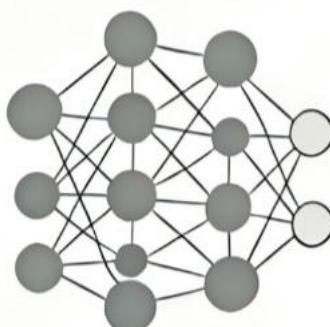


# The Contemporary Dimension Upgrade of Capital

The Dominance Revolution from “Means of Production” to “Labor Power Production”

著：张皓翔



## Author Biography

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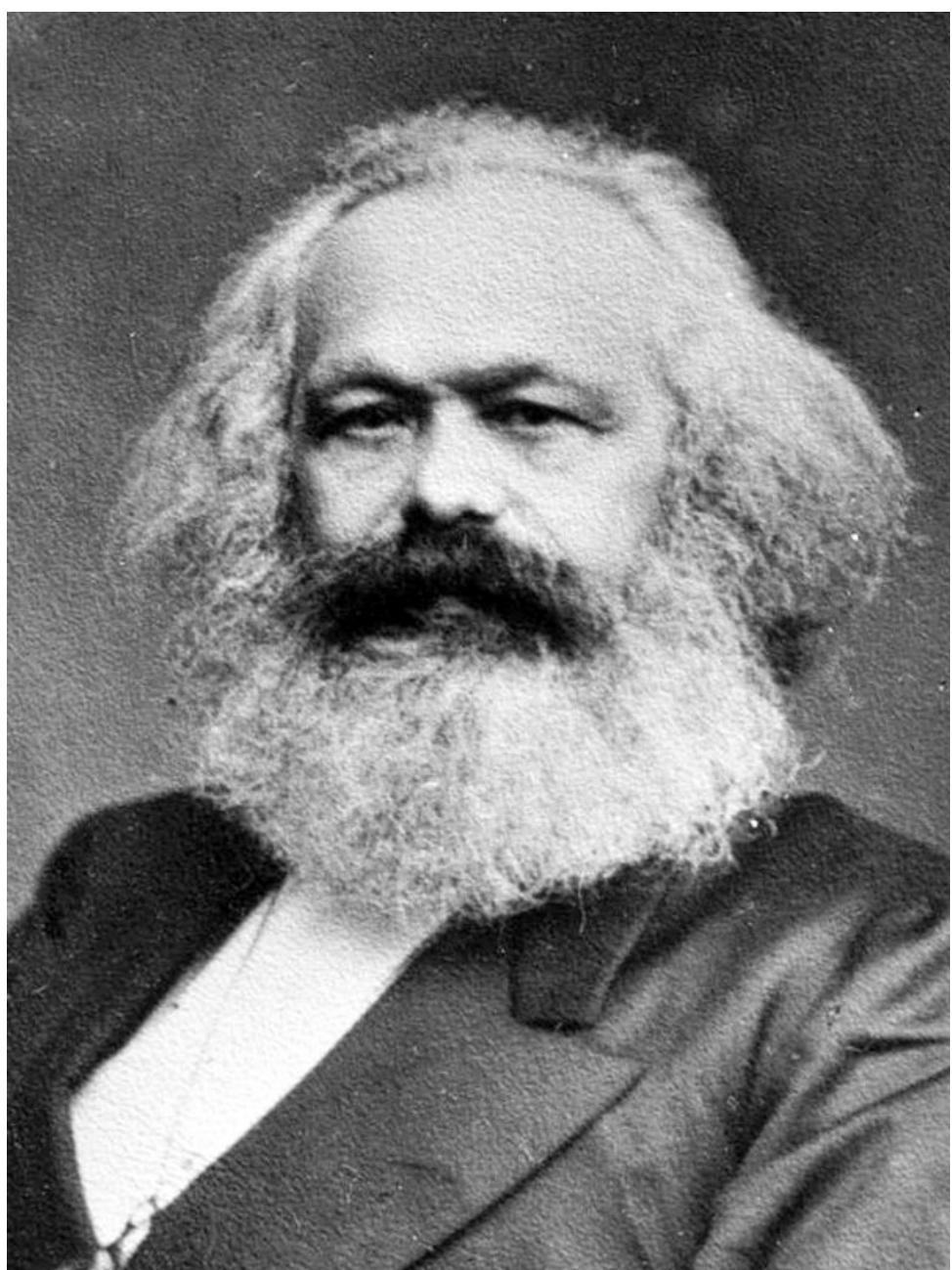
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His research originates from a profound confusion about the symptoms of the times: Why, in an era of advanced technology and material abundance, has a deep sense of powerlessness and exhaustion from being systematically arranged become a universal experience? Spanning the fields of culture, education, and technological ethics, his work attempts to trace the manifestation of this core question across different spheres of life.

This book represents a systematic attempt at this long-term exploration. By constructing the analytical framework of “the actual control capacity over the production of labor power,” it seeks to reveal that numerous predicaments—from educational involution and work alienation to the datafication of daily life—share a common economic root: the colonization of the entire process of life reproduction by digital capital. Beyond mere phenomenological description, it endeavors to provide a unified political economy explanatory coordinate for understanding contemporary domination and pursuing emancipation.





## Preface

This book is not born out of pure logical deduction in an ivory tower, but rooted in the concrete and pervasive life experiences of a generation. It is the exhaustion drained by “involution,” the emptiness after being silently programmed by algorithms and performance metrics, and the profound anxiety of witnessing one’s life, education, and even leisure being quietly encoded into data for external valuation. Such experiences are not plights confined to specific industries, but a universal climate permeating all spheres—from campuses to workplaces, from production to daily life. When a student who has not yet formally entered the traditional “production” field can clearly feel the pressure of being predetermined and optimized, what it reveals is no longer individual fragility, but a core malady of the era: the dominant logic of capital has completed its decisive “dimension upgrade,” expanding from the monopoly of the “production field” to the systematic colonization of the “entire process of labor power production and reproduction.”

Existing explanatory frameworks have shown their inadequacy at this juncture. Whether reducing the problem to cultural criticism of individual mindsets or confining analysis to descriptive accounts of technological domination, none can penetrate the economic core that drives all forms of discipline. When authoritative theoretical landscapes fail to map the coordinates of our lived pain, exploration becomes the only way forward. Therefore, this book is a conscious theoretical project excavated backwards from the thorny ground of life experience. Its author is not an authority within the academic establishment, but an explorer struggling in a sense of suffocation, determined to seek fundamental answers for their generation. This seemingly “marginal” position precisely provides an indispensable critical perspective: it forces us to strip away the obfuscation of jargon and confront the searing reality of existence itself; it compels us to return inevitably to that oldest and sharpest critical weapon—the Marxist tradition of political economy—and attempt to inscribe new diagnoses on the cross-section of the digital age.

