**Niu Ziniu: The Reproduction of Labor Subjectivity under the Logic of Capital: Lukacs, Kojève, Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze, Negri, Boutang**

**February 2024**

**Source: Marxism and Reality, Issue 6, 2023**

**Author: Lecturer at the School of Philosophy, Nankai University**

**Summary**

**The subject problem is a key issue in Western Marxism. The "Weberian Marxism" pioneered by Lukacs emphasized the negation and alienation of the subjectivity of workers in the process of rationalized labor, and Lukacs emphasized the suppression of the worker's personality by the identity of the value form.**

**This idea was absorbed and utilized by neoliberalism around the 1970s , but it cannot explain some new phenomena in contemporary capitalism. In view of this, thinkers such as Althusser, Foucault, and Deleuze raised the issue of "subject reproduction" under the logic of capital, and began to pay attention to the inherent collusion ( secret cooperation) between labor subjectivity and capital, as well as these thinkers studied the power mechanism used by capital to produce specific subjectivity.**

**Their understanding of capital power clearly shows a trend from "negation" to "affirmation". However, contemporary Western Marxism has failed to fully implement the affirmative understanding of capital power, so that it has fallen into excessive optimism on the issue of workers' liberation.**

**Text Begins Here**

The subject problem is a key issue in the study of Marxist philosophy, and its development is deeply influenced by Western Marxist thought. Through a Hegelian interpretation of Marxist philosophy, Lukacs placed class consciousness, that is, the problem of the revolutionary subject, at the center of Marxist philosophy, and set the alienation or reification of the subject as the theme of Marx's critical theory, which profoundly influenced the thinking of the Western left such as the Frankfurt School, thus Lukacs indirectly contributed to the formation of the "subject-object reversal" paradigm in the study of Marxist philosophy in China. According to this paradigm, the core of Marx's critique of capital lies in the usurpation of the subjectivity of workers by capital, the alienation or objectification of workers by capital, and the liberation of workers lies in the restoration and reconstruction of their class subjectivity.

However, the new changes in contemporary capitalism have posed a severe challenge to the above ideas: the strengthening of the subjectivity of workers has not only failed to promote the liberation of workers, but has caused the deterioration of their situation.

On the one hand, the development of trends such as the flexibility of the labor process, the cognition of labor content, and the elasticity of the labor market has highly highlighted the subjectivity of workers; on the other hand, phenomena such as the stagnation of real wages, the decline of trade union power, the extension of working hours, and the increase in labor intensity indicate that the working class is more dominated than before. This has made Western Marxists begin to realize that there may be a profound implicit conspiracy between the development of workers' subjectivity and the rule of capital.

To this end, since the 1960s , Western Marxists have constructed a theory of labor subject reproduction under the logic of capital, trying to grasp the inherent connection between workers' subjectivity and capital power. Examining the above situation of Western Marxism is helpful to reflect on the existing model of Chinese Marxist philosophy research and better grasp the special reality of contemporary capitalism.

**1. “Weberian Marxism” and the subject theory**

Western Marxism's research on the subject problem can be traced back to Lukacs, the founder of this trend of thought. Lukacs combined the Hegelian interpretation of Marx's philosophy with Weber's rationalization theory to construct a revolutionary theory based on class consciousness and a critical theory based on the category of reification, which profoundly influenced the Frankfurt School in Germany, the French neo-Hegelianism and other left-wing schools of thought. Merleau - Ponty summarized the above ideas as "Weberian Marxism", accurately grasping its key points. This line of thought laid the foundation for the main model of Western Marxism's thinking on the subject problem, but it also faces severe challenges in the new changes of contemporary capitalism.

Lukacs argued that in developed capitalist society, the commodity form is a unified form for constructing all social relations. This form reaches its peak in the commodification of labor, that is, the reification or objectification of human beings themselves. On this basis, Lukacs grafted Marx's commodity form theory with Weber's rationalization theory, pointing out that the main characteristics of the reified form are rationality, precision and calculability, thus establishing a connection between the commodity form and the rationalized labor process.

