

Critique and Transcendence of Digital Capitalism: An Analysis of the Theoretical and Practical Path to Digital Socialism

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Abstract

The deep integration of digital technology and capital logic has given birth to digital capitalism. It reconstructs the mode of production and social relations through data monopoly, algorithm control and platform mechanism, but it also aggravates systemic crises such as labor alienation, social inequality and technological monopoly. Based on Marx's political economy, this paper deeply analyzes the essence, internal contradictions, limitations and crises of digital capitalism, and reveals the essence of exploitation under the appearance of "technology empowerment" from the perspective of Marxist criticism. At the same time, this paper integrates the unique experience of digital socialism attempts in European and American countries, Western left-wing practice and Chinese model, explores the diversified practice path of digital socialism, and provides theoretical reference and practical direction for building a new form of digital society that takes into account efficiency and fairness.

Keywords: digital capitalism, digital socialism, labor alienation, data sharing, marx's labor theory of value

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the deep coupling of digital technology and capital logic has spawned a digital capitalist form characterized by platform monopoly, data privatization, and algorithm control. With the characteristics of high efficiency, interconnection and intelligence, digital technology profoundly empowers social productivity and shows great 'liberation potential'. However, under the framework of capitalist production relations, this potential does not automatically lead to the universal liberation of human beings. On the contrary, the 'deep coupling' of capital logic and digital technology has spawned a more hidden and expansive capital accumulation model - digital capitalism. 'Digital socialism' is not a negation of digital technology, but a correction of technological alienation, aiming to reposition digital technology from a tool of capital proliferation to a force of social liberation. Digital capitalism presents a complex 'duality' paradox: it is not only an 'enabler' to improve efficiency and create convenience, but also a 'controller' to aggravate exploitation and create injustice. With the help of gorgeous narratives such as 'sharing economy' and 'flexible employment', it conceals the algorithmic manipulation of the labor process, the free deprivation of data and the global technological monopoly. Therefore, the profound Marxist criticism of digital capitalism and the exploration of its possible transcendence path are not only the contemporary verification of classical theory, but also the urgent task of responding to the major challenges of the times and conceiving the future social form.

2. The Essence and Internal Contradiction of Digital Capitalism

2.1 Integration of Digital Technology and Capital Logic

The essence of digital capitalism is a new form of capitalism in the evolution of the information age. It not only inherits the core characteristics of traditional capitalism, such as capital accumulation, exploitation mechanism and class antagonism, but also realizes the profound transformation of production mode and social relations with the help of digital technology. This new form of development not only further strengthens the dominant position of capitalism in the world, but also provides a new perspective and understanding framework for examining and criticizing capitalism. As a new chapter of capitalism in the information age, the core of digital capitalism lies in the close combination of digital technology and capital logic. This combination not only promotes the transformation of production methods, but also profoundly affects social relations and capital appreciation models. Its remarkable feature is that digital technology has become a new factor of production, reshaping traditional

production relations through digital, intelligent and platform-based means. This reshaping is not only reflected in the improvement of production efficiency, but also in its ability to become a powerful assistant for capital appreciation - digital technology achieves rapid capital appreciation through 'enclosure' primitive accumulation and exploitation of labor value, and promotes the global expansion of capital [1]. In this process, the accumulation of digital capital, the creation of digital living labor and the exploitation of surplus value by digital capital together constitute the generation mechanism of digital capitalism.

However, digital capitalism is not entirely positive. While increasing the degree of socialization of production and promoting rapid economic development, it also exacerbates social inequality. At the level of ideology and political attributes, digital capitalism has constructed a new capitalist ideology with new consumerism as the core through the combination of technical means and ideology. It uses technical means to re-plan the consumer world to adapt to the logic of capital ; at the same time, algorithm and data control have become new means to cover up the essence of exploitation and strengthen capital control.

2.2 The Transformation of Digital Labor and Alienated Labor

From the perspective of Marx 's alienated labor theory, we can deeply reveal the characteristics and essence of digital capitalism. Under the framework of digital capitalism, digital labor has risen to the dominant form of labor, and its essence is the extension and deepening of capitalist production relations in the digital context. This form of labor not only inherits the exploitation logic of traditional capitalism, but also aggravates the alienation of workers with the help of digital technology. There is a close relationship between digital labor and alienated labor. On the one hand, digital labor shows a new dimension of alienated labor : at the level of labor products, digital products such as data and algorithms become the key to capital proliferation, and workers ' ownership of their results is deprived ; at the level of labor process, algorithm monitoring, automation and platformization means to extend labor time and deprive workers of their autonomy ; at the level of the nature of laborers, digital technology objectifies laborers and weakens their subjectivity ; at the level of interpersonal relationship, digital capitalism deepens interpersonal estrangement through virtual space and social networks, resulting in the alienation of social relations. On the other hand, digital capitalism has spawned new features of alienated labor. For example, emotional labor and consumer free labor transform workers ' emotions and attention into capital resources ; panoramic transparent labor achieves comprehensive monitoring of the labor process ; the separation of virtuality and reality blurs the boundary between labor and life.

