**Xia Shaoguang: The Concept of History in Lukacs' Reification Thought and its Anti-Historicism Characteristics**

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**Abstract**

While expounding his Reification thought, young Lukacs made great efforts to reveal the manifestation of reification in bourgeois thought, especially the methodological defects of bourgeois thought, and attributed its defect to "non-historical, anti-historical beings” (ungeschichtliche, antigeschichtliche Wesen). At the same time, Lukacs put forward his concept of history as the power and methodological principle to overcome reification in the capitalist society.

However, we can see that his concept of history proposed by Lukacs' when discussing reification in the capitalist society has the characteristics of anti-historicism which he wanted to criticize but failed.

When we analyze Lukacs’ writings, we can see that the subject of Reification is not the proletariat existing in real history, and we can see that the process of overcoming reification is just a speculative activity beyond history, which finally leads to the idea that reification cannot be overcome in the capitalist society. The root of this mistake lies in Lukacs' unclear definition of the connotation of reification. This paper attempts to reveal this feature and explore its reasons.

[Key words] Lukacs; Reification; history; anti-historicism characteristics

In his representative work (History and Class Consciousnes) which Lukacs studied Reification and proletarian consciousness, Lukacs explained his historical dialectics idea with the help of the explanation of Reification in the capitalist society. Lukacs argued that: his new concept of history is endowed with the status of overcoming Reification and offers methodological principles to overcome reification. Many scholars have noticed the importance of the concept of history in Lukacs' reification thought.

For example, Professor Zhang Xiping pointed out that "the concept of history is at the center of Lukacs' system and this new history concept is the cornerstone of all his theories". The studies on Lukacs' concept of history often focuses on the comparison of external ideological styles and the exploration of Hegel factors in Lukacs' thoughts, which often argue that Lukacs "finally falls into the quagmire of historical idealism unconsciously".

**A new discussion point**

However, few people have noticed that, starting from Lukacs' definition of the concept of history, there is an internal contradiction in the history concept contained in Lukacs’ Reification thought.

This concept of history in Lukacs' reification thought has obvious characteristics of anti-historicism. On the one hand, Lukacs argued that the bourgeois thought influenced by reification thought has "non historical and/or anti historical essence", thus Lukacs put forward his new concept of history and gave it a new meaning, regarding it as the substantive and methodological principle to overcome Reification thought. But on the other hand, Lukacs' concept of history contradicts his own definition of history concept, and in a certain sense, it exactly reproduces the anti-historical and non-historical characteristics of bourgeois thought that Lukacs criticized.

This paper is mainly divided into four parts. First, it introduces Lukacs' Reification thought, from the presentation of reification to its concrete appearances.

Secondly, it introduces the manifestation of Reification in bourgeois thought, especially its methodological defects.

Thirdly, it introduces the concrete connotation of the history concept put forward by Lukacs to overcome reification, and the specific methods proposed by Lukacs to overcome reification.

Fourthly, this paper points out the anti-historicism characteristics and performance of the history concept in Lukacs' Reification thought and tries to analyze the reasons for his failure.

**Chapter I. Reification and its appearances in the field of real life**

Lukacs discussed the concept of reification around the commodity fetishism put forward by Marx. Lukacs argued that the commodity fetishism problem "manifests itself as the core and structural problem in all aspects of capitalist social life".

Thus, with the help of in-depth analysis of commodity fetishism problem, we can “in the structure of commodity relations, it is found that all the object forms of capitalist society and the principle of all subjective forms corresponding to it. "The basis of commodity structure is "the relationship between man and man obtains the nature of things, and thus obtains a kind of "ghost like objectivity",

With its strict, perfect and reasonable self-discipline, this kind of objectiveness conceals its basic essence and effects all traces of the relationship between man and man. The basic definition of reification is that once the essence contained in this commodity structure develops into fetishism, "people's own activities and their own labor, as some objective things, some things that do not depend on people, some things that control people through different self-discipline, have become opposite to human beings. "

Specifically speaking, this is reflected in both subjective and objective aspects. The objective aspect “produces a world composed of ready-made objects and turns to the relationship between objects. Although its laws are gradually recognized by people, it still stands opposite to people as an irreducible and self-acting force even in this case ".

