

On the Intellectuals as Organic Force from the Thought of Lu Xun and Antonio Gramsci

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Keywords: Intellectual thought, Organic strength, Lu xun, Gramsci

Abstract: In the similar revolutionary situation, Lu Xun and Gramsci reflect deeply on intellectual existence. Starting from the definition and function, from the relationship with the people, analyzes the similarity and difference of intellectual thoughts between the two thinkers, finds how intellectuals become the organic force that develops a better society today.

1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, both Italy and China are in a turbulent contemporaneous situation where the country's good and evil forces fight against each other and the war is constant. Gramsci, the founder of the Communist Party of Italy, the Marxist theorist and Lu Xun, the founder of modern Chinese literature, the Democratic fighter and revolutionist, as important representatives of the intellectual class in respective countries at this time, all have a strong concern about the concept of intellectuals. What are intellectuals? What kind of function does it have? And intellectuals do not exist in isolation. What is their relationship with the people? This paper analyzes their views and similarities and differences of their views, then tries to get inspiration for the development of intellectuals as an organic force.

2. The Definition of Intellectual

Lu Xun's definition of intellectual comes from the social reality of his time. At that time, China suffers both aggression from the Western powers that persecutes the people and oppression from feudal domination that damages democracy. Basing on this situation, accompanied by his high sense of social responsibility, Lu Xun opposes the tranquility and inertia proposed by Laozi. In fact, "There is no peace, so if a period must be called of peace by force, it is only because the war has just ended or has not yet begun. It seems stable on the surface, but in reality there are already hidden causes of the conflict ready to break the peace^[1]." Lu Xun believes that the intellectual should be a cultural fighter living in the present. At the same time, the intellectual must not be the hermit or the refined scholar, because the first rejects reality through self-consolation in the otherworldly fantasy, and the second immerses himself in art and obsession for aesthetic taste. In a word, there is a kind of indifference towards the outside world, living without care about it.^[2]

Lu Xun hopes that the intellectual lives consciously in the present, confronts directly his society and his life, bravely fighting the forces of darkness through pen and paper.

Gramsci's opinion on the definition of intellectual has a distinct professional colour. "It can be observed that the 'organic' intellectuals that each new class creates with itself and elaborates in its progressive development are mostly 'specialization' of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type that the new class has highlighted^[3]." Here Gramsci concretizes the organic nature of the intellectuals, building the connotation of the intellectuals from the dimensions of the relationship and the social function.

"The reference to technical roles within the factory organisation is particularly important because

it allows us to understand the sense in which Gramsci claims to 'extend the notion of intellectual greatly',^[4].”^[5] From here, it is understood that Gramsci also considers the technical roles in the factory as intellectual. This amplification of the concept of intellectual has a remarkable relationship with the great production of machines carried out by the second industrial revolution in the West. From this, one can understand Gramsci's appreciation for technical roles and even more profound the appreciation for the proletariat to which most of the technical roles belong. He considers them an intellectual social force, thus expanding the group of intellectuals.

Only from the definition of intellectual, both Lu Xun and Gramsci have affirmed the need for the use of intelligence. The intellectual for Lu Xun can be said to be a complex mental worker in the traditional sense, but he cares for society. On the contrary, Gramsci believes that “in any physical work, even the most mechanical and lowest, there exists [...] a minimum of creative intellectual activity”^[3], thus widening the scope of intellectual - “All men are intellectuals”^[3].

Both intellectual definitions also reflect the distinctive character of their time. The difference is that Lu Xun embodies the semi-colonial and semi-feudal Chinese national conditions, the tradition of Confucian scholars-officials - for example, the phrase of Zhangzai “A scholar should set up his heart for the world, set up his life for all the people, inherit the knowledge that the previous sages like Confucius and Mencius did not pass on. He should open up a permanent and peaceful basic enterprise for future generations.” is one of its vivid interpretations, while Gramsci embodies the state of that precise historical moment given by Italian industrialization, the development of capitalism and the impact of Marx's historical materialism.