The essence of digital capitalism lies in the comprehensive control and exploitation of digital labor by capital. Although digital technology has promoted productivity progress, its fundamental purpose is still capital accumulation. Marx 's capital theory points out that the core of capitalism lies in the possession and exploitation of labor by capital, while digital capitalism uses technical means to make this exploitation logic more concealed and deepened. The relationship between digital labor and traditional alienated labor is embodied in a process of transformation : from traditional alienation to digital alienation, from material alienation to non-material alienation, from passive alienation to active alienation.

3. Limitations and Crises of Digital Capitalism

3.1 Technology Monopoly and Social Inequality

The Widening of the Digital Divide the Rise of Digital Capitalism has significantly aggravated the phenomenon of technological monopoly and social inequality. This problem can be analyzed in depth from the two dimensions of technological control and social structure. At the level of technological control, digital capitalism has strengthened the control of capital over the means of production (especially the control of data resources) through the monopoly of digital platforms, forming a domestic and even global technological oligopoly. The concept of " neo-feudalism " put forward by western left-wing scholars reveals how digital technology covertly and profoundly reshapes the relationship between workers and means of production, thereby exacerbating digital monopoly[2]. Digital imperialism marks a new stage in the development of capitalism. Through the deep integration of digital technology, knowledge logic and cultural logic, it has significantly strengthened its monopoly position in the fields of global production, distribution, exchange, consumption and intellectual property rights (for example, the US technology giants have established a strong monopoly advantage in the global market). At the same time, digital labor, as a new form of exploitation, further deepens the extraction of surplus value by capital through advanced means such as algorithm monitoring and gamification management.

At the level of social structure, digital capitalism has aggravated the inequality of income and wealth distribution, widened the gap between private capital income and production value, and made the problem of social inequality more serious. In addition, it also alienates people 's labor activities, labor products and emotional activities into tools for capital control and value exploitation through technical means, resulting in workers facing the dual

dilemma of economic exploitation and marginalization of social status-the unemployed, low-income people, the elderly and other vulnerable groups are particularly obvious, and they are excluded from the digital dividend.

3.2 False Sharing of Platform Capitalism

The Alienation of Sharing Economy The exploitation mechanism and internal contradiction of digital platform capitalism are multi-dimensional and complex social phenomena. Its core is that the digital platform uses technical means and narrative discourse to cover up the essence of exploitation, and at the same time misleads the public with concepts such as 'sharing economy', so as to realize the exploitation of workers and the accumulation of capital. In terms of exploitation mechanism, digital platform capitalism transforms user-generated data into privatized means of production through data exploitation and hidden labor, which not only realizes economic exploitation, but also violates the privacy and human dignity of workers. In addition, workers in the platform economy (such as freelancers in the gig economy) are often in a state of informal employment. Their labor is transformed into the network effect of the platform, but they fail to obtain due remuneration or social security. This kind of labor alienation and unpaid labor mode weakens the bargaining power of workers and makes them fall into a low-income and unstable working environment. At the same time, the digital platform transforms the sharing economy into a new way of capital accumulation by constructing the image of the 'sharing economy' and blurring the essence of capitalist exploitation, concealing the exploitation of workers and the unequal distribution of social resources. Moreover, digital platforms further exacerbate social inequality through data monopoly: a small number of large platforms hold most of the user data, restricting market competition and leading to further social stratification.

4. Marx's Labor Theory of Value Criticizes Digital Capitalism

4.1 The Source of Value Creation

Digital labor is still the source of surplus value In criticizing digital capitalism, Marx's theory of labor value profoundly reveals the essence of labor alienation and capital proliferation, and provides a key perspective for insight into this new form of capitalism. In the era of digital capitalism, labor alienation has not disappeared due to technological progress, but presents a more hidden and more complex new form: the content and products created by workers on digital platforms are often occupied and commercialized by platforms; the labor process is controlled by algorithms and platforms, resulting in workers losing their autonomy and creativity in the labor process. In addition, digital capitalism has also exacerbated the alienation of the class nature of workers and the alienation between people - workers are objectified on the digital platform and become part of the tool; the relationship between people is also replaced by digital coding.

