

The Living Predicament of Human on the Verge of Modernity

-- Analysis based on "One-Dimensional Man"

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Abstract: "One-Dimensional Man" reflects the living predicament of people on the verge of modernity, that is, the dehumanization of existence state, the atomization of existence mode and the nihilization of existence meaning. Herbert Marcuse believes that the root cause of this predicament lies in the ideological role of science and technology, and then puts forward the realization of human liberation through philosophical criticism, cultural revolution and artistic redemption. However, because it is based on cultural and ideological criticism, the liberation program has a strong utopian color. In spite of this, Marcuse's theory of "one-dimensionality" deeply reveals the homogeneity of human society in the process of modernization, and its critical spirit provides enlightening significance to China's socialist modernization.

Keywords: Modernity, Living Predicament, Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man.

1. Introduction

Herbert Marcuse, the first generation of the major representative of the Frankfurt school, published "One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society" in 1964. It is a masterpiece in which he criticized the developed industrial countries. The book had provoked a stir throughout the western world, and became the "Bible" of the student movement in the 1960s. Marcuse is also recognized as "the godfather of the new left movement".

In "One-Dimensional Man", Marcuse established the concept of "one-dimensionality", which was used to criticize the identity and homogeneity of capitalist society. In his view, "Society before advanced capitalism was a two-way society in which people could reasonably and critically consider their own needs." [Herbert Marcuse. One-dimensional Man [M]. Liu Jiyi. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2014:34.] In modern civilization, capitalist society, as a new kind of totalitarian society, uses endless consumption and unlimited enjoyment to bribe the masses and successfully suppressing the opposition and opposing opinions in society. The negative, critical and transcendental dimensions in people's hearts are suppressed, thus creating a society in which all aspects of social life - science, art, philosophy, daily thinking, political system, economy, and craft, etc., tend to be one-dimensional, society thus becomes a "one-dimensional society", and people living in it are difficult to perceive the control of society over them. Without the ability to criticize the real society, there is no way to resist, so they become the tools and slaves of industrial civilization, and become "One-Dimensional Man", "one-dimensionality" reflects the survival predicament of people on the verge of modernity.

2. Definition of "Modernity"

Modernity originated from the modern transformation of Western society, "it is a rational social operating mechanism and cultural spirit generated in the process of modernization

of western industrial society, which is opposite to the empirical and natural nature of traditional agricultural society" [Yi Junqing. Dimensions of Modernity [M]. Harbin: Heilongjiang University Press, 2011: 28.] In a broad perspective, modernity includes two dimensions: institutional and spiritual. From the institutional dimension, modernity is represented by rationalization of economic operation, bureaucratization of administrative management, rationalization and self-discipline of public domain, democratization and contract of public power. From the spiritual dimension, modernity mainly refers to the conscious rational spirit enlightened by modern science and modern knowledge. [Yi Junqing. The dimension of modernity [M]. Harbin: Heilongjiang University Press, 2011:110.] It means the awakening of self-consciousness based on individual freedom and subjectivity.

Modernity is not only a matter of economy, politics, culture or system, but also a matter concerning people. In the domain of modernity, the crucial issue is the relationship between modernity and people, and the most basic part is the impact of modernity on people's living conditions. "Modern" means the affirmation of human creativity and subjectivity, and human beings are liberated from the bondage of circular historical destiny, becoming free and purposeful creators, and the subject of their own destiny. [Liu Qing. Lecture Notes on Western Modern Thought [M]. Beijing: Xinxing Press, 202:16.] Therefore, modernity is closely related to human subjectivity, and one of its connotations is the pursuit of human subjectivity.

However, led by the logic of capital, Western modernity has created a state of antithesis between social development and human development. While promoting the development of human society, modernity has not only brought abundant material achievements for human beings, but also caused many survival difficulties for human beings, which shows the contradiction of western modernity. The Frankfurt School, represented by Marcuse, has thought deep about the problem of modernity. Its representative work, "One-Dimensional

Man”, criticizes the problem of modernity in western society and the predicament of human existence.