From this, we have constructed the core analytical framework running through the book: a triadic dialectical linkage of “the actual control capacity over the means of production — production integrity — the actual control capacity over the production of labor power.” This framework serves as our “scalpel” for dissecting contemporary

forms of domination. We will first trace the historical formation of this dominant structure (Chapter 1), then use it to reconstruct the contemporary class map, reveal how exploitation has deepened from “value appropriation” to “life process colonization,” and deduce the complete generative logic of the alienation chain (Chapter 2). Based on this, the book puts forward a core thesis: the fundamental contradiction of capitalism has manifested as a fatal paradox between “the systematic existential dependence of the capitalist socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power” and “the capitalist private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction” (Chapter 3). Subsequently, we will unfold a “panoptic” picture, specifically presenting how capital completes the precise programming of the entire life through educational systems, work ethics, algorithmic governance, and data extraction in the fields of education, work, and daily life (Chapter 4).

Yet the destination of this book is by no means mere criticism. The end of diagnosis is the beginning of treatment. In Chapter 5, we will point to a practical program for emancipation. We argue that the complete emancipation of the proletariat must consist of two inseparable stages: first, a political revolution to reclaim the means of production and smash the state apparatus that upholds the old relations of production; second, a more profound social revolution targeting the core goal of “reclaiming the actual control capacity over the production of labor power” — that is, reconstructing the autonomy and collective sovereignty of workers in every field related to life reproduction, such as education, health, time arrangement, and personal development. This program is not only the ultimate scheme for transcending capitalism, but also an inherent requirement for continuous self-renewal proposed to all societies still experiencing alienation due to residual old legal rights and unfinished revolutionary tasks in the primary stage of socialism.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we will turn our perspective back to theory itself — confronting the core proposition of “the poverty of contemporary political economy”: when critical discourses in the digital age often fall into “suspended analyses” of culture, psychology, and other fields, this chapter takes the book’s constructed “triadic dialectical framework” as an anchor to systematically integrate contemporary critical theories. On the one hand, it anchors the underlying logic of “actual control over the means of production — production integrity — control over labor power production” to find the political economy roots of phenomena such as cultural alienation and psychological discipline; on the other hand, through the integration of this framework,

it reunites scattered critical perspectives with the core contradiction of “capital-labor,” addressing both the fragmentation dilemma of contemporary theory and reconstructing the political economy foundation for critical research in the digital age.

The writing of this book began with a personal sense of confusion and pain, but its ambition is to achieve a calm and thorough theoretical clarity. It attempts to tell every reader: the powerlessness and irritability you feel are not due to personal traits, but objective effects of the operation of capital logic at the biopolitical level; and the autonomy and wholeness you yearn for are by no means illusions — they can only be realized through the fundamental transformation of all social and economic relations that degrade humans into “labor power commodities.”

Workers of the world who strive to reclaim the actual control capacity over the production of your own labor power, unite!

Zhang Haoxiang

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# Manifesto

A profound sense of loss of control is spreading among workers worldwide. It is not the fear of poverty, but the helplessness of seeing one's own life fully programmed and systematically arranged. From performance evaluations to algorithmic settings, from learning and education to work and daily life, every aspect reveals the loss of control over the production process of one's own labor power.

Is there any student who has not struggled between their passions and future livelihood?

Is there any worker who has not grown weary of work that seems autonomous but is actually dictated by external demands?

Is there any social individual who has not grappled with the conflict between their innermost desires and society's external expectations?

All forces of the old world—scholars, bureaucrats, parents, capitalists—attempt to attribute this pain to personal weakness, laziness, or wrong choices. Yet, from the global symptoms and struggles, we can only draw one conclusion: wherever the logic of capital takes root, a self-referential and fatal cycle has become the fundamental contradiction of contemporary capitalism—its survival-dependent system must constantly consume the very object it seeks to permanently control: the capacity of workers to produce and reproduce their own labor power.

Faced with this rule that colonizes the life process, an equally thorough response has become a historical imperative. Its program can be condensed into an indivisible call: Reclaim the actual control capacity over the production of labor power.

# Chapter 1: Historical Starting Point and Core Categories

## (A) From the Primitive Accumulation of Capital to the Formation of Capitalist Private Appropriation

When the horn of capital pierces the dome of the old world, land, gold, silver, minerals, and even the most unique and rare lives in human society converge like a tide toward the areas dominated by capital—this seemingly magnificent journey is underpinned by blood-stained violence.

As the pioneers of capital sing triumphantly on the enclosed fertile fields, generations of farming peasants wander with their luggage in the winds of foreign lands; as they raise their glasses at the tide of the Atlantic Ocean, the whimpers of African slaves in the holds of slave ships struggle to find room to breathe; as they step onto colonial lands and shout "freedom," poppies covering the mountains and plains have long woven sin into a net of profits.

The "feats" they boast of are the sad songs of the world's people. This history written in deprivation is not only the starting point of capitalism's upgrading but also an indispensable proposition for studying its essence: it represents a leap forward in human civilization in material production, yet a degradation in morality and dignity.

This history—known as the primitive accumulation of capital—not only brought widespread hardship to workers of that era but also harbors the historical root of the widespread sense of powerlessness felt by every labor comrade today. All of this can be traced back to the fundamental fact on which all the mysteries of capitalist production relations are rooted: the commercialization of labor power[1].

The transformation of labor power into a commodity is not a result of natural evolution, but a historical rupture in the name of "primitive accumulation of capital." The essence of so-called primitive accumulation is the forced separation of producers from the means of production[2]. In England, it manifested as the "Enclosure Movement" that lasted for centuries: landlords and the new aristocracy, through legislation and violence, converted common lands and peasant holdings into private sheep pastures. The dispossessed peasants not only lost their means of livelihood but also all their foundations as independent producers[3]. Meanwhile, overseas colonial plunder brought enormous amounts of gold, silver, and primitive capital to Europe[4]. The outcome of this process was the formation of two opposing

classes: on one side, a small number of people who concentrated land, money, and means of production; on the other, a vast multitude of "free" workers who had been stripped of everything except their own labor capacity[5].

