A Review of Latest Ideas by Contemporary Marxist Studies in the West: 10 Major Trends

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 On September 29, 2017, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held the 43rd collective study on contemporary world Marxist thought and its influence. In this collective study Xi Jinping emphasized when presiding over this collective study: "One of the important characteristics of contemporary world Marxist thought is that many of them have made critical revelations about the structural contradictions of capitalism, the contradictions of the mode of production, class contradictions, and social contradictions, and have made in-depth analyses of the capitalist crisis, the evolution of capitalism, and the new form and essence of capitalism. These views help us to correctly understand the development trend and destiny of capitalism, accurately grasp the new changes and new characteristics of contemporary capitalism and deepen our understanding of the changing trends of contemporary capitalism." Since the establishment of foreign Marxist disciplines in the 1980s, China's foreign Marxist research has made great progress. This article intends to summarize the latest development trends of foreign Marxist thought from ten aspects as follows.

1. **Contemporary Ideology Theory and Its “New” Characteristics**

The term "ideology" originally came from the book "The Elements of Ideology" by the French philosopher Destiny de Tracy. In "The German Ideology", Marx and Engels applied this concept to the criticism of modern German philosophy represented by Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. Different from Tracy's neutral connotation of ideology, Marx and Engels mainly used the concept of ideology from the perspective of "false consciousness", referring to the superstructure representing the thoughts of the ruling class. It is determined by social existence, and people are generally not aware of it, but consciously dominated by it, so it has the characteristics of falsehood and unconsciousness. Marx once vividly expressed this characteristic of ideology: "They are not aware of it, but they do it."1

After Marx, Antonio Gramsci, General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, enriched Marx's theory of ideology through the theory of "civil society" and the concept of "cultural hegemony". He compared ideology to the "cement" in the structure of a building, and positioned ideology in the struggle for "cultural hegemony" through "positional warfare". 2

On the basis of inheriting the ideology theory of Marx and Gramsci, Louis Althusser combined with Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and greatly expanded the concept of ideology from three aspects: (1) Ideology is eternal and has no history; (2) Ideology has the function of a state apparatus; (3) The function of ideology is to interpellate individuals as the subject of ideology. 3 The above three points constitute the core of Althusser's ideology theory.

Slavoj Žižek expanded the concept of ideology from the perspective of Freud and Lacan’s “unconsciousness” and expressed it as follows: (1) All ideologies have their own “sublime objects”; (2) Ideology is not just an idea, nor is it just a materialized state apparatus; it is “social reality” itself, but this reality is not “objective” social reality, but a reality composed of “ideological illusions”; (3) The function of ideology is mainly manifested through the form of unconscious pleasure, which is latent in the subject’s “illusion framework”. The subject uses this illusion framework to cover up the traumatic rift, thereby domesticating the subject into an ideological subject. 4 The outstanding contribution of psychoanalytic ideology theory is that it reveals the “misrecognition” mechanism of the subject in ideology, allowing people to peek into the internal logic of the operation of ideology. In other words, “ideological recognition can only succeed when ideology touches the subject’s illusion framework”5.

2. Research on Digital Capitalism and New Imperialism

Digital capitalism is a new form of capitalism in the 21st century entering the digital age. It is the product of the encounter between contemporary capitalism and the modern digital technology revolution. Dan Schiller pointed out that digital capitalism is capitalism in the information age.

First, in the era of digital capitalism, capitalists have intensified their exploitation of capitalism through digital capital, further widening the gap between the rich and the poor. This form of exploitation is achieved through a new form of labor that combines production and consumption: digital labor. In the era of digital capitalism, it is no longer the production labor and real economy of the Marx era that dominate, but digital labor and digital production. Digital labor has become an extension and deepening of capital exploitation. And digital capital can only function through digital network platforms.

Second, digital network platforms constitute the main mode of capitalist operation. From online shopping to daily consumption, from watching idol videos to daily leisure, from daily consumption to capital operation, and even financial warfare and military conflicts, digital technology and network platforms are indispensable. In the era of digital capitalism, everything is "digitalized" and "capitalized". Interpersonal communication, entertainment and leisure, and even emotional exchanges have become the objects of digital capital capture. These daily life activities or emotional exchanges have become a means of making money in the digital age, which shows the power of digital capital. As consumers of digital products, individuals are also providers of digital labor and digital capital.

