

Jameson's Thoughts on Marxism and Postmodernism: A Review

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Abstract: Most Chinese readers and researchers are familiar with the great Marxism theorist Jameson and his classic analysis of postmodern culture. The majority of his work have been translated into Chinese, where offer Chinese scholars important information. This work mainly summarized and reviewed the researches of Jameson's thoughts on Marxism and postmodernism by domestic and foreign researchers, laying a foundation for the later study on Jameson's "identity".

1. Introduction

Jameson is one of the most influential theorists in the field of literature and culture since the end of the 20th century. He is also a famous thinker, Marxist theorist and postmodernist theorist in Contemporary Western society. The research results of Jameson's Marxist thought / postmodern thought are relatively rich at home and abroad. The following focuses on these two aspects

2. Jameson as a Marxist

Jameson wrote his doctoral thesis *Sart: The Origin of a Style* in 1961. In this work, he expressed his unique insights on literary criticism from the beginning. In Jameson's view, although the new criticism prevailed in the 1950s has certain value, it is obviously too narrow to regard literature as a closed organism. Although phenomenology broadens the scope of literary interpretation, it only focuses on the projection of subject and consciousness, still failing to explain the intrinsic connection between literature and society. Since then, he has been exposed to the works related to the Existential Marxism and the Structural Marxism, especially Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, which exerts a great influence on him. In 1971, Jameson published *Marxism and Form*, which was regarded as the most influential criticism of the United States in the 1970s. In his work, Jameson constructed his own critical framework. Since then, Jameson has been widely concerned as a Marxism theorist.

The question of whether Jameson's identity is positioned as a postmodernist or a Marxist is the first to be discussed, although the term "identity" is not used directly. Researchers at home and abroad generally define Jameson as the representative of Neo-Marxism or Post-Marxism. British scholar David McLellan believes that Post-Marxism is a trend of thought that attempts to combine Marxist socialism with postmodernism, which was written in the *Contemporary Marxism School*, and Jameson is the representative figure of this trend of thought [1]. Similarly, Douglas Kellnel and Steven Best believes that by 1975, Jameson had accepted the argument "the end of modernity" in their book *Postmodernism Theory: Critical Interrogation* (Central Compilation Press, 2012). He made the first explicit reference to postmodernism in his essay on film in the early 1980s and tried to develop a postmodernist theory, however, at the same time, there are also important differences between Jameson and other postmodern theorists. He rejects anti-Marxism trend that is almost advocated by all post structuralists and opposes their abandonment of generalization method. Kellnel and Best also believe that in the book *Political Unconsciousness*, Jameson first tried to combine Marxism with postmodern ideas, and his postmodern Marxism placed postmodernism in the background of capitalism, trying to rethink the current Marxist theory and politics by studying the postmodern viewpoint. This work believes that Kellnel and Best's views are in line with McClellan's definition of Post-Marxism. Mr. Zeng Zhisheng of Renmin University of China wrote a paper entitled *The Post-Marxism Identity of Jameson*, in which he believes that Jameson has the

imprint of postmodern thought and the emotion of Post-Marxism, so he is "the left-wing post-Marxist" [2].

3. Jameson as a Postmodern Theorist

Feng Chun introduced Jameson's three new works, *Visible Signature*, *Late Marxism* and *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in his article *Fredric Jameson's Three New Works*, among them, *Late Marxism* is a re-evaluation of Adorno's work [3]. The author points out that Jameson took a different position from many contemporary theorists (the author emphasizes the position of Marxism) and reanalyzed and reviewed three important works of Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. Jameson believes that Adorno's contribution to Marxist art is "unique and cannot be ignored". Adorno's aesthetic works have deconstruction effects, but they are completely different from the current deconstruction, even "Adorno is a model of dialectics in the 1990s". Jameson also emphasizes that Marxism (including Adorno's theory), like other cultural phenomena, will change due to its socioeconomic context and exist under certain historical conditions. Mr. Feng Chun seizes Jameson's unique "position" consciousness and introduces Jameson's work very clearly. In fact, this work can follow Jameson's same theoretical way of thinking, Jameson's poetic theory, that is, to focus on the specific historical conditions of the object, so as to explore how it became so.

The position held by Jameson mentioned in Mr. Feng Chun's review above is actually the Marxist position held by Jameson as a postmodern theorist. The particularity of this identity makes Jameson's argument have new meaning. Mr. Wang Fengzhen discussed the connection between Jameson and the third world, especially Chinese culture, in the article *Frederic Jameson and Chinese Culture*. In the article, Mr. Wang pointed out that Jameson's attitude towards the third world is both alienated and close [4]. Jameson believes that in the third world culture, the relationship between individuals and the public or politics is completely different from that of first world culture. He believes that all cultural forms in the third world have the color of political unity. In literary works, even when personal works are presented, they always highlight a certain aspect of politics in the form of "national fables". The so-called story of personal destiny is nothing but an allegory formed by cultural and social struggles. This work believes that Jameson's assertion has its complex identity. The original work certainly did not further discuss the particularity of Jameson, but from this we can see that the special identity of Jameson by viewing the third world from the perspective of the first world also gives his theory interpretation new space for attention, but it has not been paid attention in the theoretical circle.

