



A Brief Analysis of the Revolutionary Significance Inherent in Early Lukács's "Two Dimensions" Theory

Jiixin Guo

Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

Abstract: Early Lukács's theoretical framework primarily unfolds along "two dimensions": one dimension focuses on the critique of capitalist society, while the other explores potential revolutionary pathways. Through dialectical analysis of totality, Lukács demonstrates that with the fundamental contradiction between the rationalization of total life and irrational living conditions, humans, as subjects of life and history, will inevitably transform their self-consciousness into class consciousness. This class consciousness emerges as an inevitable consequence of capitalist development logic. Within a specific historical and spatial context, the revolutionary significance inherent in these "two dimensions" lies in their exposure of capitalist exploitation and their confidence in future development.

Keywords: Lukács; "two dimensions"; revolutionary significance

1. The Historical Context of the "Two Dimensions" Theory

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Second Industrial Revolution unfolded, accelerating globalization, increasing raw materials, expanding markets, rapidly inflating capital, and pushing trade toward monopolization. Capitalist nations transformed their earlier violent plundering of foreign territories into capital export. To maintain social stability, the bourgeoisie began redistributing certain colonial gains, while domestic class conflicts with the proletariat shifted from violent confrontations to more subtle forms of control.

The expansion and development of colonies simultaneously provided the proletariat with broader development opportunities. The import of low-cost products significantly reduced domestic economic pressure. Within the proletariat, the Second International moved toward reformism and achieved certain successes under continued capitalist development, increasing both its influence and disruptive power, creating an illusion of "peaceful transition". The masses became entrapped in the consumerist maze created by capital, leading to a dilution of class consciousness.

2. Theory of Reification: Exposing the Reality and Intensification of Cruel Exploitation

Lukács boldly integrated the "non-Marxist" critical theory of Max Weber's "rationalization" with Marxism. He pointed out that in modern capitalist society, reification still exists and presents itself in an "autonomous" state. The formal rationality achieved in this process makes exploitation difficult to detect. However, the reification of humans is progressing from quantitative to qualitative changes in reality, becoming a universal fate that no one in modern society can escape.

The development of capitalism is inseparable from the division of labor, evolving from initial handicrafts to simple cooperation, manufactories, and modern machine production. This indicates that as capitalist society continues to develop, social division of labor becomes increasingly refined. When this refinement reaches a certain degree, the work allocated to each person gradually loses its independence, becoming merely a small part of the whole. The qualitative differences in labor gradually diminish, making actual labor formally identical.

In capitalist society, exchange is inevitable, necessitating abstract labor. Real labor becomes marked by abstract labor, and actual labor achieves formal uniformity. As the differences in labor itself and labor objects disappear, essential human differences also vanish. Workers are no longer measured by human standards but by time. Human differences between workers become meaningless under homogenized labor, with time division rules becoming capital's primary focus. Humans become calculable objects. As capital and rationalization principles infiltrate various social spheres, everything that cannot be rationalized becomes isolated, leading to irrational disasters.

This disaster extends beyond the proletariat to capitalists themselves. In a society completely filled with commodity forms, being calculated becomes everyone's universal fate. In the process of reification, individuals under reified conditions subjectively reify themselves, inevitably leading to the loss of individual autonomous consciousness.

Marx stated: "The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colos-

sal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.”[1]Capital’s multiplication comes from the proletariat’s surplus value; as long as capitalist society exists, the proletariat will remain oppressed and exploited. The reformist dream of “peaceful” transition is impossible to realize; the shackles of exploitation and the cage of the old world can only be broken by the proletariat’s own hands.