Third, digital capitalism has not only failed to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor, but has led to the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor on a global scale. The wealth of Microsoft Capital and Apple Capital is the most typical example. In his book Digital Labor and Karl Marx, Christian Fuchs focuses on the digital labor exploitation of global workers and consumers by the capitalist information and communication technology (ICT) industry under the global value chain. On the one hand, due to the international division of digital labor, workers in underdeveloped areas are mostly engaged in low-end manufacturing labor related to ICT products, such as miners in Africa, Foxconn workers in China, and software engineers in India; on the other hand, the consumption of Internet products by social media users is also a kind of digital labor. The information, emotions and other data they create will be commoditized and sold by large companies such as Google and Twitter. This seemingly entertaining way is actually free labor for capitalists, which is the so-called "play labor". 7

It is worth noting that digital capitalism is closely related to the study of contemporary capitalism or new imperialism. The study of contemporary capitalism must first be traced back to Marx's Capital. After Marx, the Fourth International theorist Ernest Mandel revised Marx's theory of economic crisis in his book Late Capitalism through an investigation of 20th century capitalism, and proposed the "long wave theory" of the outbreak of capitalist crises. Mandel believed that capitalism would not frequently experience economic crises, but would have a longer periodicity, and Mandel figuratively expressed this cycle as a "long wave" (50-100 years). However, Mandel generally recognized Marx's theory of capitalist economic crisis. Lenin, in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, transformed the study of contemporary capitalism into the study of imperialism, and put forward the classic assertion that "imperialism, in its economic essence, is monopoly capitalism"8.

Since Lenin put forward this assertion, imperialism has a history of 100 years, and the emergence of digital capitalism has both accelerated the crisis of imperialism and provided it with a new way to get rid of the crisis.

Faced with the current development of imperialism, contemporary Western left-wing scholars have put forward their own views. David Harvey proposed the theory of "new imperialism" based on spatial geography through his interpretation of Marx's "Capital" to explain the difficult problem of why modern imperialism is "dying but not dead". Specifically, Harvey proposed the theory of "time-space repair" based on spatial geography. The so-called time-space repair means that the new imperialism transfers transnational capital to the third world and backward countries through the spatial expansion of capital under the dimension of globalization in order to seize excess surplus value. With the help of "time-space repair", capitalism has a strong self-repair ability, which can avoid capitalist crises and delay the collapse of the capital empire. 9

Hardt and Negri also gave a new interpretation of contemporary imperialism in their book Empire. They believe that in the post-capitalist era of service-oriented and information-based production, regional differences in the economy are no longer manifested as differences in the degree of development, but rather as hierarchical differences in the international production system. The traditional industrial production and labor discussed by Marx in the 19th century are being replaced by another type of labor - immaterial labor. Immaterial labor has three forms, namely information-based industrial labor, information data service labor, and emotional labor. Correspondingly, the assembly line production model of traditional industry has been replaced by post-Fordist digital network production. The capitalist empire, relying on its dominant position in the information industry, digital capital, and data services, can still establish a control center for the production network in the context of production being dispersed around the world. The decentralization of the production process in physical space has brought about the centralization of economic management and control. Wall Street's financial trade guides and influences the development of the global economy. 10

In short, digital capitalism and neo-imperialism have changed the traditional imperialist mode of exploitation through violent seizure of colonies, and have spawned a variety of modern capitalist forms, such as "financial capitalism", "rent capitalism", "welfare capitalism", "technological capitalism", "disaster capitalism" and other new forms of exploitation.

3. New Discussion on Consumer Society and Labor Theory of Value

It is generally believed that the West entered the consumer society in the 1960s. In recent years, there are roughly the following different views or factions on the study of consumer society. (1) The Marxist consumption view places consumption at the end of the four links of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. This is because the 19th century when Marx lived was still an era of relatively insufficient production; but when humans enter the consumer society, how to reconstruct the Marxist consumption view and how to deal with the relationship between production, distribution, exchange, and consumption will be an important topic of Marxism. (2) The liberal consumption view represented by Barbara Kruger advocates "I consume, therefore I am". Different from Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" mind-body dualism, "I consume, therefore I am" intrinsically links consumption with the existence of the subject. The core of Descartes' proposition lies in the abstract "I think", while the core of the liberal consumption view lies in "I consume", which gives consumption a certain ontological and existential core position, and obviously adopts an attitude of praise and approval. In other words, only consumption can reflect the essence of the subject, otherwise the subject has no foothold or even ceases to exist. (3) Scholars represented by Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu regard consumption as a kind of consumption of culture and taste. If the liberal consumption view gives consumption an ontological and existential status, then cultural consumption greatly enhances the spiritual level and cultural taste of consumption, making people more justified and satisfied when consuming. (4) Scholars such as Jean Baudrillard believe that consumption is a kind of symbolic consumption, which is in a certain structural social relationship. Unlike the second and third consumption views that sing praises for consumption, the "symbolic consumption" represented by Baudrillard is a typical consumption criticism theory. It adheres to the critical style of Western Marxism, concretizes and symbolizes the consumer society, and aims to reveal the deformed social relations in capitalist society through consumption.