3. The Function of Intellectual

To the function of intellectual, Lu Xun argues that intellectuals should be passionate about meddling in the affairs of others. “I repeat my doctrine that students should read fewer traditional Chinese texts, instead they should be passionate about meddling in other people's affairs”^[6].” But “the affairs of others” to which Lu Xun refers, do not indicate who got married today or who was robbed yesterday, but indicate the solicitude for social public affairs and the concern future of his own country and nation, except the partial areas in which he does academic research.

At that time, the Chinese people live in a difficult situation, in fact, they are deeply oppressed by the “three mountains”, that is imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. “There is no place even for this ‘tower of avarice’, and soon will appear, I guess that at the most there will only be ‘the house of the snail’”^[7].” The person “bends with his naked body inside, comes out and reacts rarely, without clothes, without anything to do, without words to say. Because it is the period of conflict between the warlords, of arbitrary killings, those who do not feel the urgent need to act, only in this way can their lives be prolonged.”^[7]

Intellectuals should no longer hide in ivory towers, steal and get security, but should stand up and resist, even if not with weapons, the pen works just as well. With revelation and censorship in the ideological field, eradicate the old feudal and decayed civilization that endangers the physical and mental health of rational individuals. Although reactionary powers cannot be repented by facing implicit reproach, this method can also raise the conscience of some people and help the more aware people of the situation to struggle against it. The intellectual can even leave the pen when necessary and act with the people.

Gramsci believes that “Intellectuals are the ‘agents’ of the ruling group, who perform the lower functions of social hegemony and political rule”^[5].”, intellectuals enter politics, function like fulcrums to help public life offer its spontaneous consent for the legality of the ruling group in a dynamic balance between rational construction and material satisfaction.

Thus “In every phase of the struggle for hegemony, a crucial role of ‘officials’ or ‘agents’ is played by intellectuals”^[8].”. As a cultural symbol, intellectuals first have the greatest function or influence in the ideological field. At this level, the acquisition of hegemony is inseparable from the efforts of intellectuals. Gramsci divides civil society and political society in the area of the

superstructure, the role of intellectuals is particularly important in civil society.

Because, as mentioned above, it wants to lead the people to provide spontaneous consent. In civil society, organic intellectuals through school, church, media, etc., transmit the ideas and values of the ruling class to the masses from the ideological level as fully as possible, so that the masses can unconsciously form a spontaneous consensus for the ruling class. They, like gardeners, use knowledge to slowly cultivate cultural awareness in the daily consciousness of the masses.

In summary, Lu Xun believes that intellectuals should participate in public affairs and take care of the world in addition to academics. While Gramsci thinks that intellectuals are the executors of subordinate functions of social hegemony. Gramsci thinks that intellectuals should serve the ruling class as their agents. Gramsci's understanding of the function of intellectuals is from a macroscopic perspective, does not imply a rational judgment of the pros or cons of the ruling class, but only an analysis and a technical reassessment. Whereas Lu Xun, specifically with regard to China's national conditions, believes that intellectuals are the rebels of the irrational ruling class in China at the time, and for them, it is essential to develop the country and the nation better and combat the decayed domination. Gramsci is like a theoretical analyst, rational and calm, but Lu Xun is a bit more practical, like a fighter who is passionate about society.

4. The Intellectual's Relationship with People

For the relation with the people, Lu Xun does not close himself in a tower of ivory. Although he goes abroad to study, he doesn't despise the people at that time largely illiterate. He is always on the side of the exploited people of his time who live in poverty, is in close relations with them, enters into empathy with them. Just as when many self-proclaimed "cultural" people appreciate the refined Hunan embroidery on silk or examine the art of floral composition in tea houses, Lu Xun, on the other hand, takes care of the workers who grow cotton under the burning sun for their livelihood, a woman who embroiders and stays up late at night to finish a scarf, and so on: "There are at least two types of 'material civilization': in the first case people eat nutritious and tasty food, wear warm and comfortable clothes and live in villas with garden; in the second type people eat bark, wear rags and live in straw huts. People eat what they should not eat, wear what they should not wear, and lives where they should not live^[9]."