It is precisely this duality of "freedom"—freed from personal dependence yet free in having nothing—that makes the universal transformation of labor power into a commodity possible and prerequisite. Selling one's labor power is no longer a choice, but the sole means of survival[1][5]. When workers sell their labor capacity as a commodity on the market, a fundamental transformation occurs: their labor is no longer aimed at directly producing use-value, but at exchanging for wages; what governs their labor process is no longer their own will, but the capital that purchases their labor power. The commercialization of labor power marks the birth of a brand-new social relation—the wage-labor relation.

This new relation has completely transformed the nature of the private ownership of means of production. In pre-capitalist societies, private ownership of means of production mainly served the owner's personal labor and consumption. Under the wage-labor relation, however, the owners of means of production purchase labor power for production, whose purpose is no longer use-value but the valorization of value. Means of production are thus transformed into capital, and their private ownership correspondingly evolves into capitalist private appropriation—a form of ownership centered on possessing and dominating the labor of others and exploiting surplus value.

Therefore, the violent dispossession of primitive accumulation, the pivotal transformation of labor power into a commodity, and the establishment of the mutually locked production relations of capitalist private ownership and wage labor constitute a complete historical and logical chain. It clearly reveals that the entire class structure, contradictions, and movements of capitalist society are built on the cornerstone that "labor power is a commodity"[1][6].

Today, with the emergence of new forms of capital such as algorithms and platforms, the potential inherent in the commercialization of labor power[1] is being unleashed and amplified in an unprecedented manner. Digital capital exhibits three fundamental characteristics distinct from traditional industrial capital, forcing our analytical perspective to undergo a dual transformation. Yet this dual transformation ultimately points to the same conclusion.

First, flexibility and dynamism: the high flexibility of production and capital flow. In traditional forms of capital, production and capital flow are fundamentally relatively static. Production takes place in fixed locations, at fixed times, and according to

fixed processes; even in the circulation sphere, it mainly manifests as the physical transfer of commodities in space. Digital capital, however, has completely subverted this spatio-temporal structure. Its production can occur instantaneously, collaborate globally, and operate 24 hours a day; its circulation proceeds at the speed of light in virtual networks, and the transformation of capital forms (from data to computing power to financial derivatives) happens in the blink of an eye. This extreme flexibility and dynamism render obsolete the perspective that simply understands means of production as "static things" such as factories and machines, as it can no longer grasp the true pulse of capital movement.

Second, virtuality: the virtuality of capital forms and value creation. This not only refers to the transformation of means of production from tangible ones such as lathes and assembly lines to virtual ones such as data, algorithms, and platform protocols, but more profoundly, the virtualization of value creation and value carriers themselves. In the industrial age, value was embodied in tangible manufactured goods such as steel and cotton yarn. In the digital age, however, value is increasingly manifested as access rights, attention duration, network effects, and even expectations of future data monetization capabilities. Value is increasingly divorced from heavy material entities, floating in a virtual space constructed by code and consensus. Traditional analyses that cling to "tangible means of production" appear increasingly narrow and outdated in the face of the platform economy.

Third, bubble prosperity: the bubble-driven prosperity characteristic of capital accumulation. The prosperity of contemporary digital capital is often driven by financial market valuation games, user growth myths, and monopolistic control of traffic, rather than stable profits from physical products. This prosperity is highly speculative and bubble-prone, with a profound disconnect between the process of capital accumulation and the support of the real economy. If we merely focus on cultural interpretations of this bubble prosperity (such as the "involution" mentality) or temporal critiques (such as "social acceleration"), we are likely to remain superficial and fail to touch the core of the capital logic that drives everything. It also warns us that if we merely shift our perspective from traditional tangible means of production to virtual ones such as data and platforms, we will not only fail to overcome the limitations of the traditional perspective but may even be deceived by this bubble prosperity.

These three characteristics collectively issue an unavoidable challenge and call to our critical theory:

- Its flexibility and dynamism require us to shift our perspective from static "things" to dynamic "processes," from the possession of fixed means of production to the analysis of the control of fluid production and reproduction processes.
- Its virtuality requires us to elevate our perspective from tangible "entities" to intangible "relations," "capabilities," and even "potentialities," questioning what new power structures organize production and distribute value in virtual space.
- At the same time, its bubble prosperity demands that if we cannot penetrate the bubble of prosperity to trace the ultimate source of value and power, any analysis will be reduced to a description of appearances.

Thus, a seemingly contradictory requirement for perspective transformation lies before us: on the one hand, we must "upgrade our dimension"—elevating the analysis to a more dynamic, abstract level that focuses on "processes" and "capabilities"; on the other hand, we must "return to fundamentals"—penetrating the fog of all new technologies and forms to unwaveringly revert to the oldest and most solid questions of political economy: Where does value come from? Why does power arise?

The answer ultimately points to the unchanging fundamental: labor power[1], and the control over its production process. All the new characteristics of digital capital—its dynamic scheduling serves to extract living labor more efficiently; the source of its virtual value remains the condensation of human attention, creativity, and datafied labor; the foundation of its bubble is still the surplus value production supported by the total social labor time. What has changed is only the form and technology of domination; what remains unchanged is the essence and object of domination.

Therefore, our theoretical reconstruction must precisely begin with this set of core categories centered on "labor power" and its "control."

### **(B) The Triadic Dialectically Linked Analytical Framework[7]**

Having identified "labor power" and "control" as the core categories, we need to propose a new analytical framework around them.

Before constructing the framework itself, it is necessary to define several key concepts.

#### **(I). Actual Control over the Means of Production**

Refers to the sustainable potential of actors to functionally dominate and utilize the means of production (land, tools, machines, data, platforms, algorithms, etc.) endowed by their objective position in the given relations of production. It constitutes the structural foundation determining power relations in the production process.

## (II). Production Integrity

Refers to a state of labor where the worker can relatively independently complete the entire process from conceiving an intention to outputting a complete commodity, and personally witness the objectification of labor in the final product. It is the direct external manifestation and phenomenological representation of "actual control over the means of production" in the labor process. Labor power, as a special commodity, deserves special mention here. Marx notes in Capital that the capitalist first advances the price of labor power[8], after which the worker labors under the capitalist's direction. Furthermore, the production of the worker's own labor power must depend on the capitalist—on individuals or organizations that exercise absolute control over the means of production. Without the capitalist's advance payment of the price of labor power, the worker cannot completely and independently produce their own labor power. Therefore, the worker still lacks the production integrity for producing this special commodity of labor power. Simply put, the worker does not first produce labor power and then sell it on the market; instead, only after another person (the capitalist) purchases their yet-to-be-produced labor power can they produce this special commodity under the other's direction. Thus, labor power, as a special commodity, still falls within the scope of our concept of production integrity.