As a result, workers are understood as objects that are precisely calculated in the rationalization process; the ruling power of capital over workers is reflected in the power of the commodity form to reify or objectify workers. In contrast, the liberation of workers lies in getting rid of this objectified (reified) situation and restoring their own subjectivity, that is, forming a class consciousness of "subject-object" as a historical whole. From the perspective of historical materialism, this theory is compatible with Taylorist capitalism in the 20th century. In the mid- 20th century, with the widespread implementation of Taylorism, scientific management method and Fordism, the knowledge and skills of workers were gradually alienated to machines, which made the subject-object reversal between labor and capital, the objectification of workers, and the bureaucratization of capitalist industry particularly was prominent. This situation was correctly expressed in Lukacs' theory of reification.

This paradigm of interpretation initiated by Lukacs later gradually became the dominant problem consciousness of early Western Marxism.

In the first generation of scholars of the Frankfurt School, Lukacs's theory was transformed into a critique of the society of comprehensive control and instrumental rationality, and acquired a pure philosophical form in Adorno's negative dialectics of criticizing identity with non-identity.

**"The name of dialectics means nothing more than that objects cannot enter concepts completely without leaving a residue, which contradicts the traditional principle of sufficiency. Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism distorts it into: it is not the essence in the sense of Heraclitus. It refers to the non-truth of identity and the fact that concepts cannot exhaust what they conceive."**

In Marcuse's works, this idea developed into the opposition between civilization and love, "one-dimensional man" and repressed unconscious desire, which had a huge impact on the revolutionary movement in the West in the 1960s and 1970s .

According to this line of thought, the criticism of identity by non-identity is consistent with the resistance of subjectivity to objectivity: to resist the uniform and rigid bureaucratic system, it is necessary to liberate the suppressed desires full of individual differences. Influenced by this line of thought, the Marxist philosophy research in China often understands the essence of capital logic as the unification and abstraction of value forms, and the consequences of the universal development of capital logic as abstract rule and the impoverishment of the world of meaning; in contrast, the sign of the liberation of human subjectivity from the rule of capital is also understood as the full development of human creativity and the re-enrichment of human world of meaning.

However, according to the viewpoint in the above, the critical line of thought initiated by Lukacs is aimed at a special form of capitalism, namely, industrial capitalism that reached its peak in the Fordist system in the mid -20th century, which cannot represent the general laws of capital logic.

Specifically, only in Fordist capitalism, due to the need for large-scale production of standardized products, will the organizational form of capitalism manifest as a developed bureaucracy, various social systems will show signs of being highly fixed and rigid, and the labor process will become a uniform one-dimensional process. However, these characteristics are not the inevitable inference of the essential laws of capital logic, nor are they the common characteristics of other stages of capitalism. Early Western Marxism directly linked this special form with the general value form, and even with the entire history of Western rationality, thus exaggerating it into the general form of capitalism.

More importantly, as some scholars have pointed out, when Lukacs deduced from the commodity form to the rationalized labor process, Lukacs used Weber's rationalization theory, not Marx's capital increase theory, as the intermediary. This line of thought of Lukacs bypassed Marx's essential definition of the logic of capital and created a "short circuit" between the commodity form and the labor process.

In Marx’s Capital, the discussion on the rationalization of the labor process belongs to the historical analysis from the manual workshop to the large-scale machine industry, which in turn belongs to the theory of relative surplus value.

In other words, for Marx the rationalized labor process is not directly based on the commodity form, and the two must be mediated by the theory of capital increase and the theory of relative surplus value. According to the exposition of Capital, the premise for the establishment of the value form of commodities is the universal movement of capital increase, and capital increase requires the exploitation of the surplus value created by labor. In developed capitalist society, the increase of surplus value mainly depends on the production of relative surplus value: through the rationalization of the labor process, the productivity of necessities of life increases, the unit value decreases, and the reproduction cost of labor skills also decreases, which leads to a decrease in the value of labor and an increase in the proportion of surplus value in the total value. It can be seen that in Marx's view, the rationalization of the labor process is the requirement for producing relative surplus value, that is, the requirement of the "special rationality" of the capital growth movement, rather than the general requirement of modern rationality. However, early Western Marxism just ignored this point and simply grafted the rationalization of the capitalist labor process with modern instrumental rationality.

Because early Western Marxism bypassed Marx's essential provisions on the logic of capital, namely, the movement of capital appreciation and the production of surplus value, its criticism of capitalism can only hit the empirical phenomena of a specific era, but cannot hit the essential connection between this phenomenon and the logic of capital.