In the subjective aspect, "human activities are opposite to human beings themselves and are objectified and become a kind of commodity. This kind of commodity obeys the natural law of society, which is different from the objectivity of human beings. It is just like any consumer goods turned into commodities, and it is bound to carry out its own movement without relying on human beings".

**Workers and work process are the most common and important practical field affected by Reification.**

According to Lukacs’ explanations: in industrial production, the principle based on is the principle of rationalization, that is, to adjust according to calculability, to quantify the activities of workers with qualitative content as human beings, and to become and only become the digital form that can be visualized directly. The impact of this on industrial production activities and workers lies in the following aspects:

Firstly, the overall identity of the production process is destroyed, and the local operations have been divided in time and space.

Secondly, the workers who are the main actors of production activities are also divided into many parts, and lose the autonomy of the labor process, and workers are added to the production process as accessories. Man's natural relation is replaced by the rational reified relation.

**Although the typical victim of reification is workers, it is the general fate of bourgeois society.**

Therefore, in other fields of social life, although the specific appearances are different, the appearances in these fields shows the most basic principle of reification, that is, according to the principle of rationalization, a system established on the basis of calculable, predictable and often quantitative relations is often regarded as something that has been completed forever, fixed and accurately determined, and thus can function independently, as opposed to individual things in social life. However, the real individual differences among human beings are gradually eliminated, which is dominated by the new abstract and generalized "material nature". In these forms, the relationship between people hidden in the direct commodity relationship and between people and the real object that meets their practical needs gradually disappears, as a result these relations become the representatives of the social existence dominated by reified consciousness.

Chapter 2. Reification in the ideological field

**First, the paradox of rationality.**

**Behind the unity and rationality of the part, there is the isolation and irrationality of the whole.**

Lukacs pointed out that the system established according to the principle of rationalization in capitalist society actually contains profound contradictions, that is, the contradiction between unity and isolation. Behind the partial rationalization and the unity established according to the principle of rationalization, it is the isolation and lack of connection between the whole. In capitalist society, on the one hand, individuals are abstract samples; on the other hand, they are isolated objects. Social life is divided into many isolated parts. Within these local areas, it seems reasonable, and there must be some connection between them in form, but in fact there is not.

**Secondly, the disappearance of holistic thinking and the self-setting of boundaries.**

Lukacs pointed out that "due to the specialization of the work, any overall vision has disappears. Science, which is also involved in this directness, divides the whole reality into some parts, and the whole cannot be seen because of the specialization of the work”.

In this specialized fields, science will carry out accurate research in accordance with its own rationalization method, and try to grasp it as a regular unity. However, beyond the boundaries of specialized fields, man’s reified consciousness has given up questioning the foundation of its own specialized field and its relationship with other related fields, and see it as the boundary of one's own ability. The more development and progress of modern science, the more problems related to its own existence foundation are excluded, and they are regarded as being unable to grasp in methodology, thus making itself a rational closed system from the internal point of view.

Moreover, the direct thinking, starting from the established facts and without any intermediary, regards the intuitive phenomenon as the existence itself of things, thus losing the inquiry into the essence of things. The limitations of this methodology are clearly reflected in economics and law.

For example, in economics, marginal benefit theory "attempts to start from the 'subjective' behavior of producers in the market, rather than from the objective laws of commodity production and ignores to analyze movement that determines the market itself and analyze the conditions that determines the 'subjective' behavior mode in the market".

As a result, economic crisis is always outside the scope of economic analysis.

In law science, "the content of quality cannot be understood", the jurisprudence under the influence of materialistic consciousness “gives up rational argumentation and the rationality of the content of the law in its methodology, and regards the law as nothing more than a formal system of calculations, by means of which the inevitable legal results of an act can be calculated as precisely as possible”, and as a result, “the real basis of the emergence of law, the change in power relations among different classes, becomes blurred. "From the perspective of law, it becomes impossible to understand the emergence and disappearance of law.