## (III). Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power

Refers to the fundamental potential and institutional right of workers, based on their subjectivity, to possess autonomous definition rights, process leadership rights, and outcome disposition rights over the full life-cycle process of their own labor power—this special commodity. This process includes its production (skill acquisition and shaping), maintenance (physical and mental reproduction and health), development (capacity upgrading and transformation), deployment (time allocation

and labor input), and output (labor results and derived data).

This capacity comprises three inseparable layers:

1. Individual Potential Layer: The actual, transferable skills and awareness that workers possess to autonomously arrange their labor and reproduction.
2. Social Rights Layer: Statutory rights guaranteed by social institutions to independently determine labor conditions and life rhythms free from capitalist coercion (e.g., working hours, leave, data privacy).
3. Collective Power Layer: The capacity of workers, through organized forms, to exercise democratic co-determination over the social conditions affecting labor power reproduction (e.g., education systems, medical resources, platform algorithms).

In essence, it is the core of the struggle between workers and capital over "dominance of the life process." The logic of capital accumulation inevitably attempts to compress this capacity into an adaptive, commodified "human capital" investment capability; whereas the goal of emancipatory politics is to restore and develop it into a complete, creative "life sovereignty." Therefore, the degree of preservation or loss of this capacity is the ultimate yardstick for judging the depth of a worker's alienation and the possibility of liberation.

It is necessary to clarify that the core categories proposed in this paper—especially "actual control over the production of labor power—derive their strength precisely from their dialectical, relational essence, rather than being a static attribute that can be standardized and measured. They aim to reveal the existential state and direction of change of a power relation. Just as Marx's analysis of the value form was not to price commodities but to uncover the secret of fetishism[9], the purpose of this framework is to dissect the dynamic game structure of "control" and "loss," providing a qualitative rather than quantitative, trend-identifying rather than metric-calculating critical analytical tool for understanding class formation, the escalation of exploitation, and the spread of alienation. Rigidifying it into an index system would itself be a betrayal of its dialectical spirit.

A rigorous dialectical linkage exists among these three categories, forming a progressively advancing explanatory framework:

- First Linkage Layer (Historical Dispossession): Loss of [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I) → Leads to loss of [Production Integrity] (II)

The historical origin of capitalism (primitive accumulation) lies at its core in the systematic dispossession of workers' [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I). The direct consequence of this structural dispossession is the universal disintegration of workers' [Production Integrity] (II). Peasants losing their land cannot independently complete the farming cycle; artisans separated from their tools cannot produce complete products. This linkage clearly explains the generative logic of alienation in the classical industrial era: the transfer of control over the means of production necessarily manifests externally as the fragmentation of the labor process and the loss of control over the product.

- Second Linkage Layer (Essential Transformation): Loss of [Production Integrity] (II) → Signifies loss of [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III)

The disintegration of [Production Integrity] (II) is not the endpoint but a symptom of a more profound transformation. It signifies that a fundamental qualitative alienation has occurred in the worker's [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III). This is because labor power, as a special commodity, has its "production" and "consumption" (i.e., the labor process) inseparable in time and space. When the worker, due to the disintegration of (II), is unable to "consume" their own labor power in autonomous production, the only "production" they can realize must occur after its sale, under the direction of capital. Consequently, their [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III) is alienated from a complete potential oriented toward use-value creation into a deficient, commodified potential oriented solely toward the realization of exchange value. Its only outlet is to sell labor power as a commodity. At this point, this "capacity" is compressed and distorted from a complete, autonomous potential into a commodified, dependent formal potential—namely, the "capacity" to sell one's own labor power only under market rules. Therefore, the state of production integrity (preservation, disintegration, or distortion) is a key phenomenological indicator for judging the essence of a worker's control over their own labor power (autonomy or alienation).

- Third Linkage Layer (Contemporary Deepening): Loss of [Actual Control over the

Production of Labor Power] (III) becomes the core domain of domination

Under contemporary conditions, the dominating logic of capital has achieved a crucial leap: it is no longer satisfied merely with dispossessing (I) and utilizing the disintegration of (II), but directly targets and systematically colonizes [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III) itself. This is because, when control over material means of production (I) becomes stable and globally distributed, capital's anxiety over valorization inevitably shifts toward deeper excavation of "living labor"—namely, the meticulous, all-around extraction of the life process of labor power itself. Through algorithmic scheduling, flexible employment, performance monitoring, and biopolitical governance, capital intends to meticulously control the reproduction rhythms, skill development directions, physical and mental states, and even leisure time of labor power, thereby dispossessing workers of their autonomy at a deeper level. Here, we have completed the outline of the "historical logic." However, capitalist rule is by no means a one-time historical setting; it is a continuous process of reproduction. In the contemporary era, a more profound dialectical reversal is occurring: capital's systematic colonization of (III) is no longer merely the passive result of the loss of (I) and (II); instead, it has ascended to become the core mechanism and dynamic source that actively and continuously reproduces the latter two states of loss. This means that the analysis of true capitalist domination must focus on the specific forms of loss of (III).

## Chapter 2: Class, Exploitation, and Alienation

### (A) Reconstructing Class Positioning: A New Map Based on "Control over Labor Power Production"[10]

With the analytical tool in hand, we begin the dissection. To understand the true landscape of contemporary capitalist society, we must first clarify the division of classes. Class analysis is the main thread running through the Marxist theoretical system, the key to examining the essence of all economic relations, and even the cornerstone for defining our own situation and direction of struggle. Without a clear grasp of classes, it is impossible to thoroughly insight into the structure of society and the root causes of its movements.

However, existing class theories—whether the classic Marxist theory of "ownership of the means of production"[11] or Max Weber's "wealth-status-power" stratification paradigm[12]—have revealed their limitations today. The former, constrained by the productive forces of its era, cannot fully encompass the complex forms of ownership of means of production in the digital age (such as data and algorithms); the latter, due to its fundamental methodological flaws, leads to positionless and superficial descriptions.

Therefore, our critique must start with the Weberian paradigm, and we must go beyond simple labeling negation to directly target the incompleteness of its theoretical core.