This criticism by early Western Marxism fails to see that both the unifying power of the value form and the unifying appearance of the rationalized labor process are based on the movement of capital appreciation. However, the principle of capital appreciation is not identity, but a certain non-identity: it will not stay at the same value, but will constantly pursue "more" than the current value, constantly differ from itself, and thus constantly create something new and different that did not exist before. Only under the drive of this endless desire to constantly surpass itself, will the unifying appearance of the value form be expanded on all things, and the rationalization of the labor process will be pushed to the point of being penny-pinching. In this sense, the crux of capitalist society is not identity, but non-identity itself: it is not abstract poverty, but deformed excess; it is not that things that should exist do not exist, but that things that should not exist exist too much.

**The above-mentioned mistakes of "Weberian Marxism" directly lead to its deviation in the position on the subject.**

It associates identity with the suppression of subjectivity by the rationalized labor process, and associates non-identity with the liberation of multiple subjectivities. This critical path is certainly meaningful in resisting the rigidification of society in the era of industrial capitalism, but it only focuses on the empirical phenomena of this special period, so it is in collusion (secret cooperation) with the essential laws of capital logic. In fact, the liberation of the subject based on non-identity just meets the requirements of capital growth, because capital growth is originally realized through a non-identical subject, that is, the subject of surplus labor. The production of surplus value is possible only when the subject can pay labor beyond its own needs, that is, not only necessary labor but also surplus labor. In this sense, non-identity and subjectivity are indeed consistent; but this consistency does not lie in the hope of liberation from the rule of capital, but in the fact that they are both internal links of capital power itself.

It can be seen that the theoretical strategy of "Weberian Marxism" is impossible to succeed.

It understands the general characteristics of capitalism as identity and reification, and criticizes and resists it based on non-identity and subjectivity, but fails to see that non-identity and subjectivity are precisely the requirements of the essential law of capital logic, and identity and reification are only the manifestations of this essential law in a special period. Therefore, this theoretical strategy contains double risks from the beginning: on the one hand, Weberian Marxism’s criticism of the special form of capitalism is disconnected from the essential law of capital logic, and it is likely to affect those social organizations that do not belong to capitalism but show similar characteristics, thus "accidentally hurting friendly forces"; on the other hand, Weberian Marxism’s liberation plan is only conceived for the special stage of capitalism. This plan is not only unable to resist general capitalism, but is likely to conform to the requirements of capitalism's own transformation to the next stage and meet the need for capitalism to "self-adjust" in the face of its stage contradictions.

Judging from the actual development of history, the objective effect brought about by "Weberian Marxism" is indeed the case.

First, Weberian Marxism’s criticism of capitalism is aimed at rationalization and bureaucracy, not targets the capital growth itself.

This criticism also affects trade unions and welfare states that adopt bureaucracy, the socialist countries in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and even mainly falls on the latter "friendly forces" that belong to the left camp. Secondly, its liberation strategy is to restore the subjectivity of workers and the differences imprisoned by the same value form. However, in the 1960s and 1970s when capitalism gradually turned to neoliberalism , the release of this subjectivity and difference is exactly what capitalism itself needs most.

Neoliberal capitalism destroys the unity of trade unions and workers' organizations, disintegrates the industrial assembly line that closely combines a large number of workers, and reconstructs the labor process into a decentralized and flexible form, thereby weakening the resistance of the working class. Neoliberal capitalism also cultivates differentiated consumer demand, shapes a labor ethic that encourages individual self-realization, exacerbates the division within the working class, and creates suitable labor and consumer subjects for neoliberalism.

"Weberian Marxism" has had a profound influence on the social revolutionary movements in the West since 1968 , determining the conservative nature of these movements under their radical appearance. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello pointed out in The New Spirit of Capitalism:

**This period was in fact characterized by the rise of various "new social movements" (feminism, homosexuality, ecology and anti-nuclear movements, etc.), characterized by the gradual dominance of anti-communist, pro-autonomous tendencies on the left, and the severe criticism of communism throughout the 1980s . The analytical categories of totalitarianism were applied to the analysis of communism without the resistance they had met in the 1950s or 1960s . In France, since social criticism was closely linked to the communist movement, the discrediting of the communist movement meant that social criticism temporarily but openly abandoned the economic field. Under the attack of esthetic artistic criticism, the company was reduced to a repressive institution like the state, the army, the school and the family; the struggle against bureaucracy and for labor autonomy replaced the concern for economic equality and the security of the most deprived.**

It can be seen from this that the early Western Marxist critique of capitalism was actually a critique of the superficial commonalities between capitalism and socialism, and sometimes even turned into a critique of socialism; rather than saying that it dealt a blow to capitalism, it is better to say that it was absorbed and utilized by capitalism. This failure of "Weberian Marxism" highlights that in order to think about the subject problem from the perspective of Marxist philosophy, it is necessary to distinguish the special manifestations of capitalism in a certain period from the essential laws of capital logic, and to examine the transformation of the subject in the staged evolution of capitalism; it is necessary to consider not only the subject's resistance to capital, but also the subject's inherent collusion (secret cooperation) with capital. These two points have been clearly reflected in Western Marxism since the 1960s.