第四， 这种思想必然也是无主体的， 是把主客体孤立化隔离化的。对事物采取纯粹的直观态度， 必然也就意味着不会使主体作为一个创造性的人来活动， 从而取消了主体的任何能动性。由于工人在生产的过程中是作为纯粹的附属物被添加进去的， 因而只能是被动地适应生产合理化的要求， 本身并不能作为能动的主体而存在。同时， 物化所产生的一系列要求甚至侵入了人的心灵领域， 成为一种影响和控制人的意识形态而独立地发挥作用， 与此相应， 人本身的有意识的活动被取消和阻止了。

**Thirdly, this kind of reified thought must also have no subject, and isolate the subject and object.**

Taking a purely intuitive attitude towards things inevitably means that the subject will not act as a creative person, thus any initiative of the subject is ignored. As workers are added to labor process as just appendages in the process of production, they can only passively adapt to the requirements of production rationalization, and workers cannot exist as active subjects. At the same time, a series of requirements generated by reification even intruded into the field of human mind, becoming an ideology that influences and controls people and plays an independent role. Accordingly, the conscious activities of human beings are prevented.

In essence, the fundamental characteristics of this kind of reified thought lie in non-history and in anti-history: which means there is no historical origin, and there is no historical generative, holistic and temporal features of history. The performance of practice lies in the fact that we can't really grasp the present facts from the perspective of world history, we can't really grasp the present facts including its individual characters. Therefore, we are trapped into fetishism of mysticism. **"This non- historical and anti-historical nature of bourgeois thought"** is unable to grasp history, which is reflected in the fact that the members of the capitalist class are unable to deal with the great individuals or natural environment in history, which makes them as things in themselves that cannot be cancelled and overcome, which are outside of human history and in opposition to individual real people.

**Chapter 3. The methodological way out to overcome alienation lies in the correct concept of history**

Lukacs not only pointed out the non-historical and anti-historical nature of bourgeois reification thought from the negative aspect, but also rediscovered the connotation of the buried historical concept from the positive aspect, and Lukacs took his redefinition of history as the ideological weapon of working class to overcome reification.

In Lukacs' reification concept and proletarian consciousness concept, his new concept of history has at least been given two different meanings. The first meaning is that in the practice concept of historical materialism as ontology, it must be historical, so history has acquired some ontological meaning in Lukacs’ mind. In some places, Lukacs explicitly defined history as a certain "origin". The second meaning is that history, or the method of history, itself has the meaning of some methodological principles. On this level, Lukacs regards history as the synonym of dialectics and often used this term interchangeably. Lukács argued that only in true history, only with a truly historical approach, could the methodological limitations of materialistic thinking be overcome, and thus reification can be overcome.

**3.1. Lukacs’ history concept in the sense of ontology**

**Lukacs pointed out that although German classical philosophy (**Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel) **did not solve the problem of reification, it provided many useful clues, one of which was the concept of history.**

Lukacs pointed out that "the new and first appearing entity, that is, the order and connection of things that should be the basis of philosophy, that is, history, in history, and only in history, there is a concrete basis for the origin. The advantage of history lies in that "only the generation of history can truly eliminate the one-to-one independence of things and concepts of things and the resulting rigidity", "it must be pointed out that history is the place to solve all these problems in methodology (referring to the antinomy faced by reified thinking)" and "only the concrete (historical)" generation can play such a role”. (Lukacs)

**3.2. Lukacs: History as methodology is equivalent to dialectics**

Lukacs argues that Marxism has found dialectics in history itself. Lukacs wrote: "Dialectics comes from history itself, and is an inevitable form of expression in this particular stage of development of history, and is recognized by people. " The specific definition of dialectics by Lukacs lies in the following aspects:

**Firstly, the overall (total) thinking is against isolation.**

Dialectics requires the proletariat to grasp history as a whole, so as to eliminate the contingency of reification when the proletariat only understands the object from the direct isolated reality. Lukacs pointed out that "history as a whole is not only the mechanical summation of individual historical events, nor a priori observation principle based on other historical events. The whole history itself is mainly a kind of real historical power, which cannot be separated from the reality of individual facts, cannot eliminate their reality at the same time, that is, their fact itself. "

This further requires that we should not only understand the problems from the isolated atomization of facts, but also based on the relationship between facts, based on the structure formed by this mutual relationship, the essence of history lies in the change of structural form. Therefore, we should not only understand the problem from the partial-local point of view, but also see the mutual connection between the parts and the overall independent significance formed on this connection.