In the study of consumer society, the most representative figure is the French philosopher Baudrillard. In his book Consumer Society, he proposed the concept of "consumer society", believing that consumption is a kind of symbolic consumption and regarded it as a white myth. Different from the production ontology of classical Marxism, Baudrillard reconstructed the relationship between production, distribution, exchange and consumption from the perspective of consumption ontology, and placed consumption in the first place. This emphasis on consumer society is bound to conflict with Marx's labor theory of value. Therefore, how to view Marx's labor theory of value in the context of consumer society has become an important issue for academic discussion. Starting from the perspective of symbolic consumption, Baudrillard opposed Marx's labor theory of value, and in The Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, he replaced Marx's political economy criticism with the critique of symbolic political economy, and replaced Marx's use value and exchange value with symbolic value and symbolic value, trying to reconstruct the critique of political economy under the semiotic dimension. Starting from this, Baudrillard reconstructed his entire theoretical system with the theory of symbolic exchange, and then went deep into the surreal world of technological simulation and simulacrum. The famous "The Matrix" is a movie shot with Baudrillard's book Simulation and Simulacrum as the theoretical support.

4. Political Philosophy Research on Issues of Fairness and Justice

Due to the widening inequality and the gap between the rich and the poor in contemporary capitalist society, fairness and justice have become global social issues facing mankind today. Since the publication of John Rawls's Theory of Justice in the 1970s, fairness and justice have become a hot topic in the field of political philosophy and a major issue that cannot be avoided in contemporary foreign Marxist research. It first triggered a dispute between liberalism and communitarianism, and Rawls, Robert Nozick, Alasdair MacIntyre and others launched a fierce debate on the issue of justice and its distribution. Afterwards, many foreign Marxist scholars also conducted critical analysis of Rawls's Theory of Justice.

Jurgen Habermas proposed an "equal and democratic" negotiation and dialogue mechanism that is different from liberalism and communitarianism. The biggest feature of this theory is that it emphasizes the role of "norms" in a democratic society. Its theoretical basis is obviously the principles of liberalism, but the goal to be achieved is communitarianism. Habermas believes that his theory is neither "positivist" nor "constructivist", but aims to "reconstruct" the negotiation mechanism. This view is typically reflected in his book "Between Facts and Norms". In this book, Habermas refuted Rawls's theory of distributive justice based on the position of moral analysis from a normative perspective, and replaced it with a normative theory. Habermas' "norms" include both legal norms and moral norms. He believes that the fairness and justice that people pursue can only be achieved through binding "norms" and "rules" and a communication and negotiation mechanism. There is no other way. Therefore, between "facts and norms", the effectiveness of facts and the effectiveness of norms must be taken into account. 11

G.A Cohen, a representative of analytical Marxism, re-proposed the issue of fairness and justice in the late 20th century and early 21st century. In his two books, Self-Ownership, Liberty, and Equality and Saving Justice and Equality, Cohen refuted Nozick and Rawls's views on fairness and justice respectively. Specifically, Cohen first criticized Nozick's views on "self-ownership" and "acquisition justice" in Self-Ownership, Liberty, and Equality. Nozick believes that as long as procedural justice is followed, the property acquired based on individual talents is legitimate and justified. Cohen pointed out that the "self-ownership" principle precisely reflects the inequality caused by deeper talent differences, so support for this "non-selective" difference will aggravate individual inequality in distribution. In addition, in Cohen's view, Nozick's argument that freedom must be sacrificed to maintain equality is also untenable. Cohen combines the concept of "self-ownership" with resource equality and puts forward the claim of "common ownership" of resources, that is, everyone has equal rights to the world's resources, so how to use them also requires the consent of every owner. Then, Cohen challenged Rawls’ theory of distributive justice in Saving Justice and Equality. Rawls believed that certain inequalities could be included in justice, so he advocated the difference principle, that is, social and economic arrangements should be conducive to the greatest interests of the least benefited, that is, to prove that those inequalities are allowed by justice. The most typical practice of the difference principle is to stimulate innovation through differential distribution of the "cake", so as to improve economic efficiency and produce a bigger "cake". Cohen criticized Rawls’s view, arguing that the difference principle cannot prove that inequality based on incentives is in line with the requirements of a just society, and that the rationality of policies cannot be equated with justice. He pointed out: "The difference principle is not an unconditional principle of justice because it supports the kind of unequal injustice caused by moral arbitrariness."12

