

A Brief Discussion of Gramsci's Theory of Civil Society

Gaoxiang Wang

Tianjin University of Commerce, Tianjin, 300000, China.

Abstract

Gramsci's concept of civil society establishes a new theoretical tradition that summarizes civil society in a cultural sense, which is different from Aristotle's unique city-state or political community in ancient Greece in a political sense, and different from Hegel and Marx's definition of civil society in an economic sense. This theoretical tradition was developed by the early Frankfurt School and the theories of Parsons and others, finally reached an unprecedented theoretical synthesis in Habermas. It represents the mainstream of contemporary civil society theory research, reflecting the shift in the focus of Western civil society theory research since the 20th century.

Keywords

Gramsci, Civil society, Culture.

1. The development of the concept of civil society

"Civil society" first appeared in Aristotle's "Poltike Kornonia" in Political Science, which means "an ethical-political community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined legal system." The word was later translated by Cicero into Latin "Civilis Societas", "referring not only to individual countries, but also to the living conditions of civilized political communities that have developed into cities". In this way, the overarching concept, which originally meant the life of the entire city-state community, has a triple meaning of economy, politics, and civilized society. [1]

For the first time, Hegel explicitly distinguished civil society from the political state in theory, using the concept of civil society in the modern sense. Based on the distinction between private life and the state, he used civil society to refer to the realm of private autonomy, seeing it as a concept corresponding to the political state. Hegel believed that the family, civil society, and the state are the three stages in the development of ethical concepts. The family and civil society are conceptual domains of the state, which ethically encompass them. The transformation of the family and civil society, dominated by private interests, to the state constituting the general good is the self-development of the absolute concept. Thus, the state is not only above the family and civil society, but ultimately determines them. The emergence of the family and civil society is rooted in the inherent requirements of the development of ethical concepts. This was called by Marx "logical pantheistic mysticism."

In contrast to Hegel, Marx believed that the family and civil society were the prerequisites of the state, and they determined that the state "cannot exist without the natural basis of the family and the human foundation of civil society." Here, Marx understood the family and civil society from the root of social life, and he regarded the family and civil society as the basis of the political, cultural and other political state. [2] After moving away from Hegel's words, Marx often included the family in civil society, focusing on understanding civil society from the level of economic relations, emphasizing the role of civil society as an economic factor in determining the political state. Therefore, Marx sometimes referred to the form of economic interaction directly as the civil society.

After entering the 20th century", the developed capitalist countries of the West paid great attention to the influence and integration of various autonomous groups and organizations in

civil society, and tried to incorporate them into the political conceptual framework of the state, making them "opposition" in state ideology Helper. Under the combined effect of the political state and civil society, the legitimacy of bourgeois rule has ostensibly become a rational form based on popular consent. Gramsci recognized this change in capitalism early on and critiqued it with civil society theory. It is on the basis of this theoretical orientation that Gramsci believes that civil society does not belong to the economic activity of people's labor production, does not belong to the economic base, but belongs to a part of the superstructure, which in his view is divided into two areas: one is political society and the other is civil society.[3]

2. The basic connotation of Gramsci's theory of civil society

2.1. Civil society belongs to the field of superstructure

Gramsci's theory of civil society no longer simply points to the traditional field of economic activity, but reduces civil society to the category of superstructure, becoming a realm of ethics, culture and ideology alongside the state and politics, and this transformation occupies the core position of Gramsci's thought. Proceeding from the reality of Western society, Gramsci examined the social organization of "non-governmental institutions" such as churches, trade unions, and schools occupying a major position in civil society, and he called this social model civil society, and reduced it to the superstructure field together with political society, believing that civil society and the political state are independent of each other.

According to Marx, "civil society includes all material interactions of individuals at a certain stage in the development of the productive forces." [4] Interpreting civil society from the perspective of economics, while Gramsci believes that civil society is the sum of ideological and cultural relations and all spiritual and intellectual life, it can be seen that the difference between Gramsci's civil society theory and Marx is mainly in the following fields: to put civil society in what field to find, one is to put it in the economic field to analyze, and regard civil society as the true birthplace and center of history; The other puts it in the context of the superstructure and examines it. But Gramsci's civil society did not negate Marx's civil society, he followed the dichotomy between the economic base and the superstructure, and added civil society in between, so that the composition of the state included the political state and civil society, "We can now identify two superstructure 'strata': one can be called 'civil society', that is, commonly called "The private 'sum of organizations', the other is 'political society' or 'state'. These two classes correspond on the one hand to the 'hegemonic' function exercised by the ruling clique through society, and on the other hand to the 'direct domination' or jurisdiction function exercised by the State and the 'judicial' government". The structure of human society includes the economic base and superstructure, and the superstructure mainly refers to the political society (including the state, government and other fields of political activities), and Gramsci has given new connotation to civil society that includes cultural, ethical and ideological activities, making civil society an ethical, cultural and ideological field juxtaposed with the political state. Civil society represents the field of public opinion (civil society organizations such as political parties, trade unions, schools, churches) and ideology (newspapers, magazines, news media, academic groups, etc.), and is the superstructure belonging to the ideological and cultural field, and various civil society organizations constitute the main form of civil society.