**Second, intermediary (dolayımlı) thinking, against directness.**

The understanding of the whole requires the help of intermediary, we should not approach just from the direct reality of intuition. The significance of intermediary category for history lies in that "historical reality can only be achieved, recognized and described in a complex intermediary process". On the contrary, the thinking mode of meta intermediary must be to understand history as a direct existence without process, thus having the nature of non-history and anti-history, the bourgeoisie has obvious defects in using the intermediary category.

Due to the lack of intermediary, the bourgeoisie can only understand things from the directly given appearances, thus capitalist class turns its position into a pure direct position. The principle that should be interpreted through intermediary cannot be understood directly, so it has to be raised to "value" unilaterally. As a result, the bourgeoisie cannot grasp history as history, especially bourgeoisie cannot grasp the history of the world. **"This inability of the** bourgeoisie **divides into two extremes: one is the" great, genius individuals "as the creator of history, and the other is the" natural law "of historical environment. "**

**Thirdly, we should grasp things as the process of generation and oppose the solidification of time.**

Dialectical thinking requires us to grasp the truth as a process and grasp the direct reality as the specific link of the process from the overall flow, understand the truth as constant new and changing process. The premise of the proletariat's transcendence of the directness of its existence lies in the fact that things can be proved to be a link in the process of integration. Lukacs pointed out clearly that in Marx's dialectical process, the objective form of the object itself is transformed into a flowing process, and further explains that "generation is expressed as the truth of existence, and the process is expressed as the truth of things The tendency of historical development constitutes a higher reality than empirical facts As soon as this (rigid) reality dissolves into a process whose driving force is human beings, the picture immediately becomes full of meanings.

**Fourthly, the subject-object relationship is established on the basis of practice.**

That is, for Lukacs history can only be a process of human and humanization. That is, history can only be a human, humanizing process. The most fundamental requirement and destination of the dialectic for overcoming objectification lies in the discovery of the essential power of the human being from the appearance of the immediacy of objectification, and the real overcoming of objectification in practice, so that the proletariat, as the subject and object of social history, exists as one and the same being.

**Firstly, the social relations of capitalism exist in the direct form of objects and conceal the social relations of human beings behind them.** The greatest historical characteristic of capitalism is the transformation of human relations into purely social relations, but the bourgeoisie, due to the influence of commodity fetishism, still understands human social relations in terms of objectification. The proletariat is at the heart of this process of socialization, but it is indeed the most extreme form of materialistic existence that proletariat suffers from. Therefore, to return to the human being from the appearance of materialization requires, that we should see within this materialistic form of fetishism the human nature embodied in it, and we should see that this human nature is constantly unfolding in a series of interactions. This discovered relationship between man and man must be clearly defined, otherwise there is still a risk of returning to the abstract opposition of materialistic thinking, as we have seen in Feuerbach's anthroposophy and in the "humanitarianism" in general.

Chapter 4. The non historicism characteristics and the real reasons behind Lukacs' reification thought on the concept of history

However, Lukacs's above-mentioned historical method has its own inherent contradiction. Although Lukacs claims to be using a historical approach to eliminate the methodological shortcomings of reified thought, the solution path Lukacs points out for overcoming reification is presented in an ahistorical way.

Firstly, Lukács understands history not as it is really understood from the perspective of historical materialism, and thus Lukacs cannot find the real subject which will overcome reification. In Lukács' understanding, it is the totality that is required to eliminate the isolation and atomization of the idea of reification. Lukács argues that history with its generative nature can meet this requirement, and thus Lukacs defines history as a "real entity". At the same time, the demand for the elimination of objectification can only be put forward by the proletariat, which is gradually awakening to achieve its class consciousness, in a society of generalized objectification, i.e., the capitalist society, and thus the proletariat is the main actor of the elimination of objectification. Capitalist society and its history are themselves the creations of the proletariat, as a result the proletariat and history become a dualistic structure of entity and subject. Lukács described this structure explicitly on several occasions.

This is where the problem lies. Through this Hegelian discourse, it is not difficult to see that Lukács is merely replacing the Hegel’s mysterious "absolute spirit" with the reality of the "proletariat," but despite the change in terminology, this is fundamentally nothing more than the transformation of the original flesh-and-blood history, which is supported by concrete and objective material content, into an empty dialectic of subject-object relations. The fundamental cause of reification is the self-division of secular society, which is rooted in the practice of labor as the basic content of the production of material means of life. The history concept that Lukács thought he had found could be the origin of generativity, but in fact it was still only a dance on the table and did not touch the real roots of history.