Cohen further based on modern ecological civilization and advocated that contemporary Marxists should seek the possibility of socialism from scarcity. He proposed two major principles of justice for socialism that are different from Rawls's. (1) The principle of equality. In Cohen's view, the ultimate value orientation of socialist society is equality, and equal opportunity is the best way to embody egalitarian justice. (2) The principle of sharing, that is, the principle of community. In order to prevent the substantive inequality brought about by formal equality of opportunity, Cohen introduced the principle of sharing, that is, people care about each other and take care of each other when necessary and possible, and also care about each other's mutual care. The principle of sharing includes two modes of care: the first is a mode of care that suppresses certain inequalities caused by socialist equality of opportunity, emphasizing that the rich should contribute to the community, which is similar to the third distribution; the second is a reciprocal care model that emphasizes the reciprocal behavior of community members for purposes other than the market.

In addition to the above-mentioned scholars, there are many foreign Marxist theorists who pay attention to the issues of fairness and justice, such as Alan W. Wood, Kay Nelson, Ziad Husami and others.

5. Ecological Marxism

Since the 1960s, ecological Marxism has begun to attract academic attention and gradually formed a social trend. Ecological Marxism mainly emphasizes that the basic contradictions of modern capitalism have led to an unbalanced relationship between man and nature, which in turn has brought about unavoidable ecological problems.

First, Marx's exposition of the basic contradictions of capitalism implies that capitalism will inevitably lead to an ecological crisis. As Marx said, the basic contradiction between the socialization of production and capitalist private ownership will inevitably lead to capitalists blindly pursuing surplus value, thus ignoring environmental and ecological issues, and thus triggering an ecological crisis. This is one of the main reasons why foreign Marxist scholars pay attention to ecological issues from an institutional level.

Secondly, scholars of ecological Marxism also apply Marx's basic views and methods to analyze and interpret modern ecological and environmental problems, trying to explore a path to green social development in the future. From Ben Agger, who proposed the concept of "ecological Marxism", to Andre Goetz, David Pepper, John Bellamy Foster, Joel Cowell, Sarah Sacca and others who continued to track ecological issues around the 21st century, they all combined Marx's philosophy, political economy and critical theory of capitalism with the increasingly serious ecological problems in the West from different perspectives, and then put forward their own theoretical propositions. For example, Foster believes that Marx's ecological views not only exist in his economic theory, but are more concentratedly reflected in Marx's philosophy. Therefore, he put the focus of his research on materialistic theory and tried to rediscover Marx's ecological thoughts. In the book "Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature", Foster systematically expounded materialism and ecology, and sorted out the formation process of Marx's materialistic view of nature from the perspective of development history. It is worth mentioning that Foster took the “metabolic rupture” mentioned by Marx in Capital as the core concept and creatively applied it to the interpretation of ecological materialism, which profoundly revealed the contradiction between man and nature under the conditions of capitalist production. At the same time, he also pointed out that ecological problems not only concern the economic crisis of capitalism, but also the survival destiny of all mankind.

Thirdly, it should be pointed out that with the deepening of ecological research, the problem is no longer limited to capitalist society, but involves a re-exploration of the relationship between man and nature. Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" conducted an in-depth analysis of the relationship between man and nature, and pointed out the direction for exploring today's ecological problems. In fact, most Western ecologists have also noticed this problem and realized that any region or country with human activities, especially industrialized activities, may face ecological problems and ecological disasters. Therefore, ecology is a global issue that must be taken seriously by the world and governments of various countries. Engels had foresightedly pointed out in "Dialectics of Nature": "We should not be too intoxicated with our human victory over nature. For every such victory, nature will retaliate against us." 14 On this basis, Zizek proposed an alternative interpretation of the relationship between man and nature, pointing out that man is "the wound of nature" and that "there is no ultimate solution" in the relationship between man and nature. Only this traumatic "fragile balance" can be maintained. 15