3. The Living Predicament of Human on the Verge of Modernity

In “One-Dimensional Man”, Marcuse believes that there are "one-dimensional people" in the developed industrial society who have lost the ability to negate, criticize and transcend, and the "one-dimensional people" mainly reflects the living conditions of people on the verge of modernity. Based on this, he further elaborated the manifestations, root cause and possible solutions to the living dilemma of people in the developed industrial society.

3.1. The Manifestations of the Living Predicament of Human

The contradiction of modernity not only finds and elevates "man", but also buries and buries "man" [Liu Yang, Li Yang. Back to Marx: An exploration of human's survival Dilemma from the perspective of modernity [J]. Journal of Northeastern University (Social Science Edition),2016,18(05):526.] In the book, Marcuse explained the "one-dimensionality" of man. It pointed out that the dilemma of man on the verge of modernity is embodied in the state of existence, the way of existence and the meaning of existence.

3.1.1. the Dehumanization of Existence State

The high development of industrial civilization has greatly enriched the material civilization of society, and led to the alienation of human beings at the same time, that is, the dehumanization of human existence. Marcuse believes that people living in the developed industrial society indulge in the pleasure brought by material desire, they are increasingly obsessed with material success and addicted to consumption, "false needs", that is, "those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice." [Herbert Marcuse. One-dimensional Man [M]. Translated by Liu Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House,2014:13.] replaces the "true needs", people no longer pursue the use value of commodities, instead, exchange value can reveal people's identity and confirm people's existence. Thus, man becomes a slave to money and material desires. At the same time, the high development of science and technology should have served and benefited human beings, but it has gradually developed into a free system out of human control, becoming the dominator of human nature, "the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence" [Herbert Marcuse. One-way human [M]. Liu Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House,2014:16.] In the stage of technological rationality, technology is materialized, human is alienated, human's subjectivity is dissolved, the "second dimension" is deprived, and it becomes the obedient tool of industrial civilization.

3.1.2. the Atomization of Existence Mode

With the progress of science and technology, the developed industrial society has formed a large-scale automated machine production system. And people become in line with the "one-dimensional standard" of industrial parts embedded in it, This phenomenon gives rise to a "new type of totalitarianism" and to the alienation and opposition between the individual and the individual, between the individual and the group, between the individual and the society, that is, the

atomization of the way of being. Marcuse believes that in capitalist society, the role of the market economy do minates people, people treat themselves as commodities to be sold, and their goal of life is to sell themselves successfully in the market and exchange for money. If they fail, they will lose the value of existence. In this case, people lose themselves and become things, people are commodities in the eyes of each other, and the relationship between people is alienated into the relationship between things, which leads to the atomization of people, people no longer have sensibility, impulse, creativity, and vitality, and no longer have "love", and the wholeness and comprehensiveness of people are broken. "The individual is forced to be isolated from other individuals" [Herbert Marcuse. Reason and Revolution [M]. Translated by Cheng Zhimin. Chongqing: Chongqing People's Publishing House,1993:253.] and falls into the "perpetuation of the struggle for existence", in which people lose their organic, unified and integral connection and become isolated, indifferent and alienated atoms.

3.1.3. the Nihilization of Existence Meaning

Modern industrial society is a world of things, and it is a materialistic society controlled by a production system with capital as the core. Faced with a huge production system and commodity accumulation, people will eventually view society purely instrumentally, and then get themselves into the fall of traditional values, leading to the nihilization of existential meaning. According to Marcuse, "A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization" [Herbert Marcuse. One-dimensional Man [M]. Translated by Liu Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House,2014:11.] Instead of giving human freedom, the progress of science and technology has produced a society in which humanity is debased, freedom is lost, and value is eliminated. In capitalist society, instrumental rationality completely suppresses value rationality, personal freedom and life meaning are gradually lost. And people's unique personality and qualitative differences are obliterated, things advocated by "value rationality" are regarded as "metaphysics" and then was knocked down, people are homogenized by modern industrial civilization in terms of needs, thinking and behavior, and people's vitality and creativity are exhausted. Man is reduced to a mere thing, his value, dignity and autonomy are lost. And he fails to achieve real development, the meaning of life is thus reduced to the level of a thing that is equal to a commodity.

