

Viewing the Consumerism of China's Today's Society With Marxist Consumption

--- Take Loan Consumption as an Example

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Abstract

Since the second industrial revolution, technological innovation has promoted manufacturing and commodity circulation, as well as social development, leading traditional society into modern development. The social relationship and structure of traditional society are in the high-speed circulation of commodities and currency. Disintegration, the development of industry reframes and stereotypes modern society. However, with the rapid economic development, the relationship between production and consumption in today's society is distorted. Consumerism prevails, and the relationship between production and consumption cannot be balanced, which has become the biggest obstacle to establishing a correct consumption concept in my country. On the basis of expounding Marx's concept of consumption, the article analyzes the causes of consumerism and the ways to resist the concept of overdraft consumption in today's society, in order to promote the optimization of industrial structure and consumption structure.

Keywords: production and consumption, Marx's concept of consumption, consumerism, consumption alienation

1. Introduction

With the development of society, the problem of consumption is becoming more and more important on the road of human development. The problem of consumption is a major issue of human development, which is related to the change of the way of human existence, and the consumption activity is related to the development trend of human beings. At the same time, with the continuous improvement of people's consumption demand and the vigorous development of Internet media, the e-commerce live broadcast industry has sprung up and penetrated into all aspects of people's lives. Online consumption is in full swing, and the consumption volume of Double Eleven in 2020 has reached a new high. At the end of 2020, although it was hit hard by the epidemic to a large extent, my country's economy recovered rapidly, and domestic demand drove China's economy, showing a unique situation in the landscape. However, blindly following the trend of consumption, the effect of celebrities bringing goods, and the concept of overdraft consumption that accompanies online consumption also make people sink deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of consumerism.

Consumerism is a kind of consumption value that pursues "satisfaction of desires" and regards possession of more material and wealth as the highest goal of life (Chen & Kuang, 2015). Since the rise of consumerism in the United States in the 1920s, it has rapidly developed into the mainstream consumer values and way of life in western developed countries. But with the advent of the era of economic globalization, consumerism has gradually spread to the vast number of developing countries.

However, consumerism not only harms nature, destroys the ecological environment, and causes resource depletion, but also harms society, exacerbating injustice among people and disharmony in social development (Pan et al., 2015). Therefore, it is an urgent matter to correctly understand the harm of consumerism, establish a correct consumption concept, and cultivate a correct consumption culture. In particular, our country is in a period of great development and great prosperity of the socialist market economy. Expanding domestic demand is one of the most effective ways to promote economic development, but while we are pursuing economic development, if we can recognize the essence of consumerism and make reasonable use of it, and avoid its bad aspects, we can better serve our country's development and human progress.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Marx's Concept of Consumption

Marx's concept of consumption is not systematically discussed in Marx's works, but his unique views on consumption can be seen from a series of his works. In his article *"Introduction to Political Economy"*, he made a profound analysis of consumption issues, in which reasonable concepts still have important guiding significance for consumption behavior in today's society. Marx said in *"Das Kapital"*: "From the first day man appeared on the stage of the earth, he has to consume every day, no matter before he begins to produce and during production"(Marx, 2004), affirming the positive significance of consumption is the basis of the Marxist Consumerism. Consumption is divided into production consumption and living consumption. When Marx studied consumption, he regarded it as a whole in the four links of social reproduction, and believed that consumption was the ultimate goal and driving force of the total process of material materials (Xiang, 2021). Marx's classic consumption point of view in *"Das Kapital"* has great reference significance for criticizing contemporary wrong consumerism.

2.2 The Essence of Consumption

For the essence of consumption, Marx also made a deep analysis. In order to correctly reveal the essence of consumption, Marx made a scientific classification of the types of consumption. He divides consumption into productive consumption and personal consumption. Marx believes that the process of production and consumption is also the process of capital appreciation of capitalism. In the process of capitalist production, while consuming the means of production (machines, equipment, raw materials, etc.). It also needs to consume the physical strength of laborers. In such a process, "the act of production itself, in all its elements, is also the act of consumption" (Marx & Engels, 1985). This means that under capitalist wage labor, production and consumption are also a process of capital appreciation. Marx once said: "It is not the workers who consume the means of production as the material elements of production activities, but the means of production that consume the workers as the yeast of their own life process, and the life process of capital, knowledge capital, as a self-appreciating value. Movement." (Marx & Engels, 1979)

2.3 The Manifestation and Essence of Consumerism

Consumption is a basic way of life for people to survive. It is the completion of the activities of the consuming subject on the objective natural objects. Such activities are selective and creative activities of the subject, aimed at meeting the material and spiritual needs of human existence and development (Yu & Zhou, 2003). However, due to the rapid development of science, technology and economy, contemporary society has entered the era of overproduction, and the wrong concept of consumption caused by this has emerged. Consumption in contemporary society is full of excessive consumption, borrowed consumption and "consistent consumption", which are all manifestations of contemporary consumerism.