**2. The Positive Nature of Power: Western Marxism**

**A critique of labor subjectivity under the logic of capital**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s , the Western world was on the eve of neoliberal changes, and this reality profoundly influenced the development of Western Marxism. The way neoliberalism reconstructed capital power was not to strengthen regulation, but to relax it; not to prohibit and force, but to allow and encourage; not to strengthen the identity of the whole society, but to create flexibility and differences everywhere; not to turn people into "things" like machine parts, but to encourage people to "realize themselves" and "be themselves".

In other words, in the era of neoliberalism, the operation of capital power has gone beyond the traditional negative appearance and has shown unprecedented positive characteristics; this power is not limited to suppressing and denying subjectivity, but on the other hand, it is to create, stimulate, promote and even indulge subjectivity.

This made left-wing thinkers realize that there is a profound collusion (secret cooperation) between the strengthening of workers' subjectivity and the deepening of capital power. Critical theory cannot stick to the old concept of "Weberian Marxism" and understand capital power as capital's negation of workers' subjectivity. Otherwise, it is very likely that the new power technology will bypass the inspection of critical theory in the name of "freedom" and "liberation".

In view of this, since the 1960s, Western Marxists have raised the issue of "labor subject reproduction" under the logic of capital. This issue runs through topics such as ideology theory, power theory, and biopolitics theory, showing a clear trend of positive understanding of power. For them the question is not about how capital power denies and suppresses the subjectivity of workers, but how this power produces specific labor subjectivity.

This line of thought can be traced back to Alexandre Kojève. In his Hegel seminar, Kojève argued that Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is a kind of philosophical anthropology, which discusses the process of self-consciousness gradually forming through mutual recognition, which is also the process of the subject being generated through "desiring the desire of others". This explanation implicitly coincides with Marx's understanding of commodity society: in commodity exchange, "each person can only achieve his own goals as a means for another person", so commodity society has the general structure of "desiring the desire of others". Therefore, the role of "the desire of others" in the disintegration and reconstruction of subjectivity has a strong explanatory power for the problem of subject generation under the logic of capital.

**Althusser**

This theoretical theme was linked to Marx's capital theory in Althusser through the help of mediation of Lacan. Althusser distinguished between two different senses of subjectivity: one is the subject of revolutionary political action, for Althusser the subject of revolutionary political action is a blank position to be occupied by the comparison of multiple forces; in addition, there is an "ideological subject" that is dominated by capital and embedded in the operation of capital.

Although it is in a dominated position, it still has the qualifications of a subject. In fact, the particularity of the capitalist mode of domination lies precisely in the fact that it is more effective to rule people as subjects and through their subjectivity than to rule them as objects: "As long as people understand that morality requires a self-conscious subject, that is, a subject who is responsible for his own behavior, then people can make themselves accept the obligation to obey norms-this is much more "economical" than imposing norms on people through violence."

The reproduction of this specific subjectivity is a necessary link in the capitalist reproduction process.

Althusser argues that capitalist reproduction can be decomposed into the reproduction of production conditions and the reproduction of production relations, and the reproduction of production conditions must include the reproduction of labor power, that is, the reproduction of the labor subject. On this issue, Marx only explained the reproduction of the physical life of the workers through the wage theory, but did not explain how the specific subjectivity of the workers, that is, their docile character, is reproduced. Therefore, it is necessary to create a special labor subject reproduction theory as a necessary supplement to Marx's capital theory. In Althusser's view, the reproduction of the labor subject is completed by a state machine: the ideological subject is the "inquiry" product of the ideological state machine. In Althusser's view, if it is not through this mechanism, the workers cannot become subjects in the true sense.

Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatus marks a profound change in ideological theory and subject philosophy, which is necessary to understand the operating mechanism of capitalism. The subject understood by modern philosophy is first of all the subject of consciousness, and Marx's criticism of ideology is first of all a criticism of this idealist philosophy, so ideology is often understood as false consciousness.

However, Althusser did not understand ideology in the sense of consciousness philosophy, but pointed out that "ideology has a material existence." Ideology is "the 'representation' of the imaginary relationship between individuals and their real living conditions." The subject understands its own real situation through this relationship and acts accordingly. Although this relationship is imaginary, since the subject lives in reality and takes real actions through this relationship, this relationship has a "material" real existence. In other words, the imaginary relationship between the subject and reality participates in the construction of reality itself.

Althusser's ideology theory helps to define the labor subject reproduction mechanism under the logic of capital in an affirmative way. Based on the criticism of the philosophy of consciousness, the traditional ideology theory tends to regard the reproduction of the labor subject as a secondary issue belonging to the category of social consciousness, and understands it as a negative mechanism for bourgeois ideology to "deceive" or "buy" workers. However, Althusser's concept of ideology "has a material existence". It cannot be attributed to the "deceptive" effect of false consciousness, but is more fundamentally based on the social relationship structure that constrains the real actions of workers. It can influence the actions of workers through positive ways such as production, guidance and even motivation. Ideology in this sense does not cover up the capitalist production relations but is a link in the production relations themselves. Ideology ensures the smooth operation of capitalist production relations by calling people as specific subjects. This realistic concept of ideology provides a possibility to establish a connection between subject theory and political economics criticism. **It can be seen that Althusser's concept of ideology is very realistic and very different from traditional ideology theory.**

**Foucault**

Foucault further radicalized this idea, abandoned the ambiguous concept of ideology, and developed the subject theory into power theory or biopolitical theory. Foucault proposed in texts such as Truth and the Form of Right that although Marx was critical of national economics, there was a commonality between Marx and national economists, that is, they uncritically regarded labor as the innate nature of man and the natural source of wealth. However, the fact that people become the subject of labor, especially the labor force that produces value, is a historical phenomenon of modern bourgeois society and a constructive product of social power. We should not simply accept this fact, but should ask what kind of power mechanism constructs people into such a subject. Obviously, the subject here is not the subject of revolutionary action, but a subject that obeys a specific social power and can continue to work obediently. The reason why this seemingly fully objectified worker is still understood as a subject is that wage labor requires the worker's active will quality. Negative factors such as hunger, poverty, and coercion are not enough to force landless farmers to become wage workers; on the contrary, wage labor requires positive factors such as workers' willingness to work, hardworking character, and professional responsibility, all of which need to be constructed from scratch in workers. In Foucault's view, the dual meaning of the word "subject" in Western languages ​​already implies this ambiguous situation: this word means both "subject, subject" and "obey, submit to", which means that "becoming a subject" has always been the result of "submitting to power", and power itself cannot exist without the subject.

Based on the above problem consciousness, Foucault carefully examined the formation of labor subjects in early capitalist society. Foucault studied various subject production mechanisms in British cities in the mid -19th century, such as the punishment system, legal-moral discourse, medical and criminological discourse, and Foucault explained how they constructed the urban poor into subjects capable of continuous labor. Foucault specifically pointed out that the objects of these mechanisms are active elements such as "the body, desire, and needs of workers", and their ultimate result is to internalize the requirements of capital for labor into the moral requirements of the workers themselves: they "require a strict, high-intensity, and continuous labor - in short, the moral qualities of workers". This once again shows that the reproduction mechanism of the labor subject is absolutely necessary for capitalism, and it needs to transform the desire for capital's proliferation into the spontaneous desire and ethical responsibility of the workers.

After that, Foucault discussed the issue of neoliberal subject reproduction in texts such as The Birth of Biopolitics. In neoliberal society, workers are not only constructed as labor subjects, but also as investment subjects or entrepreneurs: "The economic man here no longer refers to a party in the exchange. The economic man is an entrepreneur, his own entrepreneur." In this case, the subjectivity of the workers has undergone a significant "capitalization": the workers understand and arrange themselves according to the rules of action of capital, and understand their own activities as investments in human capital. The workers are not only subjects who engage in repetitive labor driven by capital, but also self-renewing and self-shaping self-subjects like capital. Of course, this does not mean that the workers have capital or have gained freedom from the rule of capital, but only means that the requirements of capital reproduction are embedded in the subjectivity of the workers, and the workers spontaneously cooperate with the reproduction of capital and regard it as their own will.