2.2. Cultural leadership of civil society

Through careful study and reflection on Western social institutions, Gramsci summarized the reasons for the failure of the proletarian revolution and came up with the idea of a cultural shift in civil society, arguing that "civil society refers to the leadership of the entire state exercised by a social group through so-called private organizations such as society, trade unions or schools"[5]. In contrast to traditional capitalist society, civil society at that time had become

integrated into the political state and became an integral part of the state. "Civil society consists not of 'the whole material relationship,' but the whole of intellectual and cultural relations, not 'the whole of commercial and industrial relations,' but the whole intellectual and spiritual life." Different from Marx's emphasis on civil society based on "material exchanges", Gramsci believes that the premise of the existence of the state is the "consent" of citizens, and citizens "agree" that the state can survive, and a class can only rely on the power of civil society to educate citizens if they want to rule, so that citizens voluntarily accept the rule of this class, Make civil society a part of the superstructure. Gramsci's civil society is "the leadership of the entire state exercised by a social group through so-called private organizations such as churches, trade unions or schools". In this context, cultural leadership is the magic weapon of the ruling class to protect the interests of the class, and the Western bourgeoisie relies on the superiority of this ideology (education, religion, news media, etc.) above society to maintain its rule, rather than traditional political society, military or violence. Civil society "refers to both informal, non-violent, civil organizational systems and spiritual forces, as well as auxiliary forces that directly or indirectly influence politics"[6]. Therefore, if the proletarian revolution wants to win, it must master cultural leadership. Gramsci defined the concept of civil society from a cultural dimension, explaining that civil society is a general term for various private or civil institutions that formulate and disseminate ideology, especially the ideology of the ruling class, which generally includes mass media, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, academic groups, and various social activities led by intellectual organizations. In Gramsci's eyes, cultural leadership has become the "tool" of the ruling class, and by spreading the ruling class consciousness in the field of ideology and culture, the purpose of stabilizing society is achieved, so that this cultural leadership of civil society has become the core of modern state power.

3. The Significance of Gramsci's Theory of Civil Society

In addition to having great positive enlightenment significance for the development of Marxist philosophy and the trend of "cultural studies", Gramsci's theory of civil society is also full of reference significance for China's current national construction and development.

Gramsci's study of civil society aims to illustrate the importance of ideological leadership in the superstructure. At present, China is in an important stage of reform and development, and there are many problems in both the economic and ideological fields, and the problems will become more and more complex with the changes in the reform situation. In the face of existing and upcoming challenges, we must respond in advance. In the early days of reform, due to the extremely underdeveloped productive forces, we put all our focus on the field of economic construction and neglected the construction of ideology, culture and ideology. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Economic construction is the central work of the party, and ideological work is an extremely important work of the party. From this sentence of the general secretary, we can see that economic construction is the main task of the party's work, but ideological construction is also quite important. Therefore, at the present stage, on the basis of the achievements made in economic construction, we should improve the ideological and cultural quality of the Chinese people, and at the same time pay attention to socialist ideological and cultural construction, strengthen the dominant position of Marxism in the ideological field of our country and the ideological leadership of the Communist Party of China. Although today's Chinese society is very different from the Eastern society that Gramsci saw at that time, the ideological penetration in today's society is intensifying, and capitalist society continues to instill its own ideological and theoretical values in the East through various means. Therefore, strengthening cultural leadership in the ideological field is urgent for the Chinese Communist Party.

Building the ideological field is a long-term and slow-acting task, but once there is a good start, the later work will be very smooth. Like the ruling class in the bourgeois society, we also need to use a series of intermediate links to spread our mainstream culture. For example, educational organizations, social media, certain other social organizations, and leaders in the industry. Attach importance to the status of educational organizations in society, especially colleges and universities, because colleges and universities are the training base for socialist successors, and we must attach importance to the correct guidance of the ideological consciousness of talented people and prevent the emergence of erroneous ideas against socialism. The government should strengthen the management of social media, and in the context of the Internet era, it is necessary to strictly control the dissemination and penetration of information, and the public must also be media participants with discerning ability and firm position.

The ideological field is hard and long, but we must train our own "organic intellectuals" and play their key role. Only in this way can we establish a strong foundation belonging to our society and better safeguard the harmony and stability of our country.

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