4. The Integration of Marxists and Postmodernists

In addition, the research on Jameson's postmodernism and Post-Marxism is also rich. The results include theoretical discussion of the dialogue with Jameson and theoretical interpretation of Jameson's thoughts on these two aspects. For example, Dr. Hu Yamin discriminates the theoretical inheritance relationship between Jameson and other contemporary Marxists in the West in *Jameson, Neo-Marxism and Postmodernism* (Huazhong Normal University, 2002), pointing out diversity and heterogeneity of Jameson's thought sources. She believes that its theoretical characteristics include three aspects: adhering to the dominant position of Marxist mode of production, the permanent history and the dialectical spirit and the generalization thought. Hu Wen believes that Jameson does not regard Marxism as a fixed system, but as an area to be explored and developed and an insurmountable horizon. Based on the classical Marxist mode of production, Jameson puts forward the idea that different production methods can coexist in the same society and the same mode of production has different stages of development, offering the current cultural phenomenon theoretical support. In addition, Hu Wen also makes a comparative study between Jameson and postmodern theorists. Therefore, Hu Wen also believes that Jameson is both a staunch Neo-Marxism critic and a sober postmodern theorist. Dr. Hu Yamin's work focuses on the characteristics of Jameson's Marxist theory in the postmodernism culture, which in fact indirectly

determines Jameson's theoretical identity between postmodernism and Marxism. What is more, Hu wen's carding of Jameson's theory also has reference function for the author's discussion on Jameson's poetics theory. Yang Huixin's master thesis *Jameson Postmodernism Cultural Critique* (Henan University, 2012) attempts to systematically summarize and study Jameson's postmodernism theory from the perspective of Marxist philosophy. The thesis is mainly about the development of postmodernism, the origin of Jameson's postmodern theory, the typical cultural characteristics of postmodernism, and the comparison among postmodernism, modernism and realism. It points out the realistic basis and ideological basis of Jameson's postmodernism theory, and then proposes the influence of Mandel's late capitalism theory, Raymond Williams's three cultural theory, and Marxist mode of production theory on the formation of his postmodern theory. There are many studies on the interpretation of Jameson's postmodernism theory or Marxist theory, such as *Political Writing: The Image of Marx in the Postmodern Perspective* written by Carver in the United States (Liaoning University Press, 2009) , *The Postmodern spectacle: A Study in Ideological Fantasy and 20th Century American Culture* written by Gallego, Carlos (Stanford University, 2003), *Post-Marxism and the New Social Movement* written by Jeffrey Isaac and Zhou Fan, (Marxism and Reality, No. 2, 2004), *Beyond Marxism and the Opposition of Post-Marxism* written by Neal Curry and Qiang Donghong, *Marxism and Late Capitalist Society - Jameson's Argument on Contemporary Marxism* written by Chen Xueming (Teaching and Research, No. 8, 2001), *Jameson: Facing Post-colonial and Postmodern Issues* written by Wang Yuechuan (Teaching and Research, No. 5, 1999), *Frederic Jameson and His Marxist Critical Theory* written by Wang Ning (Southern Cultural Forum, No.2, 2002), *Defense and Transcendence of Total Dialectics - Research on Jameson's Postmodern Marxism* written by Wang Xihua (Theory Journal, No. 12, 2009), *Totality of the Age of Difference: Analysis of Jameson's Total Thoughts* written by Xing Lijun (Jiangxi Social Science, No. 10, 2007) and so on. These studies represent one of the most concentrated aspects of Jameson's research, that is the theoretical interpretation or research on the Marxist theory or postmodernism theory.

The postmodernist theory and Post-Marxist theory of Jameson inevitably need to study the relevant writings of Jameson's modernity, which is also an aspect of understanding the source of Jameson's academic thoughts. It is mainly focused on the text interpretation and elucidation of *Single Modernity*. Although there are not many research articles in this area, it was also the most controversial area. Among them, *The Scandal of Theory: Jameson on Modernity* written by Maria Eliza and *The Critical Perspective of Modernity and Post-modernity in Jameson's Cultural Theory* written by Feng Qin give the response and explanation respectively from the whole and part of two different directions to these disputes. Eliza's work combines Jameson's *Single Modernity* with detailed questions, such as how Jameson handles it and how modernity problems adapt to Jameson's theoretical style. After a detailed review of the logic of Jameson's content, especially the interpretation of the cases cited in Jameson's work, it gives reasonable explanation [5]. Feng Qin's work proposes that the critical role of Marxism, especially dialectic thought, makes Jameson's contradictory judgments have general interpretation based on the analysis of Jameson's modernity and post-modernity theory [6].

5. Summary

The academic complexity of Jameson's Marxism and postmodernism cannot be analyzed by a rough analysis. This work aims to offer a shallow cornerstone to the clear analysis of the "identity" of Jameson's academic thoughts.

References

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