In summary, there is a clear theoretical clue about the production of capitalist subjects in the left-wing thought of the European continent since the 1960s . Starting from the theory of ideology, this clue breaks away from the philosophy of consciousness presupposed by traditional ideological theory, and turns to explore the objective mechanism that constrains the actual actions of workers in capitalist society. Along this line, the understanding of power in Western left-wing thought has been constantly transitioning from negativity to affirmation, in order to clarify why the subject's own initiative has become a link in the power of capital. Foucault was very clear about the necessity of this "affirmative" turn for understanding capitalist society: **"We try to free ourselves from a legal and negative expression of power, refusing to think about power in terms of law, taboo, freedom and monarchy... It is more complex and more affirmative than a single "prohibition" effect."**

However, Foucault's understanding of capitalist subject production also has certain flaws. Although Foucault has realized that a positive concept of power is necessary, his so-called "disciplinary power" still has a certain negativity because it operates through punishment, discipline, isolation, confinement, etc. This kind of power can only produce obedient workers who follow the rules, but it is difficult to produce hardworking subjects with internal enthusiasm. According to Marx's definition, capital is "an unlimited and endless desire that seeks to transcend its own limits", a kind of self-affirmation that is constantly repeated and strengthened; accordingly, the power used by capital to produce labor subjects should also be completely positive, that is, in the form of "desire production". This subject production as desire production was first elaborated in the works of Gilles Deleuze.

**3. Deleuze’s Theory of Desiring Subject and Its contemporary development**

In Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze equates general capitalist production with desire production: "Desire is the order of production, and all production is simultaneously desire production and social production." In this way, Deleuze goes beyond the production of material products such as commodities, money, and means of production, and directly defines the object of capitalist production as a certain subjective element (i.e., desire).

As Jason Reed, an American Deleuze researcher, said, **"The special position of Deleuze and Guattari is to reject all those intermediaries and hierarchies that connect and separate economy and subjectivity."**

This stipulation hits the mark of Marx’s insight into the essence of capitalism, namely, that capitalism is fundamentally the production of subjects and relations between subjects: **“Society itself, that is, men themselves in social relations, always appears as the final result of the social production process. Everything with a fixed form, such as products, etc., appears in this movement only as elements, as transient elements.”**

Today, this essence of capitalism is directly manifested in daily experience: human reproduction activities, such as consumption, learning, entertainment, communication, etc., have become indistinguishable from the sphere of production; the “products” of capitalism are increasingly manifested as human relations and men themselves, and all areas of social life have become places for capital proliferation, forming a “desire machine” in which “everything is produced.”

**Deleuze**

In order to define capitalist production as the production of desire, Deleuze first changed the concept of desire itself and reversed the negative understanding of desire. Contemporary French philosophy often stands on the basis of Kojeve and Lacan, and understands desire in a negative way: desire is the "constitutive lack" caused by the original loss of "object a ", and the subjectivity based on this is an empty impossibility. However, this negative concept of desire is at most only applicable to people's desire for consumption, not to the desire for capital proliferation. Capital proliferation does not occur because of some kind of scarcity; on the contrary, it is a process of producing value with value, a spiral upward process with itself as its purpose. It does not lack any external object (such as a use value), but starts from itself and affirms itself to a greater extent. Therefore, Deleuze focused on criticizing Lacan's negative concept of desire in Anti-Oedipus, thereby defining desire production as positive. "Desire lacks nothing, it does not lack its object."

**This positive definition of capital desire also implies new concepts of value and labor, thus redefining the structure of the labor subject.**

First, surplus value, as what capital desires, cannot be defined as an external object that capital lacks, that is, it cannot be defined as an increment or difference in the amount of value: **" [ Surplus value ] should not be defined as the difference between labor and the value created by labor, but should be defined by the incommensurability between two mutually internal flows (i.e., capital and labor - author's note)..."**

That is to say, there is not only a quantitative difference between surplus labor and necessary labor, but also a qualitative difference; the positive definition of surplus value requires that the relationship between capital and labor be defined as a qualitative relationship, which shapes a labor with a new qualitative definition, namely surplus labor, through a specific power mechanism. This qualitative definition of surplus labor is consistent with Marx's understanding of surplus labor in the Marx’s Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858: **"Necessary labor time is labor for pure use value , for life. Surplus working day is labor for exchange value, for wealth."** Here, Marx did not define necessary labor and surplus labor as two different quantities of labor, but as two different types of labor with different purposes: surplus labor not only exceeds necessary labor in quantity, but also tends to constantly exceed itself in its internal structure.

