

Reflection on Moral Criticism of Mass Culture

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Abstract

Since China's reform and opening up, some new changes in the field of social morality (especially in the field of social morality and professional ethics) have become the focus of public attention. "The theory of moral decline" and other pessimistic argument are widely prevalent. Since the 1990s, with the vigorous development of mass culture, the criticism of mass culture has always been the focus topic in the cultural circle, and the criticism of the negative impact of mass culture on social morality is also heard. However, whether the development of mass culture is harmful to the construction of social morality and even the decline of social morality is correct or not is worthy of discussion and reflection.

Keywords: mass culture, morality, the theory of moral decline, cultural criticism

Mass culture is a specific category. "It mainly refers to the contemporary cultural form that rises in contemporary cities, is closely related to contemporary large industry, and takes the globalized modern media (especially electronic media) as the medium for mass production. It is a contemporary cultural consumption form in the consumption era or quasi consumption era, which is planned and guided by the consumption ideology and adopts the fashionable operation mode. It is the product of the full development of modern industry and market economy". The research of mass culture criticism began with the cultural industry theory of Frankfurt school. Since the early 1990s, there has also been an upsurge of research on mass culture in China. Based on the critical theories of western mass culture, including Frankfurt school, postmodern elegant and popular confluence theory, scholars have carried out extensive and in-depth criticism of mass culture. At the same time, "Moral Decline Theory" has also become a research hotspot in the same period. As a social phenomenon after China's reform and opening up, the development of mass culture has also been attributed to the main cultural root of the decline of social morality. It is true that there is a close relationship between mass culture and the construction of social morality. However, whether the influence of mass culture on the development of social morality is really as far-reaching as some scholars say, whether mass culture is one of the main causes of moral crisis, and even the rationality of the theory of moral crisis is still debatable. Therefore, the one-sided criticism of turning a blind eye to the value significance of mass culture in the construction of ethics and morality is worthy of in-depth reflection.

1. Intellectuals' Monopoly of the Discourse Power of Moral Culture and Its Criticism of Mass Culture

The theory of moral crisis began after the establishment of the market economic system in the early 1990s. The proposition and theoretical debate of the moral crisis theory is mainly a reflection and worry of the humanistic intellectuals on the development of social morality, and it is a manifestation of dissatisfaction with the status quo of secularized social morality. First of all, this has something to do with the impact on the discourse authority and social status of humanistic intellectuals in the increasingly secular economic society. For a long time, humanistic intellectuals always have a sense of hereditary superiority to culture and social morality. The vigorous development of mass culture has a great impact on the discourse right of humanistic intellectuals in social, cultural and moral evaluation, which naturally causes the resistance of the majority of humanistic intellectuals. Secondly, traditionally, humanistic intellectuals play the role of referees, mentors and leaders. They still regard themselves as judges for mass culture, and often hold a critical attitude towards culture different from their own standards. The accusations of mass culture often focus on its non-compliance with the traditional aesthetic standards, which are exactly the evaluation standards set and adhered to by humanistic intellectuals.

2. The Paradigm of the Development of Social Ethics in China Is Renewed, and the Moral Evaluation Mechanism Needs to Be Transformed Urgently

With the gradual and in-depth development of China's social transformation, the context of ethical and moral discourse has also changed. The traditional morality has been difficult to adapt to the moral demands of contemporary society. Therefore, it is inevitable to draw a pessimistic conclusion of moral anomie when examining the moral situation of contemporary society with the traditional ethics. If we re-examine the current situation of social morality from a holistic and developmental perspective, there is every reason to believe that the current social ethics and morality are constantly improving and developing as a whole. Its internal structure is gradually improved from one-sided emphasis on virtue ethics to the coordinated development of virtue ethics and institutional ethics, which is a benign development of structural adjustment and overall improvement. The specific manifestations are as follows: The whole society has developed from one-sided neglect of the construction of institutional ethics to the construction of social institutional ethics focusing on social justice and fairness, democracy and legal system, freedom and equality, integrity and openness; From a one-sided focus on the construction of private morality that is compatible with the small-scale peasant economy and the unit-system society, to the direction of focusing on the construction of social morality that is compatible with the modern market economy. Whether it is the structural transformation and adjustment of social ethics and moral construction, or the adaptation and participation of the public to modern social ethics and morality, a qualitative leap has been achieved, which is a great social progress. Therefore, rather than highlighting the social moral crisis. Rather, it is a crisis of adaptability to the real society caused by the failure of the cultural elites to build and uphold the consciousness concept that should reflect, explain and guide the development of ethics and morality.

In addition, the manned spaceflight spirit of "being able to bear hardships, fight, tackle key problems and contribute" has emerged in society in recent years. The earthquake relief spirit of "unremitting self-improvement, tenacious struggle, unity, solidarity, self-reliance and hard work". The great anti epidemic spirit of putting life first, uniting the whole country, sacrificing life and death, respecting science and sharing destiny. The advanced moral deeds of moral models represented by "contemporary Lei Feng" Guo Mingyi, the vast number of young volunteers active in large-scale activities such as the Beijing Olympic Games, the Xiamen BRICs summit and the Qingdao SCO summit, as well as hundreds of millions of selfless volunteers active in the streets. It tells the transformation and improvement of socialist moral achievements and national moral quality in the new period with plank facts.