At the same time, although digital capitalism has changed the specific form of capital proliferation, its essence has not changed: Capital still proliferates through exploitative labor, but in the digital age, this exploitation is more subtle and efficient. With the help of algorithms and data analysis, the digital platform embeds workers in the chain of capital proliferation and occupies their labor achievements and surplus value for free. In addition, the capital proliferation chain also extends to data collection, commodity circulation and other links, forming a more complex digital economic system. Under digital capitalism, the antagonistic relationship between capital and labor still exists: although the digital platform ostensibly realizes the organization and sociality of production, in fact, there is still a contradiction of anarchy, which is reflected not only in the exploitation and oppression of capital on labor, but also in the resistance and struggle of laborers against capital control. Marx's labor value theory and alienation theory still have practical significance and guiding role in the era of digital capitalism. These theories not only reveal the essence of labor alienation and capital proliferation under digital capitalism, but also provide a theoretical basis for understanding the exploitation mechanism of digital capitalism.

4.2 The Possibility of Liberating Tools

The duality of technology Marx pointed out in the theory of labor value that technology has a dual role in capitalist production relations: On the one hand, it becomes a tool for capital to exploit labor by improving production efficiency and reducing production costs; on the other hand, technology also breeds the potential of individual development and may become a weapon against capital oppression. However, in the era of digital capitalism, this dual role is more complicated. Digital technology not only continues the logic of capital's exploitation of labor, but also intensifies labor alienation and capital's control of labor through data and algorithmization. At the same time, it also continues the role of 'breeding individual development potential'. Although digital technology is used by capital, its possibility as a 'weapon against capital oppression' has not disappeared. Marx's theory suggests that the organic combination of technological governance and labor liberation, the collaborative sharing of data publicization and decentralization, and the practice of paid digital labor and the principle of justice may be an effective way to alleviate the exploitation and enslavement of workers by digital technology. The critical analysis

of digital capitalism by Marx 's labor theory of value provides theoretical support for understanding the possibility of digital technology as a ' tool of liberation '. Based on Marx 's theoretical framework, Fox and other scholars have conducted in-depth research on digital labor and revealed the essence of labor alienation under digital capitalism, which not only enriches the application scope of Marx 's labor theory of value, but also provides a new academic perspective for understanding digital capitalism.

5. Practical Path of Digital Socialism

5.1 Digital Socialism Attempts in European and American Countries

The exploration of digital socialism in European and American countries is a multi-dimensional and intricate phenomenon of " interweaving theory and practice, " which constitutes an important evolution of Western left-wing thought in the 21 st century. This exploration aims to use digital technology as the driving force of social change, and to counter the inherent limitations of digital capitalism by realizing the privatization, democratization and universalization of digital infrastructure. There are many schools of thought within digital socialism, such as "digital socialism" in the narrow sense advocated by Kevin Kelly, cyber communism, communicative socialism, etc. Although these schools have their own characteristics, they share the common vision of "reconstructing the power structure through technical means and creating a new digital public sphere."

In practical exploration, the strategic positioning and policy layout of European and American countries are significantly different: The United States focuses on strengthening global competitiveness through technological innovation, while the European Union focuses more on using the digital economy to expand international influence. In terms of digital infrastructure construction, both European and American countries have invested heavily, but they also face complex problems such as privacy data leakage and increasing digital divide. In response to the drawbacks of digital capitalism in large-scale technology companies, European and American countries have adopted a series of anti-monopoly measures and limited privacy regulations to promote the healthy and sustainable development of the digital economy. However, these practical explorations have also encountered many challenges, both the practical feasibility of the utopian digital socialism model and the deep foundation of the capitalist mode of production and production relations.