Since surplus labor is defined as a special quality, rather than just a divisible quantity, Deleuze argues that all labor time in capitalism already has the nature of surplus labor, and the general labor subject has always been the subject of surplus labor. **"Labor only appears when it is accompanied by a surplus construction... (Labor in the proper sense) only occurs when it is accompanied by what we call surplus labor."** For this kind of labor, **"there is no longer a need for a code to guarantee surplus labor, because surplus labor is already mixed with labor itself in the same simple quantity in terms of quality and time."** It can be seen that the mechanism for the generation of surplus labor is not a deprivation mechanism external to the subject, but a structure of desire inherent in the subject. In Deleuze's view, this structure is **"the desire of the poorest creatures, with all their strength, without any economic recognition or misunderstanding, can be invested in the entire capitalist social field."**

In other words, the desire of the proletariat itself, without the mediation of any false consciousness, can spontaneously desire surplus labor, thereby satisfying the requirements of capital reproduction and serving as the energy for capital proliferation. Through this proposition, Deleuze delves into a crucial level of capitalist subject production: capital's desire model must be embedded in the subjectivity of workers, and the labor subject must be able to "desire the desire of capital."

Furthermore, based on the characteristics of the capitalist reproduction process, Deleuze deduced the construction mechanism of its labor subject. The operation of capitalism does not rely on external laws, but on the internal relationship structure; it does not use predetermined rules to control social members, but allows many subjects to form a specific relationship by themselves, thereby developing internal and flexible adjustments to themselves. In Deleuze's terms, the social rules of capitalism are not "coding" but "axioms".

Therefore, the subject reproduction of capitalism does not need to rely on a certain discipline, belief or ideology; it does not need to be mediated by the subject's consciousness, but can directly construct the subject's actions and desires to make them consistent with the desires of capital. The most prominent manifestation of this mechanism is the domination of money: money unifies various desires into the desire for money itself, and establishes a direct quantitative relationship between them, so that the "axioms" of capitalism can automatically operate through equivalent exchange relations. In this way, even if the subject has no identification or belief in capitalism, he will still spontaneously act according to the equivalent exchange relationship. More importantly, in the object of money, the desire of the proletariat is unified with the desire of capital: although the money possessed by the proletariat is only enough to meet the needs of survival and cannot be converted into capital, the homogeneity of the object of money obscures this fundamental difference between the desire of the proletariat and the desire of capital. As a result, the desire of the proletariat to improve its own situation is not realized through class revolution, but through earning money, but this precisely reproduces capitalism itself.

**Deleuze's theory of desire production is an important advancement of Western Marxist subject reproduction theory.**

It has more thoroughly realized the shift from ideology theory to power theory, and from the concept of negative power to the concept of positive power. Since the 21st century, global capitalism has broken through various previous restrictions, incorporated all social fields into its own scope, and turned subjects and the relationship between subjects into production tools and products. This situation has made Deleuze's capital theory timely become the universal discourse of contemporary left-wing thought. In this context, Han Bingzhe made a summary study of the situation of contemporary labor subjects based on Deleuze's basic insights, and introduced this line of thought from France to Germany in the name of spiritual politics. Han Bingzhe argues that the contemporary performance society is different from the past disciplinary society. The main feature of contemporary performance society is not the negativity of power, but the excessive affirmation; the dilemma of contemporary workers is not the frustration of being difficult to become a subject, but the "self-exploitation" imposed on themselves by the excessive subjectivity.

However, Han Bingzhe also criticized the fatal mistake that Deleuze made at the last moment of his theory.

Although Deleuze has understood capital as positive desire production or "general decoding", Deleuze has not fully implemented the positive concept of power and has not completely eliminated the negative concept of power. Therefore, Deleuze hastily attributed the operation of capital power to "re-territorialiser" , that is, the restriction of capital on the possibility of desire. In this way, Deleuze failed to see thoroughly that capital power is fundamentally the ever-expanding desire itself, the release and intensification of desire. Correspondingly, the liberation strategy proposed by Deleuze is to overcome the "re-territorialiser" of capital and he has expanded the "general deterritorialisation" of capital as much as possible.