Max Weber's profound insight lies in his failure to ignore the economic factor of "wealth"[12]. Yet the fundamental flaw of his theory is that he promptly juxtaposes "wealth" with categories belonging to the superstructure—"status" and "power"—as plural, parallel criteria for division. This approach methodologically obscures and even dissolves the decisive role of the economic base in shaping the superstructure. As a result, analysis remains confined to pluralistic descriptions of social appearances—describing who is richer, more respected, or more influential—without penetrating these appearances, as historical materialism does, to reveal the

underlying fundamental production relations and the essence of exploitation. Thus, while Weber's theory is not idealist, it is by no means thorough historical materialism.

This theoretical incompleteness and ambiguity are not accidental academic preferences. His bourgeois stance determines that even his critique of capitalism, like the contradiction between the "individual capitalist" and the "entire bourgeoisie" revealed by Marx in Capital[13], is an expression of the long-term class rationality of the bourgeoisie. It functions like a sophisticated "social climatology," aiming to diagnose storms to better reinforce houses—a form of internal early warning and systematic adjustment to maintain the long-term stability of the system, rather than a revolutionary analytical tool that reveals the true situation of the exploited and thereby subverts this order.

It explains inequality but evades exploitation; it describes stratification but obscures confrontation; it diagnoses conflicts but dissolves revolution. Within the Weberian paradigm, classes are reduced to "strata," struggles are diluted into "mobility," and the contradictions of capitalism are transformed into manageable technical issues. This is precisely the theoretical illusion we must break through.

Therefore, our task is to advance the criteria of class analysis while adhering to the fundamental stance of historical materialism. We must not only ask "Do you own the means of production?" but also probe deeper: "What do you actually control in the production process?"—not merely the right to dominate things, but the autonomy over the production and reproduction of your own labor power. Only in this way can we draw a class map that both penetrates history and illuminates the present—a map truly belonging to the working class.

So why do we say that Marx's theory of ownership of the means of production[11] has its historical limitations? This is by no means a negation of its revolutionary nature and scientific validity, but rather an inevitable conclusion following the spirit of historical materialism—any theory is a product of specific historical conditions and must develop with the evolution of those conditions.

As previously indicated, we need a dual perspective transformation: first, "upgrading

the dimension," requiring the perspective to evolve toward a more dynamic, abstract orientation that emphasizes processual connections; second, "returning to fundamentals," penetrating all new forms to unwaveringly revert to "labor power" as the ultimate source of value and power. It is in these two aspects that Marx, constrained by the specific forms of productive forces in the steam age he lived in, left room for further deepening in the development of his classic theory.

To use an analogy, traditional class theories—whether Marx's binary opposition or Weber's pluralistic stratification—resemble a "point-like distribution" in their graphical model. Each class or stratum corresponds to one or more relatively static, isolated points on a chart; mobility between classes is a "jump" between points, and relationships are relatively external and oppositional. This model exhibits strong explanatory power when analyzing industrial societies with relatively stable structures and relatively fixed forms of means of production (land, factories).

However, in the landscape of digital capitalism, these "points" themselves have become blurred, fluid, and mutually permeable. A programmer may simultaneously be a small shareholder (a minor owner of the means of production), a high-level wage laborer, a personal data producer, and even a contractor on a gig platform. Their class position is no longer a static "point," but a "state interval" that slides dynamically between multiple attributes, filled with internal tensions. At this point, the point-like model reveals its rigidity and limitations—it is difficult to describe the persistent, systematic state of dependence, nor can it capture the contradictory experience of formally possessing a certain degree of control (such as professional skills) while essentially losing overall dominance.

Therefore, we must shift our perspective from "points" to "lines" and even "fields," using a more continuous and dynamically connected "curve" to depict the class spectrum. The horizontal axis of this curve represents a continuum of the strength of "actual control over the means of production"; the vertical axis represents the degree of autonomy in "actual control over the production of labor power." Everyone's position on this dynamic map is no longer an isolated point, but one that fluctuates over time, influenced by multiple variables such as their skills, contracts, data rights, and collective bargaining power.

The origin and baseline of the coordinate system constructing this "curve" is "labor power" itself. "Upgrading the dimension" requires us to focus on the shape and fluctuations of the curve—the specific forms of realization and dynamic changes of control capacity; "returning to fundamentals" ensures we never forget that all fluctuations occur around the central axis of "the production and reproduction of labor power." All "capacities" ultimately point to the potential to dominate one's own or others' labor power as a special commodity.

Thus, we can utilize the core framework of "actual control capacity—production integrity—control over labor power production" established earlier to conduct a class division and interpretation that both inherits the classics and confronts the present. This is no longer a simple replacement of labels, but an upgrade of the analytical paradigm: from the diagnosis of static ownership relations to the critique of dynamic control processes, and ultimately anchoring the root cause of all issues in the struggle for dominance over the life process.

To analyze classes, we must directly address two classic issues and four contemporary subjects.

First, let us address the two classic issues.

First, how to thoroughly elaborate on the key category of the "semi-proletariat" proposed by Comrade Mao Zedong in Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society[14] at the theoretical level. This is by no means a mere historical textual research issue. It is like a sharp "catalyst" that can help us pierce through many fogs in contemporary socio-economic analysis.

Second, how to fundamentally explain the inherent and distinct class attributes of different classes in classic theories based on our new framework. For example, why does the proletariat possess thorough revolutionary nature? Why do the bourgeoisie often exhibit vacillation and compromise (weakness) at critical historical moments? These attributes do not arise out of thin air or from moral judgments; they must be sought in deeper, material production relations.

Clarifying these two classic issues provides us with a telescope to navigate through historical smoke. Only then can we use this polished theoretical lens to accurately focus on and analyze the four contemporary subjects, drawing a true and complex class map belonging to our era.

Let us start with the first issue. In *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society*, Comrade Mao Zedong creatively used the concept of the "semi-proletariat" to accurately depict groups such as semi-owner peasants, poor peasants, and tenant farmers[14]. Within the historical context of China's "semi-colonial and semi-feudal society," these peasant groups were fundamentally identical to urban industrial workers in terms of economic income, social status, and political rights, and often endured even worse living conditions. If examined solely through the external characteristics emphasized by classic theories—such as Marx's "ownership of the means of production" or Weber's pluralistic "wealth-status-power" paradigm—they would undoubtedly be classified within the broad category of the "proletariat."

However, applying the triadic dialectical analytical framework established earlier[7] leads to a completely different conclusion.