Nevertheless, the exploration of digital socialism in European and American countries still provides valuable experience and profound enlightenment for the study of global digital socialism. These explorations not only highlight the optimistic expectations of Western left-wing thought on technological change, but also reflect the theoretical and practical difficulties encountered in practice. Looking forward to the future, with the continuous evolution of artificial intelligence and digital technology, the practice of digital socialism in European and American countries will be carried out in more complex scenarios, providing useful ' extra-territorial mirror ' for the construction of digital socialism in China and other countries, and jointly promoting the research and practice of global digital socialism to a new depth and breadth.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions of Western Left-Wing Scholars

Digital socialism from an international perspective is an important theoretical contribution of western left-wing scholars in the post-financial crisis era. Its theoretical origin can be traced back to the great debate of socialist economic calculation in the early 20 th century. After reinterpreting Marx 's theory of mechanized mass production and deepening the understanding of core concepts such as ' general intelligence ', it gradually formed a redefinition of digital power relations and a new idea of constructing digital commons. Around this issue, western left-wing scholars put forward three main theoretical contexts : starting from the possibility of economic planning, starting from the reconstruction of digital power relations, and starting from the code governance system based on blockchain technology. Through these three threads, scholars have a profound insight into the nature of the capitalist digital crisis and explored a new model that transcends capitalism.

These theoretical contributions are not only reflected in theoretical innovations (such as combining digital technology with socialist ideas to propose a series of new theoretical frameworks), but also in critical thinking on the capitalist digital crisis - they reveal the transformational factors contained in the crisis and provide the non-Western world with the possibility of a new form of civilization. At the same time, some scholars also try to transform theory into practice, build new social relations through blockchain technology, and show a practice-oriented attempt. However, these theories also have limitations : the technical Utopian color is too heavy, from the Marxist position and other issues, resulting in insufficient theoretical feasibility, and the lack of construction of revolutionary forces.

Although the theory of digital socialism by Western left-wing scholars is controversial, it undoubtedly provides a unique research perspective for the fight against capitalism, and also demonstrates the courage and innovative

spirit of exploring new social relations. Compared with traditional scientific socialism, digital socialism shows obvious differences in the logic of argumentation and the path of practice. Looking forward to the future, if digital socialism can further optimize the theoretical system on the basis of adhering to the Marxist class viewpoint and closely combining with the actual needs of the proletarian struggle, it is expected to provide a more practical and feasible path for global social change and contribute valuable wisdom to the construction of a more just and inclusive digital society.

5.3 Unique Exploration of the Chinese Model From an International Perspective

The exploration of digital socialism in the Chinese model presents distinct uniqueness, and the core lies in the deep integration and innovation of digital technology and the socialist system. China emphasizes the application of digital technology to promote the transformation of social production relations, aiming at realizing the organic combination of productivity development and public ownership, so as to overcome the problems of exploitation and gap between the rich and the poor brought by digital capitalism. This model is not only reflected in the actual operation of "optimizing resource allocation and improving production efficiency through digital platforms and intelligent technologies," but also in "insisting on protecting the rights and interests of workers and preventing digital labor from becoming a new form of exploitation," which reflects the superiority and innovation of the socialist system in the digital age. At the theoretical level, the Chinese model of digital socialism breaks through the limitations of traditional socialist theory, combines Marxist historical materialism with the characteristics of the digital economy era, and proposes a new concept of "digital socialism," which provides a new perspective for understanding the socialist development in the digital economy era.

Further, the Chinese model of digital socialism focuses on starting from practice and exploring the development path in line with its own national conditions. Through the construction of "Digital China" and the reform of digital government, China has not only promoted the universalization, democratization and publicization of digital infrastructure, but also improved the governance capacity, optimized the social governance system, and effectively reduced the negative impact of technological development. At the same time, China has deeply criticized Western digital capitalism and regulated the digital economy through socialist principles, avoiding problems such as technological monopoly and privacy leakage, and ensuring the healthy development of the digital economy. The Chinese model of digital socialism not only provides theoretical guidance and practical path for its own development, but also provides a useful reference for global digital governance. Through the construction of the digital Silk Road under the "Belt and Road" initiative, China has strengthened its cooperation with countries around the world in the field of digital economy and jointly coped with the challenges of the digital age. At the same time, China also pays attention to the integration of culture and ideology, and realizes cultural self-confidence and ideological security by constructing a system of "combining socialist core values with digital culture."

6. Conclusion

As a critical transcendence of digital capitalism, digital socialism represents a more forward-looking and humanitarian vision of the future. The arrival of the digital age provides a new historical opportunity for the development of socialism: the "liberation potential" of digital technology can only be fully released under the socialist system; socialism, only through the empowerment of digital technology, can achieve the goal of "free and comprehensive development of human beings." In the future, the practice of digital socialism needs to further deepen theoretical innovation and explore the path in line with its own development in combination with the national conditions of various countries; at the same time, it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation to jointly address the global challenges of digital capitalism and promote the construction of a fair, inclusive and sustainable new form of digital civilization.

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