VI. Contemporary Populism and Its “New” Characteristics

Populism is a problem that permeates the world today. Whether it is Marine Le Pen, the leader of the "National Front" in the 2022 French presidential election, Donald Trump, who won the US election in 2017, or the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, as well as populist movements and their representatives in other countries, they all show that populist forces are on the rise globally today. Populist thought and its movement have a long history. It originated in Russia in the mid-19th century and has a history of more than 100 years. Specifically, populism advocates flat civilian democracy, the so-called "big democracy", and emphasizes the interests of the grassroots people. Therefore, its political propositions are often very attractive and appealing, just like the "Siren's song", which is very tempting and makes people unable to stop. However, although populism is glamorous on the surface and can widely mobilize members of society and attract the general public, if it is allowed to develop, it will be difficult to control and will have great social destructiveness and lethality, and the consequences will be catastrophic. It should be noted that populism also constitutes a social trend in our country today. For example, the online violence incidents such as human flesh searches and attacks that have appeared in the mass media in recent years, the siege of KFC, the looting and smashing in anti-Japanese demonstrations, extreme nationalist remarks, etc., are all manifestations of populist thought in social reality.

Generally speaking, populism often conducts political activities under the banner of "the people", but it is divided into left-wing and right-wing. Neoliberalism is generally manifested as right-wing populism. In On Populist Rationality, Ernst Laclau discussed the strategy of left-wing populism to construct the "people" front through discourse theory, and showed the mechanism of populism to construct "the people" through a confrontational diagram. 16

Recently, Chantal Mouffe, who has been in academic cooperation with Laclau, has raised the banner of left-wing populism to revive the theory of left-wing populism. She first published "To Left-wing Populism" in 2019, and then published "Left-wing Populism and the Power of Affect" in 2022. In Defending a Lost Cause, Zizek fiercely criticized Laclau's left-wing populist theory characterized by the construction of "the people", saying that this theory is "good enough in practice, but not good enough in theory"17.

Compared with the theoretical research on populism, populism in real society is indeed as described by Zizek, which is extremely ambiguous, complex, inflammatory and destructive. Populism in real society mainly originates from narrow nationalism and emotional reactions of the lower classes. It usually occurs when social contradictions intensify and economic crises occur. It uses inflammatory language and utopian political fantasies to transfer the anger and dissatisfaction of the masses to opposition to the technical expert governance model of the political elite. It is both a political trend, a political movement, and a political strategy. In political practice, it is specifically manifested as a rejection of technical elites and mainstream social systems, advocating equality for all and high social welfare, and opposing immigration and globalization. The construction of a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico during Trump's administration and a series of "withdrawal" behaviors during his tenure are all manifestations of political populism. The destructiveness of populism is also reflected in its "conspiracy theory" tendency, that is, establishing a unified "people's" front through the concrete identification of the "enemy". For example, Trump's proposal to bring manufacturing back to the United States inherently implies that foreign workers have snatched the cheese of the unemployed in the United States.

7. The Frankfurt School’s Social Critical Theory and Its New Development

The Frankfurt School was formed in Germany in the 1920s and has a history of nearly 100 years. It has now developed into the fourth generation. In the face of the modern characteristics of capitalism and the alienation of technological rationality, the Frankfurt School has developed a unique social critical theory that continues to this day.

The first generation of the Frankfurt School was mainly aimed at the Nazi atrocities in Germany during World War II. It proposed a social criticism theory with rational reflection and technological criticism as the core. Its representatives were Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Horkheimer and Adorno found that rationality had turned to its opposite in the process of human liberation. The dialectic of enlightenment they proposed believed that "myth is enlightenment, but enlightenment has regressed to myth."18 On the one hand, enlightenment broke the old myths and saved people from their fear of nature; on the other hand, enlightenment mystified itself and constructed another new "myth". The blind obedience and dependence on science and rationality made it possible for fascist totalitarian rule. In other words, technological rationality appeared in the form of ruling rationality, but ultimately led to the domination of people.

The main theories of the second generation of the Frankfurt School are Habermas's theory of communicative action and negotiation theory. Unlike the first generation's rejection of instrumental rationality, Habermas believes that modernity is an unfinished business and that philosophy should explain crises rather than simply criticize them. Therefore, based on the tradition of rationalism, Habermas examined the four manifestations of the late capitalist crisis, namely, economic crisis, rationality crisis, legitimation crisis and motivation crisis, and pointed out that the legitimation crisis is the main problem facing capitalism today. In Habermas' view, communicative rationality is the main way to eliminate the legitimation crisis. He replaced technical rationality and the subjectivity of Kantian philosophy with the subject's communication, and tried to use his theory of communicative action to reconstruct Marx's historical materialism.