第二， 与卢卡奇自身所竭力提示的历史性要求相反， 他所定义的无产阶级消除物化的进程， 也是非历史的。的确， 卢卡奇正确地指出， 历史是在时间当中的、历时态的存在， 从这样的要求出发， 必然会提出各历史阶段出现的必然性和历史的合理性。但是， 他却没有按照这样的要求深人到对物化和资本主义社会的追问中， 更没有进入对无产阶级克服物化的实践在何种历史条件下何以可能的问题。资本主义制度作为一种社会制度， 本身也是历史发展的结果， 虽然出现了普遍的物化， 使物的关系成为联系甚至决定人的关系的纽带和根据， 但是相对其之前的以血缘宗法关系为纽带的社会形态中， 人的活动所受到的限制尤其是自然关系的束缚， 物化却意味着人的活动所受到的自然的直接性的限制有所削弱， 因为" 物" 毕竟是作为人的创造物而存在。因而， 资本主义的历史的进步性和合理性， 并不能因为无产阶级自身的价值诉求便被抹杀。结果， 对无产阶级的出场背景界定不清， 导致了无产阶级何以克服物化、在什么样的历史阶段上克服物化这些问题也没有得到解决。

**Secondly, contrary to the historical requirements that Lukacs himself suggested, the process of eliminating reification by the proletariat as defined by him is also non-historical.**

Indeed, Lukács rightly points out that history is a temporal, ephemeral existence, and from such situation a demand comes the inevitability of the emergence of historical phases and the rationality of history. However, Lukacs does not follow such a demand to go deeper into the question of reification and capitalist society, let alone he does not go deeper into the question of the historical conditions under which the proletariat's practice of overcoming materialization is possible.

The capitalist system, as a social system, is itself the result of historical progress and development, and although there is a widespread reification in the capitalist society, and although due to this widespread reification the relationship between things has become the link and even became basis for connecting and even determining the relationship between people in the capitalist society, it is a progress compared to previous social forms. But compared to the previous social forms in which people were linked by blood and clan relationships (personal dependency relationship), in the previous social forms (feudalism and others) human activities were limited, especially limited by the constraints of natural relationships, on the other hand objectification/reification in the capitalist society means that the natural and direct limitations on human activities are weakened, because after all "things" in this capitalist society exist as human creations.

Therefore, the historical progress and rationality of capitalism cannot be obliterated by the proletariat's own value claims. As a result, in Lukacs the background of the proletariat’s appearance is not clearly defined, leading to the unresolved problems of how the proletariat overcomes reification and at what historical stage can the proletariat overcome reification.

**Thirdly, since because Lukács’ history concept is only a speculative binary structure of proletariat-history and subject-object, behind the complete human value that Lukacs tried to highlight through his reified society concept, the man proposed as the goal of overcoming reification is exactly split.**

Since in Lukacs the history of man and man cannot be really attributed to the practice with the production of material means as the content, Lukacs's concepts of man and thing; thinking and existence; freedom and necessity all become empty concepts, and form a hard binary opposition in terms of concept.

Since because the above concepts cannot be truly attached to the history as an entity and cannot be dialectically united, one concept in the binary have to overwhelm the other concept in this binary; as well as we are forced to use abstract proletarian values (such as overcoming reification) to oppose the existence of facts (such as the historical inevitability of capitalism and rationality of capitalism). Therefore, in this split binary structure, it becomes impossible to find a realistic path to overcome reification.

There are many reasons for Lukács' failure when he proposed his concept of history, but fundamentally speaking, his failure lies in the starting point of the problem Lukacs discussed, that is, the connotation of the concept of reification itself, was not clear enough.