In contrast to Marx's "free and well-rounded man" [Karl Marx.1844 Economic and Philosophical manuscript [M]. Translation by Central Compilation and Translation Bureau. Beijing: People's Publishing House,2000:107.], the "one-dimensional man" is undoubtedly oppressed and limited. It presents the living conditions of human beings in modern western society and epitomizes the ills of modernity.

3.2. The root cause of the Living Predicament of Human

In capitalist society, one-dimensional man are faced with the survival situation of dehumanization of existence state, atomization of existence mode and nihilization of existence meaning. Marcuse believes that the root cause of this dilemma is that the rapid development of science and technology has turned it into ideology, and then become the dominant ruling force in the developed industrial society.

"The very concept of technical rationality may be

ideological. Not only the application of technical reason, but technology itself, is the domination (of nature and man)." [Herbert Marcuse. *One-dimensional Man* [M]. Translated by Liu Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2014:106.] In the developed capitalist society, science and technology become the master of enslaving and controlling people, and become a new social control tool. The ideological tendency of technological rationality itself makes people fall into a "comfortable unfreedom" through various forms of manipulation such as consumption, concept, psychology, etc., and then it is difficult for them to perceive the control of society and thus there is no way to resist it. In Marcuse's view, this is manifested as a "new type of totalitarianism". As a new type of totalitarian society, the integration of capitalist society in politics, economy, culture, ideology and other aspects has led to the one-dimensionality of society and people, making people lose their ability to criticize reality and society, and collectively fall into a state of unconsciousness. This kind of totalitarianism is based on science and technology, and it is precisely because the developed science and technology constitute a strict whole, making it a tool to control the form of life, political system and social organization at the same time, and finally resulting in man's one-dimensionality.

One-dimensional man is the product of one-dimensional society, and the one-dimensional society under the rule of technical rationality is the result of the comprehensive effect of politics, culture, language and other aspects. First, technology has closed the political sphere. As the opposite of society, the proletariat is addicted to the technological solutions provided by the developed capitalist society, loses its critical ability, and forms a "one-dimensional politics" without opposition. Secondly, the automatic production makes the cultural commodities standardized, moulded and homogenized, the "two-dimensionality" of culture and the original critical reflection function are completely removed, and become an ideological tool to serve the rule. Moreover, technology has closed the field of discourse. Advanced technology creates developed media, while the consistency of media results in one-dimensional expression of discourse, and authoritative speech also makes language lose its critical function. According to Marcuse, the closure of the field of discourse leads to the one-dimensional culture, which also leads to the closure of the political field, and finally forms a one-dimensional society and produces one-dimensional man.

In short, science and technology provide rationality to "one-dimensionality" of man. Marcuse believes that technological progress = the growth of social wealth = the expansion of slavery [Yi Junqing. *Anxiety and Cultural Criticism of Modernity* [M]. Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang University Press, 2007:167.], people decide their own lives independently, but it is not possible technically, because people's unfreedom is subject to the technology that provides them with rich material life. With the continuous development of technology, human beings are constantly alienated and instrumentalized, thus falling into a one-dimensional survival dilemma.

3.3. The Countermeasures to the Living Predicament of Human

Facing the one-dimensionality of man in the developed industrial society, Marcuse put forward three main ways of salvation, namely, philosophical criticism, cultural revolution and artistic salvation.

First of all, the historical mission of philosophy is to criticize the real society. Marcuse believes that the important pattern of thinking in philosophy are rational thoughts and negation criticism, so it can be used to negate the existing unreasonable aspects of society. Before that, he intended to make people in a one-dimensional society realize the importance of critical thinking by criticizing unreasonable factors in positivist philosophy and linguistic analytic philosophy, so as to change people's state of being controlled by positive thinking, then restore people's negative critical thinking, get rid of their state of alienation and instrumentalization, and reverse the situation of being controlled and ruled, so as to be truly free and pursue true happiness.

Secondly, it is an important way to lift the repression to carry out the general revolution from the ideological and cultural field. Marcuse believed that only by lifting people's sense of oppression and awakening people's critical ability to reality can people get rid of the one-dimensional survival dilemma. Therefore, he proposed a struggle mode with "great rejection" as the core to obtain people's liberation, that is, rejecting the repression of technological rationality, the control and domination of technology, and the submission to industrial society. Since the proletariat in the developed industrial society has lost its revolutionary spirit, the main body of the revolution is the "new left", that is, the groups on the edge of capitalist society, such as young students, dissident intellectuals, the unemployed, the persecuted of other races, the unemployed, etc. Through the cultural revolution, the wrong thoughts of one-dimensional people are educated and corrected, so that more people can realize the deception and repression of the technologically rational society, and then realize the freedom and liberation of individuals..