Consumerism, that is, the purpose of consumption is not to satisfy practical needs, but to continuously pursue the satisfaction of created and stimulated desires. Consumerism is a kind of consumption value that pursues "satisfaction of desires" and regards possession and consumption of more material wealth as the highest goal of life (Chen & Kuang, 2015). Originally, consumption activities should follow two principles: the principle of natural life and the principle of spirit. But the alienation of contemporary consumption actually deviates from the principle of consumption. What consumerism pursues is not the proper consumption concept for the survival of human life, but the pursuit and advocacy of excessive material possession, which regards consumption as the purpose of life and the value concept of a good life, and the practice activities under the control of this concept.

2.4 Consumption Alienation

Marx's analysis of the nature of consumption shows that under the capitalist private ownership social system, self-interested consumption is an alienation of human nature. Marx put forward in Mill's *"Principles of Political Economy"*: In order to satisfy their own self-interested needs, producers seize the wealth of others by producing and possessing products. In this case, the purpose of the producer to produce the product is only to satisfy his own desire, and the product becomes a tool for the producer to satisfy his desire. On the consumer side, consumers have to be enslaved and dominated by products because they are dominated by self-interested consumption. Consumers' dependence on products makes them lose their human nature. Likewise, "objectification manifests itself in the loss and enslavement of the object"(Marx & Engels, 1979).The relationship between producers and consumers is also alienated.

Consumption alienation, in layman's terms, refers to the abnormal change of consumers' consumption intentions, and consumption for the sake of consumption (Sun, 2021). Although Marx did not directly and systematically

discuss the alienation of consumption, but in the "Manuscripts of Economics and Philosophy of 1844", Marx analyzed the problem from the point of view of the actual human existence. "Consumption" in the final link of the field. If it is said that people have to engage in inescapable labor in order to survive, it is a kind of labor alienation, and for consumption, people are willing to be its slaves. People compare consumption with each other, take pride in consumption, and get caught up in it. This is consumption alienation. It can be said that consumption alienation is the deepening of labor alienation and need alienation.

Nowadays, the alienation of consumption has gradually attracted people's attention. Consumption was originally an activity to meet one's own needs, but it has become an end in itself. This makes labor alienation deeper and deeper. People not only consume for consumption, but also labor for consumption. In his writings, Marx pointed out that production and consumption are two indispensable links in the production process. People can obtain both material and spiritual satisfaction in the process of consumption. However, due to the alienation of consumption, consumption has become a purpose, and the existence of this purpose leads to the purpose of production, which is to continuously stimulate consumers to consume in order to obtain more profits.

3. Research Content

3.1 Consumerism in Today's Society

On June 17, 2021, the central bank issued a notice on "Q1 Payment Operation in 2021" (Note 1). The data shows that the total outstanding credit of credit cards overdue for half a year in China is 89.2 billion yuan, of which young people account for the majority. To put it bluntly, the young people owe the bank more than half a year in debt as high as 89.2 billion yuan. However, in 2011 10 years ago, this figure was only 8 billion yuan. In 10 years, it has increased by more than 11 times, which is equivalent to the expected total in one month now, catching up with the total in one year 10 years ago.

Nowadays, what is more terrifying than the over-consumption of credit cards is the ubiquitous online loans, Huabei, Weilidai, Jingdong baitiao, Fenqile and so on. According to the "Debt Status Report of Chinese Young People" (Note 2) released by Nielsen, the average debt of the post-90s generation is 127,000 yuan, and the debt-to-income ratio reaches 1,850%. What does this data indicate? Debt is 18.5 times salary! Extreme poverty has become a hallmark of this generation of young people. But worse than poverty, they have empty pockets and flat jobs on one side. On the other hand, they also spend crazily and can't pay the loan on time. Between ice and fire, the lives of young people are pushed into the abyss.

However, for capital, the abyss has never been the focus of their attention, and interest is their best friend. The consumerism that pushes young people into the abyss was originally a common social phenomenon in capitalist countries. They pursue decent consumption and unrestrained material enjoyment, and regard these as life values. However, with the continuous expansion of the scope of economic and cultural globalization, the connection between countries and societies has become closer and closer, and consumerism in capitalist society has gradually begun to erode the blood and bones of the Chinese people.

3.2 Analysis of the Causes of Young People's Loan Consumption From the Perspective of Marx's Consumption Concept

So how did consumerism flourish in China? What role does capital play in the whole process? To explore the reasons, I think there are three points:

First, advertising shocks—to find legitimate reasons for improper borrowing and consumption. There is a well-known "bullet theory" in modern communication science. Information is like a bullet hitting the body and can react quickly. There is also an idiom in ancient China called "Three people become tigers". If you say a lot of lies, you can make people believe them. These theories are used vividly by capital and business, and a consumerist advertisement shocks the heart. For example, a smart woman is willing to spend money for herself - linking marketing with people's IQ, implying that if you don't buy, you have a low IQ; if you love yourself, you can spend it if you want! - Binding self-pleasure and consumption, etc., such advertisements are all over the street, and it is difficult not to watch. The essence of consumerism is to create anxiety. It frantically incites people to consume without thinking, and even associates consumption with identity, class, taste, IQ, love, and family affection. "No matter how careful a family of three lives, the daughter's birthday should be well spent, so let's use Huabei", "Mother wants to vomit on a plane, and her son doesn't have enough money, so she should go to JD.com to get a loan for her to upgrade to first class", etc. Wait, this series of advertisements, under the guise of love, hit the soft underbelly of Chinese people who pay attention to family affection and filial piety. In fact, the consumerism it conveys is a moral kidnapping and an incorrect concept of consumption. The behavior of being "forced" to consume loans is also an alienated consumption behavior.