3. Overestimation of the Social Moral Influence of Mass Culture

The popularization characteristics of mass culture, especially the "three vulgar cultures", which account for only a small proportion, often become the pretext for people to criticize mass culture for corrupting social morality. However, the popularization of mass culture is essentially the necessity of mass culture to meet the needs of the public. The internal moral quality of mass culture does not depend on the mass culture itself, but on the audience of mass culture, that is, the moral quality of the public, especially its moral values. It is undeniable that the morality of mass culture plays a guiding role in the development of social morality. The vulgar mass culture will have a certain negative impact on the development of social morality. However, the market orientation determines that the morality of mass culture is essentially a barometer of the development of social morality. Compared with the guiding function under the strong moral education value orientation of elite culture, mass culture is more a reflection of social morality and a response to the needs. The scene of the declining moral atmosphere presented to the public just reflects the general scene of social morality in real social life. Therefore, instead of generalizing the spearhead of moral corruption to the external mass culture (without strictly distinguishing the mainstream of mass culture from a few "three vulgar cultures"), it is better to find the reason from the real social morality itself.

In addition, in Chinese society, the extensive and in-depth influence of the government in public social life determines that in China, mainstream culture still plays an important role in social and cultural life and plays an important educational function. Therefore, different from the absolute advantage and status of western mass culture in social life, the status and role of Chinese mass culture in social life (including moral life, of course) are far lower than those in western society.

4. The Irrationality of Blindly Transplanting Western Cultural Critic Theory

At present, the critical theory of mass culture in Chinese theoretical circles is mainly derived from the critical theory of cultural industry of Western Frankfurt school, Jameson and Bell's postmodern cultural integration theory. Although some theories in different cultural contexts and different historical periods have certain

universality, the suitability of transplanting the Western cultural criticism theory in the middle of the last century to China's current society to criticize the moral impact of mass culture is still debatable.

The first is the critical theory of cultural industry of Frankfurt school. Its context is in western society, and it is a cultural reflection on the Nazi's ideological and moral control over the social masses through the use of mass culture, stepping on the stage and launching a world war. It is a theoretical system used to explain the phenomenon of western mass culture in a certain historical context, which can be matched only in a specific context. In the theory of cultural industry, mass culture is regarded as a criticism of the positive culture of safeguarding the ideology of the ruling class.

Second, the current development of mass culture in China is just opposite to the cultural development of Frankfurt school at that time. "Some scholars pointed out that Adorno accused mass culture as a tool for the ruling group to implement ideological control. However, in China, even the resolute opponents of mass culture admit that there is no direct" collusion "relationship between mass culture and mainstream ideological culture. The initial stage of China's mass culture is intended to break the ideological confinement of extreme" left "culture to the public during the "Cultural Revolution".

Third, Chinese society is a dual system society. The urban-rural dual system society makes a significant difference in the influence of mass culture on urban and rural social morality. As a cultural form highly dependent on technology and suitable for modern and post-modern society, mass culture has a high influence on urban social morality, while its influence on Rural China, which is still in a quasi-modern society, is limited. Therefore, blindly transplanting the cultural criticism theory under the specific western historical field and knowledge field to explain the significantly different Chinese mass culture and social morality, especially criticizing the negative impact of mass culture on social morality, its applicability is not good.

5. The Falsity of the Decline of Social Moral Image From the Perspective of Mass Culture

The censure of cultural elites on mass culture is not without a source. Since China's reform and opening up, with the development of economy and society, mass culture has replaced elite culture and mainstream culture and become the most extensive and profound cultural type affecting the public. The deepening sense of moral indifference has become a deeper place for people to feel in mass culture, which has also become an important reason for people to recognize the existence of moral crisis and blame it on mass culture. However, the reason for the deepening of moral indifference lies, to some extent, in the moral illusion created and presented to the public by traditional elite culture and modern mass culture and its strong contrast:

The illusion of moral prosperity shaped and presented by elite culture. Based on the value principle of moral education, the moral public opinion publicity mechanism dominated by traditional elite culture and mainstream culture often only pays attention to the moral publicity of social elites and moral models, but lacks the moral attention of the general public; On the other hand, the reports and propaganda of moral deeds and characters are often deified. Under this mode, the social masses only accept the idealized and single dimensional social morality. Therefore, the traditional elite culture actually creates a false picture of social moral prosperity in the hearts of the social masses.

The market-oriented, commercial and entertaining characteristics of mass culture make catering to the needs of the audience the most critical and even the only wind vane. After getting rid of the shackles of various ideologies and lofty requirements of moral education, on the one hand, the conditions for mass culture to show a more objective and real social moral scene; on the other hand, catering to the audience makes those negative moral materials that are more lethal, can subvert the social public's moral conscience and moral psychological bottom line, and can win the public's attention more favored by media workers. Therefore, in the era of mass culture, the reports of negative moral events often fill the mass media, resulting in the illusion of the decline of moral atmosphere to the public.

From the false illusion of moral prosperity created actively and deliberately to the illusion of moral decline deliberately presented passively to cater to the audience, the strong contrast between positive and negative moral illusions makes it inevitable for the public to interpret the conclusion of social morality from prosperity to decline from the two kinds of moral illusions. However, in fact, the contrast between the different display and reflection of social moral conditions by this cultural media is far greater than the moral changes in the real society.

In short, there are great limitations and deviations in blindly transplanting the imported theory to explain the specific social form to explain the current ethical and moral changes in Chinese society. To evaluate the role of mass culture in the construction and development of social ethics, we should abandon the "colored glasses"

perspective of moral judgment and replace it with a comprehensive and comprehensive evaluation from a dialectical perspective.

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