Finally, artistic redemption can make people get rid of the depressed state controlled by technical rationality. Marcuse believes that the class contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the developed industrial society has been eliminated, so it is necessary to carry out an instinctive revolution and psychological revolution that is different from the violent revolution. Because people's love is suppressed, human nature is divided, and their thoughts, languages and behaviors are one-dimensional, the key to the revolution is to transform people's instinctive structure and behavioral psychology. The fundamental feature of art is fantasy and imagination, which can liberate people's soul and their repressed desire for love, and then transcend the alienation of society and people, so that humanity can be restored, so as to pursue the generation of people's free and conscious subjectivity, and realize the transformation of people from one dimension to multiple dimension.

4. Criticism and Reflections

4.1. The theoretical limitations of "one-dimensional man"

In "One-Dimensional Man", Marcuse criticized modernity around the problem of human's living predicament. Although he had a deep humanistic concern for the problem of modernity, it can be seen from the perspective of reality that his propositions are utopian and limited. The world constructed according to his social critical theory can only be a utopian, which cannot really help people get rid of the real survival dilemma. The reasons for this position are as follows.

4.1.1. Inverted critical stance

Although Marcuse inherited Marx's humanitarian spirit and boldly criticized the inhuman phenomena of capitalist society, he ran counter to Marx's criticism from philosophy to political economy. When constructing the critical theory of "one-dimensional man", Marcuse mainly criticized culture and ideology, ignoring the social and historical experience itself. Deviating from the materialist principle of Marxism, the criticism of political economy of Marxism is obscured in its theoretical system, so it fails to reveal the root cause of human's survival dilemma. He argued that it is the dominance of science and technology, rather than political and economic systems in advanced industrial societies that resulted in the "one-dimensionality" of man. Moreover, he ascribes the cause of historical development to technology rather than to social modes of production. As a result, Marcuse's critical reflection on modernity still stays at the level of "philosophy of consciousness", ignoring the principle of "science" and the theory is not practical enough, so he can not really solve the dilemma of human existence.

4.1.2. A utopian solution

Although Marcuse pointed out the "one-dimensional" development dilemma of human beings in capitalist society, he did not put forward the practical and feasible path for the "one-dimensional man" to "two-dimensional man". Based on the social critical theory he formulated, he proposed the solution of philosophical criticism, cultural revolution and artistic salvation, but it was confined to the pure ideological field, so it was a fantasy that could not be realized in practice. In addition, Marcuse pinned his hope of getting rid of the "one-dimensionality" dilemma on a very small number of marginal groups in modern western society, believing that because they are least affected by the alienation trend in developed industrial society and least share the benefits of the system, thus they may still have a certain critical and negative dimension. However, this approach of resorting to "local" and "marginal" has little benefit in improving people's survival predicament. On the contrary, the abandonment of wholeness and unity will lead to the proliferation of relativism and nihilism. [Liu Yang, Li Yang. Back to Marx: A probe into Human's Survival Dilemma from the perspective of Modernity [J]. Journal of Northeastern University (Social Science Edition), 2016, 18(05): 528.] And because he puts the idea of overcoming the drawbacks of modernity inside the western modern society, he falls into the new Western self-centripetalism.

In a word, Marcuse is pessimistic about the liberation prospects of one-dimensional people in a one-dimensional society, and his reversed critical stance will eventually lead to utopian solutions. He regards philosophical criticism, cultural revolution and artistic salvation as hopes to overcome the ills of modernity, rather than pragmatic solutions.

4.2. The reality reflection of "one-dimensional man"

"As long as people are associated with Western theory with acute critical potential, they are eager to use it to diagnose the ills of Chinese society." [Dean. "Dimensions of Criticism: A review of the International Symposium on the Influence of the Franz School in China [J]. Xuwen Translation. Philosophical Trends, 2009(2).] Although Marcuse's "One-dimensional Man" focuses on the plight of human beings in the Western developed industrial society, it reveals the homogeneity of human society in the process of industrialization and

modernization. Its critical theory has important enlightenment significance to China's socialist modernization construction.