Second, big data is a prison—under the data, no one can escape. Young people of Generation Z have been exposed to the Internet since childhood, watching Douyin, chatting on WeChat, browsing Weibo, and browsing Taobao have long been part of their lives. In the process, they are quietly tracked precisely by big data and algorithms. Various apps will analyze their consumption preferences, dig deep into their consumption needs, and continuously push them a dazzling array of products. Since then, whether it is to browse the circle of friends, short videos, or watching TV series, even listening to a song, nowhere can escape the dungeon that capital has drawn for them. This is called the new era of Internet painting as a prison.

Third, the threshold is lowered, and loans are easier. Formal institutions have strict control over loans, and the procedures are cumbersome, and far water cannot save near fire. But online loans are different. You don't need a work certificate or repayment ability. You only need an ID card and a mobile phone number, and you can borrow money with the touch of a finger.

Advertising brainwashing, algorithm tracking, and fast payment to accounts make young people without much social experience the "cake" that major e-commerce and online lending platforms compete for. The genius of the online loan platform is that even if it knows that your repayment ability is weak, as long as there is still a family behind it, it will open the magic box for you with confidence. In this way, one link is linked to the other, seamlessly connected, young people plunge into the trap of consumerism, silently, and finally unable to extricate themselves.

3.3 The Path Choice of Resisting Consumerism From the Perspective of Marxist Consumption View

According to Marx's consumption theory, the original meaning of consumption is to satisfy the real needs of people's production and development, and it is the external manifestation of people's essential attributes. But the prevalence of contemporary consumerism has alienated what was originally an effective form of human development—consumption. Combining with Marx's concept of consumption, I think that consumerism can be curbed from the following aspects:

First of all, coordinate consumption and production, and establish people's correct consumption concept. Consumption concept is the core of consumer culture, and updating consumption concept is the key to creating consumer culture. Marx's concept of consumption is to pay attention to the coordinated development of consumption and production, so as to ensure the healthy operation of the entire economic field. When consumerism fills people's minds and the contradiction between nature and human beings tends to intensify, Marx's consumption theory must be used as a guide, a correct consumption concept must be established, and a sustainable development path must be taken. The consumption concept of "anthropocentrism" must be replaced by the consumption concept of "harmonious coexistence of man and nature". Only by establishing the concepts of rational consumption, moderate consumption, green consumption, and ecological consumption can we properly handle the relationship between man and nature, and between contemporary man and future generations.

Secondly, mobilize the power of various parties to create a harmonious consumption environment. The consumption environment has an important influence on people's consumption concepts and consumption patterns. It is necessary to do a good job in the construction of the consumption environment, and the government should play a leading and restrictive role. Under the conditions of a market economy, expanding demand is a powerful means to promote economic development, but the application of the means should be moderate. The government should use various means to oppose the inducement and promotion of consumerism by capital and businessmen, strengthen the guidance and education on consumption, and change Consumerist values of consumerism. At the same time, most of the consumption trends in contemporary society are guided by the media, and the media should give positive guidance instead of inducing consumers to form "false demand". The establishment of a harmonious consumption environment requires the joint efforts of many parties, so as to form a good consumption culture and guide people to the road of healthy development.

Finally, strengthen consumer self-cultivation and enhance consumer awareness. Consumers, as the main body of consumption, must strengthen their own consciousness of subjectivity. Consumers are the last hurdle to control consumerism, and "the interconnected destiny of the human and natural kingdoms rests on us, the consumers." (Dunning, 1997) Consumers must be wary of the brainwashing techniques of capital giants, adhere to a rational consumption concept, do what they can and live within their means. In addition, consumers should follow the principle of "quantity and quality" when consuming, and use the correct consumption method to consume moderately. Reduce dependence on consumer goods, and expand your unilateral material needs into material, spiritual, cultural, psychological and other comprehensive needs. Consciously abandon the unhealthy concept of consumption, do not be a slave to material desires and wealth.

4. Conclusion

In the face of the great abundance of material in today's world and the influence of foreign ideas, it is particularly important to establish a healthy consumption concept. People should start from their own needs, combine with the wisdom of Marxist philosophy, enrich spiritual needs, correctly view material needs, and establish a correct Marxist consumption concept, which is of great significance to the development of individuals and society. Under the influence of rapid economic development and ideological and cultural changes, correct consumerism will lead the way of harmonious development, create new value, and promote the construction of a happy China

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Notes

Note 1. <http://www.pbc.gov.cn/goutongjiaoliu/113456/113469/4260419/index.html>

Note 2. <https://global.nielsen.com/zh/insights/>

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