**Here below, I just tried to discuss this:**

物化有两种情况， 一种是对象化的物化， 一种是异化的物化。作为对象化的物化， 本身是人的活动得以展开的必要条件， 作为人的内在能力的外部展现， 不仅不是对人的否定， 反而是对人的肯定， 因而是必需的。同时， 关于异化， 也应当从两个层面上来理解。第一是社会关系的物化、异化。物质生活资料的生产水平以及在此基础之上形成的经济结构的发展状况， 决定了一定历史时期内具体的社会关系形式， 并且必然会以某种物的形式表现出来。这种以物的形式表现的人与人之间的社会关系， 一旦出现就会逐渐成为一种独立于人的并且反过来支配人的社会力量， 从一定意义上， 这与我们通常所说的" 社会历史发展规律" 有交集， 因而是在历史中具体存在的人所不能超越的， 其存在本身也是具有其历史的合理性的。这一层面上的异化， 也不是可以抽象的加以克服的， 而只能在历史的发展过程中， 随着社会生产力的进步， 不断地改变形式， 在作为" 史前史" 的共产主义社会之前的诸社会形态中， 也是必然存在的， 无法克服的。第二是社会权力同人的相异化， 比如在资本主义社会中创造出来的巨大的社会生产力， 由于资本主义生产资料私有制的存在， 不仅不能够发挥出原先应有的促进社会成员尤其是其创造者一一工人全面发展的作用， 相反， 在某种程度上成为压榨、剥削工人的手段， 在经济危机期间， 甚至成为巨大的破坏性力量， 与人相对立。而这种社会权力的异化， 与社会关系的异化是有所不同的。马克思在《资本论》中便明确提出， 要注意机器和机器的资本主义使用方式之间的区别。而这种异化， 是可以通过一定的历史主体的活动加以改变的， 从这种意义上看， 是可以克服的异化。

There are two kinds of reification, one is reification of the objectification (Vergegenstaendlichung), the second is reification of alienation (Entfremdung).

First one, reification, as objectification, is the necessary condition for the development of human activities. As an external manifestation of human's internal abilities, it is not only a negation of human beings, but also an affirmation of human beings and therefore it is necessary.

**The second one, i.e., alienation (Entfremdung) should be understood from two levels:**

**The first is the reification (objectification) and alienation of social relations.**

The production level of the material means of life and the development of the economic structure formed on this basis determine the concrete form of social relations during a certain historical period, and they will inevitably be expressed in the form of certain things. This kind of social relationship between man and man in the form of things once it appears will gradually become a social force independent of people and in turn will dominate people. In a certain sense, this intersects with what we often refer to as the "laws of social and historical development". Therefore, they cannot be surpassed by the concrete people who exist concretely in history, and the existence of these relations themselves have their historical rationality.

The alienation at this level cannot be overcome in an abstract way (in mind). But instead, only the form of alienation changes in the process of historical development and with the progress of social productive forces. And alienation is inevitable and insurmountable in the various social forms before reaching the Communist society, Marx called these social forms as "prehistoric history".

**The second level is the alienation of social power from human beings.**

For example, huge social productive forces are created in capitalist society, but due to the existence of private ownership of capitalist means of production, it is not only unable to play its role of promoting the all-round development of the members of society, especially unable to promote the all-round development of its creators—the workers, but on the contrary, development of huge social productive forces become a means of squeezing and exploiting workers to a certain extent and during the economic crisis, they even become a huge destructive force against people, opposite to human beings. The alienation of social power is different from the alienation of social relations. In “Das Kapital”, Marx clearly pointed out that we should pay attention to the difference between machines and the capitalist use of the machines. **This second level of alienation as the alienation of social power from human beings,** can be changed through the activities of certain historical subjects, in this sense, it is an alienation that can be overcome.

Lukacs did not make the necessary distinction on the above-mentioned two levels of objectification/ reification, but talked about reification vaguely, and discussed the problem in general terms without grasping the difference between the historical rationality/legitimacy of objectification/ reification and its negative influence, thus Lukacs only simply opposed objectification/reification in a general manner.

Therefore, Lukacs could not really enter into the real basis of history, instead he speculatively constructed an identity of two-histories of the **proletariat, thus he vainly tried to attempt to overcome** the binary oppositions between man and things, between thought and existence, between freedom and necessity which was constructed by Lukacs in his mind. Thus, finally Lukacs fell in to a situation wherein he advocated historical thinking on the one hand but anti-history and non-history on the other, thus his effort to overcome objectification/reification in this way, becomes impossible.

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