First of all, we must adhere to the basic positions, viewpoints and methods of Marxism to guide China's modernization drive. Marcuse's "One-dimensional Man" theory inherits and develops the humanitarian spirit of Marxism. He boldly exposes the inhuman phenomena inside capitalism through cultural and ideological criticism, and is committed to seeking a salvation solution to free people from bondage and regain freedom. His value stance is still Marxist. He reconstructed Marxism according to the reality of western developed capitalist society so as to maintain the sensitivity and effectiveness of Marxism to practical problems, which had successfully activated the vitality of Marxism. This tells us that in order to develop Marxism advancing with time, we must continue to adapt the basic tenets of Marxism to China's specific realities and its fine traditional culture, and always insist on using Marxism to guide China's socialist modernization drive.

Secondly, we should correctly understand the role of science and technology and make it serve China's socialist modernization. Marcuse criticized the "ideological" role of science and technology in capitalist society and its enslaved control over human beings, exposing the phenomenon of human subjectivity being weakened and dispelling. In society today, science and technology develop rapidly, we should develop a correct view of science and technology, not only to affirm that it has brought rich material civilization, but also to prevent the negative impact of science and technology on people's survival, so that it can serve human subjectivity. In the process of the application of science and technology, it is necessary to keep a balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality. To be more specific, we should not only pay attention to the feasibility and economy of technology, but also adhere to the subjectivity and initiative of people, so that the high-quality development of economy and technology will become a force for the benefit of human society and promote the free and comprehensive development of people.

Third, we should stimulate the vitality of cultural innovation and creativity to meet the people's ever-growing diversified spiritual and cultural needs. Marcuse criticized the oppression of one-dimensional culture on human beings, pointing out that mass cultural production in the developed industrial society resulted in the output of the same value, and thus resulted in the blind obedience and acceptance of human beings. In today's society, the industrial nature and commodity attribute of China's culture have been highlighted. More and more cultural products are prone to cater to the market demand and the homogenization phenomenon is serious. Film and television programs, cultural publishing, media platforms and other aspects inevitably produce a large number of vulgar cultural garbage, which corrode people's thoughts and spiritual world in a subtle way, causing people's moral decline and listlessness. Therefore, we must give full play to the guiding role of core socialist values, pay attention to the construction of spiritual civilization, actively guide the healthy development of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and meet the spiritual and cultural needs of the people.

Finally, the essence of modernization is the modernization of people, and we must always adhere to the people-centered philosophy of development. Marcuse's "One-Dimensional Man" theory focuses on individual rights and happiness. He

believes that the developed productive forces in the modern western society not only cease to bring human liberation, but also cause human alienation, so he is committed to exploring the road of individual freedom and liberation. In the process of China's industrialization, there are also problems such as the alienation of the people in the factory production line and the tension between man and nature. Today, China has embarked on a new journey of Chinese modernization. It is necessary to strengthen the subject status of human and pay attention to the humanistic care of people in the process of development. We ought to pay attention to the interests, needs and psychological feelings of people. At the same time, it is required that actively seek the existence value and spiritual pursuit of individuals, so as to confirm the existence significance of people. We will adhere to the Chinese Path to Modernization, which ensures that all-round social progress and all-round development of people are coordinated and synchronized.

5. Conclusion

“One-dimensional Man” focuses on the living conditions of human beings in modern western society, and the "one-dimensional man" reflects the plight of human beings in the perspective of modernity, which is embodied in the dehumanized state of existence, the atomized way of existence and the nihilized meaning of existence. Marcuse believed that the root cause of this dilemma lies in the ideological role of science and technology, and then proposed to realize human freedom and liberation by means of philosophical criticism, cultural revolution and artistic redemption. However, due to the reversal of the critical positions of culture and ideology, the solution proposed by Marcuse has a striking utopian color. Nevertheless, Marcuse's theory of "one dimension" reveals the common problems in the process of the modernization of human society, and its critical spirit has important enlightenment significance to China's socialist modernization drive.

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