This is actually advocating the full liberation of capital and the removal of restrictions on capital, hoping that the extreme development of capital will negate itself. However, in the era of the transition of Western countries to neoliberalism, this is exactly what capital itself wants most. It can be seen that Deleuze's subject theory still retains the remnants of the concept of negative power, so it has not been able to avoid the fate of "Weberian Marxism", that is, collusion (secret cooperation) with neoliberalism.

Deleuze's mistake has also profoundly influenced Western left-wing thought in the 21st century, making it overly optimistic that it will help enhance the potential for liberation of workers when faced with the flexible and elastic characteristics of contemporary capitalism.

For example, autonomous Marxism theorists such as Negri argue that contemporary production activities are mainly "biopolitical production", that is, "using subjects to produce subjects", which is a public production based on the free association of workers. This means that for Negri the subordination of labor to capital has degenerated from "actual subordination" to "formal subordination", capital can no longer directly control the labor process, and workers are more likely to get rid of the domination of capital than before. **"We advocate that the empire is better than the previous social form and mode of production, just as Marx argues that capitalism is better than before... The empire eliminated the cruel system of modern power and enhanced the potential for liberation."**

**Cognitive capitalism school**

For another example, the cognitive capitalism school represented by scholars such as French economist Yann Moulier Boutang argues that contemporary production activities are mainly "using knowledge to produce knowledge", and the tools and products of this "cognitive labor" are knowledge itself, so it is impossible to be deprived by capital. Therefore, the labor subject can possess a certain kind of capital and become a "knowledgeable class", which will lead to the weakening or even disappearance of capitalist exploitation.

Although these theories have insight into the characteristics of contemporary capitalism, they obviously repeat the error of "Weberian Marxism", that is, equating capital power with the negation of labor subjectivity and equating the liberation of workers with the restoration of labor subjectivity, but ignoring that this view is only partially reasonable in the era of industrial capitalism.

Therefore, contemporary left-wing thought inevitably ignores another possibility: the enhancement of contemporary workers' subjectivity and the improvement of labor skills do not point to the liberation of workers, but to the contemporary form of labor subordination to capital; these labor skills must be attached to the means of production owned by capital to play a role, and their content has been constructed into a form that is conducive to expanding capital growth and strengthening capital power, thus further strengthening the dependence of labor on capital. As Marx said, **"He is now subject to capitalist production and dominated by capital, not only because he lacks labor materials, but also because of his labor capacity itself, because of the nature and mode of his labor."**

In this case, it is better to say that capital accumulates itself on workers and transfers the cost of fixed capital to workers' investment in their own human capital, rather than saying that workers accumulate capital and gain the potential to resist capital.

**The liberation of labor in the contemporary context**

The above misjudgment of contemporary left-wing thought suggests to us the possibility of re-imagining the liberation of labor in the contemporary context.

**In the neoliberal era, "domination" is carried out in the form of "liberation": the flexible flow of workers, the elasticity and cognition of the labor process, the deepening of human capital ideology, and other trends have made the enhancement of labor subjectivity deeply entangled with the domination of labor by capital.**

This shows that the labor subject constructed by capitalism itself is difficult to directly serve as a political subject against capitalism; we cannot use the general subject category to explain the trajectory of the labor liberation struggle, but it is necessary to distinguish between the subject of wage labor and the subject of political action.

At this point, it is very helpful to reawaken the original problem consciousness of the subject reproduction theory of Western Marxism. As mentioned above, Althusser distinguished the subject of political action from the "ideological subject" under the rule of capital from the very beginning, with the intention of showing that the development of labor subjectivity within capitalism is essentially different from the political organization required for revolutionary action.

At a time when economic contradictions have become highly intensified and other conditions for revolution are in place, the obstacles to revolution may lie precisely in the subjects that the revolution relies on, mobilizes, and liberates: they are the product of the subject reproduction mechanism of capitalism, inherently adapted to the requirements of capital reproduction, and resist revolution with their own will.

Therefore, political actions against capital need to distinguish and discriminate between the two subjects mentioned above, and transform the capitalist "labor subject" into a "political subject" through specific political procedures.

If this link is ignored, then revolutionary action is bound to fail, revolutionary action will be false, or be repetitive. In order to reimagine the possibility of political action and its subject in the contemporary context, it is necessary to frequently evoke the above insights; this is also the important significance of examining the subject reproduction theory of Western Marxism in the contemporary era.