Lu Xun has a generous salary and has no worries about food and clothing, but what he sees is not only a beautiful life reserved for a few people in front of him but also the broader social reality, the life of the masses who still live hard. He praises the people for their good qualities. For ordinary people to be less oppressed and deceived and gain more equality and freedom, he castigates feudal ethics in his article and works against the oppressors with the people.

For Gramsci, "The common people 'feel', but does not understand or know; the intellectuals 'know' but does not understand and especially does not feel. The mistake of the intellectual is to believe that one can know without understanding and especially without feeling and being passionate, that is, the intellectual can be like this if he is distinguished and detached from the people: one does not make history and politics and is without passion, that is without being emotionally united to the people, that is without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them.^{[8]•[10]}"

The best understanding is based on the dual foundation of knowing and feeling. Gramsci believes that it is not sufficient for intellectuals to obtain knowledge only from books and only aim to obtain it, not to understand it. "Practice is the basis and source of knowledge. (A main view of the Marxist epistemology)". To understand the knowledge gained, it is necessary to return to its mother source, that is, real life where there is popular existence, to come into contact, to experience, even to apply the theory already acquired. Under the dictatorship of fascism in Italy at that time, the movement was obstructed and the proletariat was persecuted, the way in which intellectuals can transform society and improve the lives of the people better is going deep into the life of them to feel.

This behavior is driven by the passion that is an emotional connection connected with the people,

derives from being deeply affected by their most primitive needs as if one has experienced it oneself. As he himself proposes, “New literature writers should become ‘part of the people’, understand the people and write down their own aspirations and feelings^[11].”

It can be said that, as far as the relation with the people is concerned, Lu Xun and Gramsci agree that intellectuals must be closely linked to the people and must take care of their suffering and happiness in order to better understand society and find the best way to promote the current state.

5. The Inspiration for Intellectuals Today as an Organic Force

By synthetically arranging the thoughts of the two intellectuals, the writer believes that intellectuals as an organic force are mainly focused on the three aspects—the definition, the function, and the relation with the people. The inspiration for the improvement of contemporary intellectuals is therefore based on these three aspects.

First, intellectuals cannot simply be defined by how many books they have read or the level of study they have achieved. Instead, they should be observed within the broad framework of society, which is presented subjectively as their public concern and objectively as social fusion. Intellectuals should be linked to the specific social reality and become its specific component.

Second, concentrating on studying with a careful reading of books helps intellectuals to promote the level of intelligence. This level of intelligence at the appropriate time is sufficient to help the intellectual to satisfy his or her society-oriented public care in the best way. It is here that personal intelligence and public society are combined, but people need to know that the specific problems are analyzed in a specific way. Intellectuals are the agents of the class that benefits the people, but for the class that hurts the people or even becomes enemies of them, intellectuals should also fight against it. The intellectuals should not be afraid to resist this class with a pen that is like a spear.

Third, the intellectual as an organic force should have an intimate relationship with the people. The intellectuals come from the people and the subject of academic research cannot be separated from the soil of popular life.

For example, the English poet Shelley, why his “Winter is coming, can spring be far away?” after more than a millennium, is still familiar with the student even in China? Because it expresses the desire for freedom in the heart of the oppressed people and encourages them never to give up hope of emancipation. The intellectuals who are vulnerable to firearms are extremely firm and tenacious when they are truly integrated with the will of the people.

Another example, Mrs. Curie, having purified the first gram of radio, does not require the monopoly of production, but chooses to announce the method without reservation. “No one should become rich for radio,” She says, “the radio belongs to all human beings.” Her decision benefits many families affected by the disease. We cherish her memory still in deep feeling today.

Often, only intellectuals who deeply understand what the people want and need most, use their knowledge to create an improvement for the people. Only those who believe that academic results should be shared with society and do good for the people, their academic life can become a more organic life, may even never die, because it remains alive in the heart of people.

6. Conclusion

By comparing Lu Xun's and Gramsci's theories of intellectuals under the social revolution, this paper has a clear and three-dimensional understanding of intellectuals as an organic force in terms of definition, function, and relationship with the people. Based on this, people can get the enlightenment for the development of contemporary intellectuals.

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