The urban industrial proletariat is a typical example of "zero control." They are completely separated from the means of production, confined to an isolated link in socialized large-scale production, unable to independently produce an automobile or a mobile phone. Their labor is deeply fragmented, and "production integrity" is completely disintegrated. At the same time, because they must freely sell their labor power, their "actual control over the production of labor power" is fundamentally deprived—they cannot independently determine the content, rhythm, or purpose of their labor.

In contrast, the "semi-proletariat" as discussed by Comrade Mao Zedong—semi-owner peasants, poor peasants, and tenant farmers—are entirely different[14]. They may not own land, or only possess very little, but the key point is: they do not rely entirely on selling their labor power for survival. They still retain a certain degree of autonomy in labor arrangements, able to relatively independently

decide what crops to plant, when to cultivate, and how to arrange agricultural work. In other words, their "legal or de facto ownership" of the means of production may be weak, but because their labor power has not yet been fully commodified, they still maintain a strong capacity to control the production process of their own labor power. It is this residual control that allows part of their "production integrity" to be preserved—they can relatively completely experience the agricultural cycle from sowing to harvesting, and witness the birth of labor results from their own hands.

Therefore, the "semi-" in "semi-proletariat" essentially lies in their residual actual control over the production of their own labor power, thereby maintaining partial production integrity. This constitutes the essential difference between them and the pure proletariat, and also profoundly shapes their unique class attributes and revolutionary attitudes: while they have revolutionary demands due to exploitation, they may also exhibit vacillation and incompleteness due to retaining minimal independence and illusions of small-scale private ownership.

At the same time, I believe we should also carefully analyze tenant farmers. This not only helps us accurately grasp class division but also profoundly reveals the future development trends of industry and agriculture.

First, it is important to clarify: in Mao Zedong's analysis of the semi-proletariat, "tenant farmers" in traditional Chinese society were not classified into the "semi-proletariat" category[14]. They are essentially mature agricultural wage laborers, or more strictly speaking, part of the agricultural proletariat. The root cause is that, like industrial workers, they rely entirely on selling their labor power for survival—their labor power has been completely commodified. Therefore, like industrial workers, they have completely lost their actual control over the production of their own labor power, becoming a typical group of "zero control" in the agricultural field.

So why does this analysis help us grasp the future development trends of industry and agriculture?

This requires introducing the reconstructed fundamental contradiction of capitalist

society we proposed—the contradiction between the systematic existential dependence of capitalist socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power and the capitalist private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction (this contradiction will be elaborated in detail in Chapter 3, and will not be expanded here). Based on this contradiction, re-examining the emergence of the special group of "tenant farmers" reveals a cruel historical fact:

The development of capitalism, in its inherent logic, inevitably requires drawing more and more labor power into the tide of commodification.

In Section 2 of Chapter 1, we have argued that the inevitable consequence of the commercialization of labor power is the loss of workers' actual control over the production of their own labor power. Under contemporary conditions, capital's systematic colonization of this control capacity has risen to become the core mechanism and dynamic source that actively and continuously reproduces the "disintegration of production integrity" and the "loss of control over the means of production."

This logic reveals historical laws at three levels:

First, it explains Marx's classic assertion: why the more society develops, the more it tends to differentiate into two opposing classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat[15]. Because the logic of capital accumulation is to continuously transform "non-commodified" labor power (such as owner-cultivators) into "commodified" labor power (such as tenant farmers), thereby continuously expanding the ranks of the pure proletariat.

Second, it reveals the inherent expansionary instinct of capital: capital will do everything in its power to commodify all labor power it can absorb. For the commercialization of labor power is not only the foundation of total social value but also the sole source of capital's valorization. Agriculture, a field once dominated by owner-cultivators and small-scale peasant economies, can never be permanently exempted from the logic of capital.

Third, from this, we can deduce the historical destiny of agricultural development: the future mode of agricultural production organization will inevitably converge with the process of industrialization. It will inevitably witness refined task division, differentiation of production links, and division of operational responsibilities; it will move toward large-scale, mechanized, and intensive development; the traditional mode of owner-cultivation or tenant farming will be replaced by universal wage-labor relations; large farmers (agricultural capitalists) will increasingly become the dominant force in agricultural production.

Ultimately, the production relations and operational logic of the entire agricultural sector will become increasingly consistent with those of the industrial sector. The universalization of the agricultural proletariat is not an historical accident, but an inevitable step in the global dominance of the logic of capital across geography and industries.

Next, let us address the second classic issue: the examination of class attributes.

In classic theories, we often say that the proletariat possesses thorough revolutionary nature, while the bourgeoisie exhibits vacillation and compromise[16]. Although the classic explanations are mature, as we argued in Section 2 of Chapter 1, our analytical perspective must achieve a dual transformation of "upgrading the dimension" and "returning to fundamentals" in the contemporary era. Therefore, the analysis of the causes of class attributes should also be deepened accordingly.

Traditional explanations mainly proceed from two aspects: first, the fundamental determining role of economic status; second, the direct shaping of specific forms of production organization[16]. Regarding the decisive role of the economic base, we will elaborate in subsequent chapters and will not dwell on it here. The problem lies in the second aspect—forms of production organization.

In the contemporary era, forms of production organization have undergone tremendous changes. Industrial workers, who constituted the core of the proletariat

in classic theories, no longer dominate the global labor force—long-term tracking data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that in 1991, industrial employment accounted for approximately 22% of the global total, and the service sector for 34%; by 2023, the industrial sector still maintained a share of around 22%, while the service sector had risen to 52% (ILOSTAT database, 2023). Synchronous statistics from the World Bank confirm this trend, with service sector workers becoming the absolute majority of the global employed population.

This structural change has directly reshaped the composition of the proletariat: service sector workers undoubtedly belong to the proletariat, but their forms of production organization (such as decentralization, individualization, and non-fixed locations) are no longer as highly concentrated and disciplined as traditional industrial workers. Thus, a sharp question arises: does this mean they have lost their revolutionary nature? Or, as some contemporary views suggest, has the revolutionary nature of the proletariat been greatly weakened today?

Our answer is: by no means.

Their revolutionary nature will never disappear, nor will it be weakened. The root cause is that the form of production organization is at best a "facilitating factor" or "interfering factor" in the external manifestation of class consciousness and revolutionary nature, but never its "determining factor." It can affect the way, timing, and efficiency of collective action in expressing revolutionary consciousness (for example, it is more difficult for decentralized service sector workers to organize), but it can never change the fundamental soil from which revolutionary nature arises.

So what is the fundamental determinant of class attributes (such as revolutionary nature)? There is only one: the degree of loss of workers' "actual control over the production of labor power."