The representative of the third generation of the Frankfurt School is Axel Honneth, whose theory of recognition and his pluralistic justice conception mark the postmodern turn of social critical theory, that is, the "political ethical turn". Honneth applied Hegel's theory of recognition and Habermas's theory of social interaction to his own theory of recognition. He believes that there is contempt, repression and misrecognition in today's capitalist society, so we must "struggle for recognition". In his representative work "Struggle for Recognition", Honneth discusses three forms of recognition relations: emotional care, legal recognition and social respect. These three forms exist in the three fields of love, law and solidarity, and correspond to the individual's self-confidence, self-esteem and pride. Correspondingly, he developed the conception of pluralistic justice, believing that justice aims to achieve individual autonomy and social recognition, specifically the need principle in the field of love, the equality principle in the field of law and the value principle in the field of cooperation. Honneth pointed out that the scope of recognition forms and their principles can change with social development, so as to ensure the effectiveness of recognition theory. In addition, Honneth and Nancy Fraser had a heated debate on "recognition or redistribution", which mainly reflected whether recognition theory is a trend of Marxist philosophy or more related to Hegelian philosophy in the postmodern perspective.

The fourth generation of the Frankfurt School is mainly represented by the political theory and practical philosophy of Rainer Forster, a student of Habermas. Following Honneth's political ethics turn, Forster combined the normative issues raised by Habermas in his later years with social and political justice, thus pushing social critical theory to a deeper level. In "The Right to Defense: Elements of a Constructivist Theory of Justice", he pointed out that social justice is based on the right of individuals to defend themselves; through defense, people can prove themselves in normative situations. Therefore, the realization of social and political justice requires "tolerance" and respect for the right of others to defend themselves.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of life philosophy research

The COVID-19 pandemic that began to spread around the world in early 2020 has made the issue of life philosophy in foreign Marxist studies increasingly the focus of academic attention. The main representative of life philosophy is Giorgio Agamben and his series of works, and scholars such as Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Zizek are also associated with this. Foucault explored biopolitics in the sense of social security in his late work Security, Territory and Population. He believed that capitalism established control over biopower through knowledge and governance technology. Agamben inherited Foucault's focus on micro-power and constructed a life philosophy under the state of exception based on the synthesis of Martin Heidegger's existentialism, Benjamin's "bare life", Arendt's "The Human Condition" and Schmitt's "Exception" theory.

Agamben's so-called state of exception refers to a state of crisis suspended outside the law and norms, that is, "the imbalance point between public law and political facts"19. This state can be compared to the "event" in Alain Badiou's text and the concept of "residue" in psychoanalysis. In the state of exception, the original social and political order is disrupted, the power of the sovereign is above the law, and the expansion of power corresponds to the gradual decline and dissolution of people's rights, which eventually become naked life and oppose political power. On the one hand, the biological life of the individual is devoured by political life and becomes a subsidiary existence; on the other hand, with the help of the state of exception, political power reduces political life, making the individual a "naked life" exposed to death and oppression. Agamben believes that under the conspiracy of Western politics and law, the state of exception is becoming a real norm, and power has a quasi-legal status through intervention in the law. Although political power does not have the "name" of law, it has the "reality" of law.

In Homo Sacer, Agamben points out that as a field beyond the control of the law, the state of exception deprives people of all their basic rights, and even their lives are not guaranteed, which creates a naked state of human life. The sovereign, through punishment, makes the effectiveness of the law itself manifest. It is in this sense that Agamben asserts that the life state of modern people has been reduced to a purely biological, livestock-like existence, which is the meaning of "homo sacer". In March 2020, Agamben mentioned in a statement that we are in a state of exception due to the plague, and the rulers are trying to make us adapt to this state of exception in order to normalize it. In this state, people are deprived of social, political and emotional dimensions, "living in a society that sacrifices freedom for the so-called 'security rationality', and are therefore destined to live in a permanent state of fear and anxiety." However, while this state of exception brings chaos to society, it also creates opportunities. At the new starting point constructed by the state of exception, people can use the "messianic moment" to break through the cracks in the power order and gain liberation of life. 20

9. Postmodernism and Post-Marxist Thought

At the beginning of the 21st century, the domestic academic community began to pay attention to the post-Marxist trend of thought. This trend of thought emerged after the capitalist society entered the postmodern society. Representative figures include scholars such as Laclau, Mouffe, Zizek and Judith Butler.