3. Dialectics of Totality: Affirming the Inevitability of Proletarian Revolution and Exploring Its Path

After unveiling the rationalized mask of capitalist exploitation through reification, Lukács attempted to establish a new revolutionary theory using the dialectics of totality. In the 1967 preface to “History and Class Consciousness”, Lukács stated: “For anyone wishing to return to Marxism, restoring the Hegelian tradition in Marxism is an urgent duty. ‘History and Class Consciousness’ represents perhaps the most radical attempt at that time to restore the revolutionary essence of Marx’s theory through the renewal and development of Hegelian dialectics and methodology.”[2] The application of total dialectics and construction of new revolutionary theory revealed the philosophical superficiality of positivism while further exploring proletarian revolutionary theory.

Through examining the dilemma faced by German classical philosophy - that we seem to be liberated from nature but remain bound by a “second nature” - Lukács discovered that truly complete life cannot be fully occupied by rationalization rules. As subjects of life, rationality cannot enable us to master all aspects of life; under rationalization rules, we can only grasp partial life. True life should not be a mere accumulation of spatialized time segments; only in interconnected, total life can we become masters of life and history. The distinction between Marxist philosophy and classical philosophy lies in that classical philosophy only attempted to solve this problem at the ideological level, while Marx employed historical materialism to address practical issues from life itself. Lukács believed that philosophy’s “descent to earth” to solve real problems could breakthrough via the quantitative to qualitative transformation of labor time. As capitalist society develops and time becomes increasingly spatialized, when time outside labor hours can no longer support people’s non-rational life that cannot be rationalized away, human self-consciousness will gradually recognize the necessity of breaking the capitalist predicament and transform into class consciousness, realizing that without proletarian revolution, the practical impasse is difficult to resolve.

When a society purely divided by economic standards was established, new class consciousness entered a period where it could potentially be realized. The objective possibility of class consciousness emergence is inseparable from the bourgeoisie and proletariat formed by capitalist society’s logical development[3]. On one hand, proletarian class consciousness is inseparable from capitalist development; on the other hand, capitalist development will necessarily provoke proletarian class consciousness, indicating that class consciousness can, at the level of practical possibility, break free from the capital logic that breeds reification phenomena, possessing the function of reconstructing historical materialism[3].

At the time, Lukács’s theory repositioned Marxism at the center of philosophical theory, promoting socialist study of proletarian revolution and class consciousness. It broke the dominance of the Second International’s passive assertions, affirmed the inevitable arrival of proletarian revolution, refocused attention on revolution, and provided a new theoretical exploration for proletarian revolution.

4. Conclusion

Through his study of reification and “rationalization” rules, Lukács pointed out that under continued capitalist development, differences between people would be eliminated, “rationalization” rules would permeate the entire society, and reification would become an inescapable universal fate for everyone. This dimension exposed the continued reality of working-class exploitation beneath the veil of capitalism’s and reformism’s apparent successes. Simultaneously, starting from the dialectics of totality, Lukács believed that life is an interconnected whole that cannot be completely rationalized. While rationalization remains within acceptable limits of life, class consciousness is difficult to fully realize. However, when it exceeds tolerable bounds, humans - as subjects of life and history - will transform their self-consciousness into class consciousness, an inevitable result of capitalist development. This dimension both explores proletarian revolutionary theory and demonstrates the inevitability of proletarian revolution. The revolutionary significance of Lukács’s “two dimensions” theory at the time lay in bringing the revolutionary essence of Marxism back to the center of academic vision.

References

- [1] Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1972). *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Vol. 1). Beijing: People's Publishing House, p. 256.
- [2] Lukács, G. (1999). *History and Class Consciousness* (Du Zhangzhi, Ren Li, & Yan Hongyuan, Trans.). Beijing: Commercial Press, p. 16.
- [3] Han, B. (2019). Capital Logic and Class Consciousness: A Reinterpretation of Young Lukács's Reconstruction of Historical Materialism. *Theory Monthly*, (02), 25-31.
- [4] Markovic, M., & Li, Y. (2016). The Critical Thinking of Georg Lukács. *Journal of Soochow University (Philosophy & Social Science Edition)*, 37(02), 13-20.