This positioning is fundamental because it directly targets the ultimate core of capitalist rule. As repeatedly revealed earlier: in the contemporary era, capital's systematic colonization of the actual control over labor power production is no longer merely a passive result of workers' loss of "control over the means of

production" and "production integrity"; on the contrary, it has risen to become the "core mechanism" and "dynamic source" that actively and continuously reproduces the latter two states of loss.

Therefore, it is the difference in the degree of loss of this "life sovereignty" (i.e., control over labor power production) that fundamentally shapes distinct class consciousness and political attributes. Below, we will elaborate through a comparison between the petty bourgeoisie (or semi-proletariat) and the pure proletariat.

First, there are groups that have "not completely lost" their actual control over the production of labor power. Typical examples are owner-cultivators and artisans who retain "production integrity." They can witness the birth of complete products from their own hands and clearly see which specific part of their labor is extracted through exploitation (such as rent or middleman profits). This production state necessarily fosters a deep attachment to small-scale private ownership in their ideology. They perceive exploitation as a "quantitative, partial problem," and their struggle goals are often confined to becoming "better private owners with more means of production." This ideology, rooted in individual, fragmented production, determines their inherent incompleteness and vacillation in revolutionary nature. This is the deep political economic root of their classification as "petty bourgeoisie" or "semi-proletariat."

In contrast, there are groups that have "completely lost" their actual control over the production of labor power—the "zero control" proletariat. Industrial workers are typical examples. Under capitalist division of labor, their labor is completely fragmented, unable to establish a direct connection with any complete product, and the surplus value exploitation they suffer is structural, concealed, and impossible to identify. This completely "rootless" production situation shapes their unique class consciousness: it enables them to transcend anger toward individual capitalists and clearly recognize the fundamental opposition between themselves and the entire system of capitalist private ownership. It is this ideological awakening derived from the most thorough "proletarian" state that forges their thorough, collectivist revolutionary nature.

Therefore, from the perspective of ideological analysis, the preservation or loss of

"actual control over the production of labor power" is not only the fundamental criterion for our class division but also the key to understanding the political positions, revolutionary attitudes, and historical destinies of different classes. Revolutionary nature has never disappeared; it is only that with the increasing complexity of the forms of loss of "control capacity" (such as the "flexible exploitation" of service sector workers), its mode of expression requires us to identify and organize it more acutely under new historical conditions.

Next is the repositioning of the four contemporary subjects:

#### 1. The Industrial Proletariat: The Complete Losers of the Right to Produce Labor Power as a Commodity

The classic definition of the proletariat is "free in the double sense of having nothing and only being able to sell their labor power." Our framework further reveals: they are not only sellers but also "those who have completely lost control over the production of their own labor power as a commodity."

- They cannot decide what use-value their own "commodity" produces (production content is determined by capital);
- They cannot decide the production process of their own "commodity" (labor rhythm and skill application are dictated by factory discipline);
- They cannot even independently arrange the reproduction cycle of this "commodity" (rest and training are subject to the rhythm of capital).

Thus, their [actual control over the means of production] (I) is zero, and their [production integrity] (II) is completely disintegrated. Their class essence is: they have lost all autonomy over the entire process of their own "labor power commodity," from its production to its maintenance. Their revolutionary nature stems precisely from the collective experience of this complete deprivation of the "right to produce the commodity."

## 2. Traditional Petty Producers/Semi-proletariat: Partial Possessors and Dependents of the Right to Produce Labor Power as a Commodity

The particularity of peasants and other semi-proletarians lies in that while selling their labor power as a commodity (doing casual work), they still partially retain the ability to "produce themselves as agricultural labor power commodities."

- They can relatively independently arrange agricultural work, i.e., control part of the production process of their own labor power commodity;
- However, this control is fragile and dependent, subject to rent, market forces, etc., making the production process of their labor power commodity constantly at risk of interruption or distortion.

Thus, they retain residual [actual control over the means of production] (I) and [production integrity] (II). Their class vacillation stems precisely from the incompleteness and high instability of their control capacity over the production of labor power as a commodity: they desire to fully possess this "right to production" (to become owner-cultivators) while constantly facing the threat of complete deprivation (total proletarianization).

## 3. The Capitalist Class: Organizers and Dominators of the Social Total Process of Producing Labor Power as a Commodity

The class power of capitalists lies not only in owning the means of production but more importantly in "purchasing and dominating the production process of others' labor power as a commodity."

- Through employment contracts, they purchase the right to use and dominate others' labor power commodities for a certain period;
- Organizing production essentially means organizing the purchased labor power commodities for cooperative labor to realize capital valorization;
- They formulate rules and provide training to ensure that the purchased labor power

commodities can be continuously and efficiently "reproduced" according to the needs of capital.

It is important to clarify that capitalists are essentially the personification of capital—while they possess the strongest control capacity among all social individuals within capitalist production relations, able to independently decide forms of production organization and ways of dominating labor power, this "autonomy" is not complete voluntary freedom. The core of their decisions always obeys the internal will of capital valorization, constrained by the rigid logic of capital such as market competition and profit maximization, and they cannot independently choose to break free from the framework of capitalist production relations. Thus, capitalists are the "commanders of the social total process of producing labor power as a commodity." Their [actual control over the means of production] (I) is monopolistic, their [production integrity] (II) is manifested in the complete control of the final product, and the core of their power—[actual control over the production of labor power] (III)—lies in their capacity to dominate the life cycle of others' labor power commodities.

#### 4. The "Dagongren" (Wage-Laborers)[17]: "Highly Educated Dependents" Under Cultural Hegemony and Residual Bourgeois Right

The situation of contemporary "dagongren" must be understood within the intertwined context of capitalist globalization and the primary stage of socialism (although the previous discussion has focused on capitalist society, examining the primary stage of socialism here also helps enrich our perspective). They are trapped in a deep predicament of "cleavage of control" shaped by both cultural hegemony and residual bourgeois right.

In areas dominated by the capitalist mode of production, the mechanism of cultural hegemony revealed by Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks plays a key role[18]. The education system, by imparting highly fragmented and specialized knowledge, systematically hinders "dagongren" from forming actual control over the production of their own labor power while endowing them with specific skills. This "fragmentation of capacity" means that while they possess a strong formal control capacity, the realization of their labor value remains deeply dependent on the

platforms and structures provided by capital.

