French left-wing thought in thinking about the subject problem, that is, thinking about a subject that is not to be at present. Similar to Baddeo's thinking are Lonsiere and Zizek. Lonsiere focuses on a dumb subject who is not without words but whose words are not taken as words in the present situation, just as if they did not speak. It can be said that in the recent French Marxism and left-wing thought, this current "absent", but at

a broken point, the subject of the present later events has become a tendency.

3. Epilogue

As a cornerstone of the palace of Marxist philosophy, revolutionary subjects have always occupied the core position. Marx deeply analyzed and clearly pointed out that the proletariat is the natural subject shouldering the mission of the revolution, playing the key role of the bourgeois grave-digger, and its close connection with the economic crisis constitutes the necessary conditions for the victory of the revolution. However, with the evolution of the post-war capitalist society, the working class life situation improved significantly; the change prompted many Marxist theorists to review and explore the problem of the revolutionary subject, which has given rise to a diversified theoretical perspective, among them, Britain, France and Germany of Marxist scholars contribute especially outstanding.

The British Marxists tend to put the hope of the “proletariat” experiencing the new enlightenment, the subject or the social society constructing the complex, and turn to the young students, intellectuals, vagrants and artists. The French Marxists discuss the essence of the revolutionary subject from the metaphysical perspective.

The evolution of the theory is a process of constantly getting close to reality and responding to the challenges of the times. Marx’s theory of revolutionary subject undoubtedly points out the direction for us to move forward, but in today’s rapidly changing historical conditions, how to accurately position and gather the power of the evolutionary subject and how to effectively play the role of these forces, is still an open and urgent topic to be explored deeply. In the face of the future, we need to continue to reflect and innovate in order to find a more solid foothold for the interpretation of the new era of the revolutionary subject in the interweaving of theory and practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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