Laclau and Mouffe developed Gramsci's theory of cultural and political hegemony, so their theoretical propositions are also called "neo-Gramscianism". Its main contents can be summarized as follows:

 (1) On the basis of Gramsci's hegemony logic, they integrated Foucault's micro-power criticism and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, and constructed a hegemonic articulation theory with confrontation, dislocation and contingency logic as the core. They believe that the class struggle and violent revolution theory of classical Marxism are no longer applicable to the modern society with diversified social classes, so they advocate replacing Marx's concept of "contradiction" and class struggle theory with social confrontation theory.

(2) They replace the subject with the subject identity. Therefore, in their view, the subject of the revolution is no longer the working class as a specific group, but women, immigrants, people of color, etc. on the margins of society; the way of revolution is no longer Marx's class struggle, but the strategy of left-wing populism to build a "people's" front.

 (3) They oppose economic determinism and re-explore the relationship between economic base and politics, emphasizing the revolutionary guiding role of political hegemony and cultural ideology.

In short, Laclau and Mouffe, on the one hand, oppose Marx's discussion on the decisive role of violent revolution and economic base, and advocate social reform; on the other hand, they claim that their theory is "Marxist". Their "post-Marxism" is manifested in that their research method is Marx's social critical methodology; second, although their focus is no longer on the working class, it is on the poor and marginalized groups in society. For example, the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movement in the United States in 2020 is more or less a contemporary manifestation of this post-Marxist trend of thought.

The Western left-wing scholar Zizek is more radical than Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism. On the one hand, in The Sublime Object of Ideology, Zizek analyzed the "symptomatic" characteristics of the subject's succumbing to fetishism in capitalist commodity society from the perspective of ideology and commodity fetishism, that is, the subject is difficult to get rid of the "reification" of commodity society as Lukacs called it. On the other hand, in The Sensitive Subject and In Defense of the Lost Cause, he proposed an alternative revolutionary subject with the help of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, trying to replace the "reified" subject with a "hysterical" action subject. The biggest feature of Zizek's radical left-wing theory is that it links the psychoanalytic theories of Marx and Lacan, German classical philosophy, especially the thoughts of Kant and Hegel, and reinterprets Marx's theory on this basis, thus forming his unique psychoanalytic dimension of left-wing Marxism.

Butler proposed a "queer" theory based on gender distinction and equality from a postmodern perspective, and advocated replacing "identity politics" with behavioral "performance".

10. Spatial Criticism and Urban Marxism Studies

The study of spatial philosophy and urban issues has been one of the hot topics in the academic community in recent years. The founder of Marxist spatial critical theory abroad is the French scholar Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre’s theoretical research can be divided into two periods. The early period mainly focused on the criticism of daily life, while the later period turned to the study of space and urban issues. In "Critique of Everyday Life", Lefebvre revealed the comprehensive alienation of people caused by the expansion of capitalism, that is, alienation not only occurred in the field of labor production, but also penetrated into people's daily life, and leisure activities and living places were also incorporated into the capitalist system. The focus on the daily life of the city made Lefebvre turn the perspective of theoretical research from time to space. In his late work "The Production of Space", Lefebvre expounded the three-element composition of material space, social space and spiritual space in urban space. Lefebvre's "spatial turn" directly triggered the development of spatial critical theory and urban sociology.

Harvey combines geographical research with spatial philosophy and constructs a critical theory of space under historical-geographical materialism from a postmodern perspective. He inherits and develops the Marxist theory of the uneven development of capitalism and Lefebvre's theory of "production of space". Starting from the city, the main regional unit, he demonstrates the core view that capitalism must exist and continue through the production of space. Harvey divides space into absolute space, relative space and relational space. His critical theory of space mainly includes the following three dimensions: the first is the criticism of spatial philosophy and the spatial production mechanism of capitalism, which corresponds to Marx's theory of capital reproduction; the second is the study of urban philosophy and spatial justice issues, and on this basis, criticizes the attempt of neoliberalism to capitalize urban construction; the third is the theory of spatial production and new imperialism. Harvey believes that cities have become the core of capitalist spatial issues. Contemporary capitalism has enabled capitalism to continue and develop through the control of space, or "eliminating space with time", and finally formed a spatial production system with cities as the main body and extending to regions, countries and the world.

Edward Sawyer is mainly known for his "heterogeneous space" - also known as the "third space". The so-called "third space" is a "difference space" that integrates reality and imagination, a "othered" space, and a possible space that transcends the traditional dualistic cognitive space. This space is actually the space in the perspective of postmodern geography. It is directly derived from Lefebvre's "triad" space concept: spatial practice, spatial reproduction and reproduced space. On this basis, Sawyer introduced "others" into space. The "eternal existence of others" injected a critical consciousness of creating differences into the criticism of spatial philosophy, blasting homogeneous space into heterogeneous space and transforming static reality into flowing reality. Sawyer's "third space" is a space that integrates this openness and creativity. It is an ideal free communication environment and an insurmountable maze. On the basis of his concept of "third space", Sawyer further proposed the concept of "spatial justice" and conducted analytical criticism.

Another representative figure of spatial philosophy is Manuel Castells. Castells's spatial criticism mainly revolves around urbanization, informatization and globalization. His themes include criticism of the Chicago School, "collective consumption" and urban social movements. He advocates the establishment of a "scientific object" for urban theory research and attempts to construct a new "structuralist Marxist" urban theory system to explain the structure and process of capitalist urbanization.

11. Conclusion

In addition to the ten major social thoughts mentioned above, foreign Marxist research is also widely distributed in many fields such as philosophy, political science, history, and economics, and combined with the latest theoretical resources in academia, it has produced schools such as existentialist Marxism, feminist Marxism, analytical Marxism, structuralist Marxism, psychoanalytic Marxism, dependency theory, and Eastern European Marxism. In addition, since the beginning of the 21st century, Japanese Marxist research has emerged, and the theoretical views of left-wing scholars such as Hiromatsu Wataru, Mochizuki Seiji, and Karatani Kojin have also attracted the attention of domestic academia. All of these show the inclusive and open characteristics of foreign Marxist research. A large number of foreign Marxist theorists and left-wing scholars are committed to combining Marxism with the characteristics of the current era to respond to the questions of the times, demonstrating the strong vitality and explanatory power of Marxist theory. We may not agree with their specific views, but their research methods and the issues they explore are what we should pay attention to.

Notes:

1 "Collected Works of Marx and Engels", Volume 5, People's Publishing House, 2009, page 91.

2 Antonio Gramsci: Prison Notebooks, translated by Bao Xi, People's Publishing House, 1983, p. 83.

3 Louis Althusser: Philosophy and Politics: The Althusser Reader, translated by Chen Yue, Jilin People's Publishing House, 2003, p. 334.

4 Slavoj Žižek: The Sublime Object of Ideology, translated by Ji Guangmao, Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2014, p. 45.

5 Kong Mingan and Tan Yong, “On the Recognition Mechanism of Ideology: An Analysis Based on the Ideological Theories of Althusser, Pechat and Žižek”, Foreign Social Sciences, No. 3, 2020.

6 Dan Schiller: Digital Capitalism, translated by Yang Liping, Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 2001, p. 5.

7 Christian Fuchs: Digital Labor and Karl Marx, translated by Zhou Yanyun, People's Publishing House, 2020, p. 465.

8 Lenin’s Selected Works: On Capitalism, People’s Publishing House, 2009, p. 208.

9 David Harvey, The New Imperialism, translated by Chu Lizhong and Shen Xiaolei, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2009, p. 94.

10 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire: The Political Order of the Globalization, translated by Yang Jianguo and Fan Yiting, Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2008, p. 284.

11 Jurgen Habermas: Between Facts and Norms, translated by Tong Shijun, Sanlian Bookstore, 2014, p. 2.

12 G.A. Cohen: Saving Justice and Equality, translated by Chen Wei, Fudan University Press, 2014, p. 15.

13 John Bellamy Foster, Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature, translated by Liu Rensheng and Xiao Feng, Higher Education Press, 2006, pp. 157-158.

14 Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Volume 9, People’s Publishing House, 2009, p. 559.

15 See Kong Mingan, “A New Interpretation of the Relationship between Man and Nature: Rediscussing the Contemporary Implications of Engels’ Dialectics of Nature”, Journal of Beijing Administration Institute, No. 5, 2020.

16Ernesto Laclau,On Populist Reason,London:Verso,2005,p.130.

17Slavoj Žižek, In Defense of Lost Causes, New York: Verso, 2008, p.264.

18 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, translated by Qu Jingdong and Cao Weidong, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2006, p. 5.

19Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception, translated by Kevin Attell, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.1.

20 See Agamben’s “Chiarimenti” published on the blog of the Italian publication Quodlibet on March 31, 2020, in response to the critical article “Filosofia e virus: le farneticazioni di Giorgio Agamben” by Italian journalist Paolo Dalcais.

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