In the primary stage of socialism, as Marx profoundly revealed in the Critique of the Gotha Programme, the principle of "distribution according to work" implemented in socialist society remains a form of "bourgeois right" that tacitly acknowledges natural inequalities[19]. The remnants of this right continue to function in social operation, specifically manifested in the lack of ultimate disposal rights of "dagongren" over their key labor achievements and core means of production in legal relations, creating a deep contradiction between their "high formal control capacity" and "structural dependence in legal right."

Regardless of the social formation, the labor of "dagongren" can produce seemingly complete plans, code, or designs, but the ownership of these achievements often does not belong to the creators themselves. They create "integrity that belongs to capital or the unit," and their "production integrity" becomes a structural illusion.

Thus, "dagongren" are highly educated dependents shaped by both cultural hegemony and residual bourgeois right under complex contemporary social conditions. They harbor dreams of self-realization through professional knowledge—dreams that are themselves a testament to the success of cultural hegemony—while in reality facing constraints imposed by legal relations and structural dependence. Their class anxiety stems precisely from the huge gap between their "high formal control capacity" and "substantive systematic dependence," a contradiction that is particularly prominent in the intertwined context of globalization and the primary stage of socialism.

Or it can be further condensed: "dagongren" are an deepened form of the commercialization of labor power in the knowledge economy. They are also sellers, but their particularity lies in that the value of their labor power commodity is highly dependent on continuous, specialized knowledge input. Through a sophisticated system (algorithms, performance metrics, career development), capital has deeply colonized the "production" and "upgrading" process of their labor power commodity:

- The direction of skill development is preset by capital (what to learn is determined

by market demand);

- The boundary between work and rest becomes blurred, with leisure time transformed into "maintenance" and "upgrading" time for the labor power commodity;
- Personal data generated in their labor process is extracted without compensation by capital and transformed into new means of production for disciplining themselves and optimizing the production of labor power commodities.

They seemingly "invest" in themselves as commodities, but in reality, the direction and evaluation criteria of their "investment" are fully controlled by capital, and their "autonomy" is merely a lever for capital to optimize the performance of its commodities.

In summary, by anchoring the criterion of class division in "actual control over the production of (commodified) labor power," we thoroughly return class analysis to the political economic origin of "the commercialization of labor power." This enables us to clearly insight that the essence of class differences lies in the differential distribution of "autonomous control over the production process of one's own labor power commodity" and "control over the production process of others' labor power commodities." The deepening of contemporary exploitation is precisely reflected in capital's colonization of this control, shifting from explicit "time purchase" to implicit "production process programming." This lays a unified and solid theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of forms of exploitation and mechanisms of alienation.

#### **(B) Deepening of Exploitation Forms: From Value Appropriation to Life Process Colonization[20]**

Marx brilliantly revealed the essence of capitalist exploitation in Capital: by owning the means of production, capitalists purchase labor power as a commodity on the market and unconditionally appropriate the surplus value created by workers in the production process[21]. However, this classic definition mainly exposes the economic outcome of exploitation (the transfer of surplus value). To directly confront its realization process and power essence, we must ask: How can capitalists continuously and stably achieve this appropriation? The answer lies in the

prerequisite for the possibility of exploitation: as owners of the means of production, capitalists first functionally dispossess workers of their [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I).

The direct consequence of this dispossession is the disintegration of workers' [Production Integrity] (II). In the factory system after the Industrial Revolution, this disintegration was mainly achieved through capitalist division of labor: the production of a complete product was decomposed into countless partial and repetitive links. Its superficial manifestation is the worker's alienation from the final product; its deeper essence is the worker's loss of "production integrity over their own labor power as a special commodity"—they can no longer independently and fully control the application, development, and presentation of their own labor capacity. This directly leads to the fundamental loss of workers' [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III). When workers cannot realize the value of their own labor power by controlling the means of production, their only way out is to sell their labor power as a commodity. At this point, their [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III) is alienated from an autonomous potential into a dependent "commodified potential" that can only sell their own labor time under market rules. Therefore, the essence of capitalist exploitation begins with the dispossession of [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I), manifests in the disintegration of [Production Integrity] (II), and ultimately is grounded in the systematic loss of [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III). All subsequent forms of exploitation are based on this foundation.

Exploitation forms are not static but continuously upgrade with the spatial and temporal expansion of capital accumulation. This upgrading is essentially a process in which capital constantly restructures its domination methods to break through exploitation boundaries and maximize surplus value. The historical turning point from the loss of [Actual Control over the Means of Production] to the loss of [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] becoming the dominant logic roughly occurred during the process of economic globalization. The scale of division of labor leaped from within factories and nation-states to the structural division of labor in the global industrial chain and between nations. This forced capital's domination logic to transcend direct surveillance of the labor process within fixed spaces and shift toward controlling the production and reproduction standards of the more fluid and abstract "labor power commodity." (Of course, this logic existed in a bloodier form before globalization, such as forced labor in colonies, but its systematicity and

precision reached an unprecedented height in the era of globalization.)

Under contemporary digital capitalism, this exploitative logic has achieved dual deepening, presenting a structural coupling of "double loss":

First Loss: Lack of Control over Digital Means of Production (Algorithms, Platforms, Data)

This continues and strengthens the classic dispossession of [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I). Workers neither own the digital infrastructure nor can they substantially understand or dominate the algorithmic logic, platform rules, and data resources on which their labor depends—algorithms that determine order distribution, platform architectures that set interaction rules, and data flows that form the foundation of value. Control over these new means of production is highly concentrated in the hands of platform capital.

Second Loss (Core of Contemporary Alienation): Systematic Dispossession of Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power

This marks the focus of exploitation deepening from the appropriation of labor results to the comprehensive colonization of the labor power commodity production process. It is specifically manifested in:

- ① Loss of control over the production process: The specific rhythm of labor, application scenarios of skills, and performance evaluation standards are increasingly set by external algorithms and management software. Workers lose dominance over "how to work," becoming "human-machine interfaces" that execute precise instructions.
- ② Colonization of the reproduction process: Learning, rest, social interaction, and health management, which were originally for free development, are systematically reshaped into "human capital investment" serving the "preservation" and "appreciation" of the labor power commodity. Their purposes and rhythms are dominated by market logic and competitive anxiety, and life time is fully requisitioned by the cycle of capital valorization.

③ Alienation of products (datafied labor power): Personal behavioral data, emotional investment, and social relations are unconditionally extracted by platforms as by-products of the labor power production process. This data in turn becomes new means of production for training algorithms, optimizing management, making precise predictions, and even further disciplining workers themselves (and others). While producing data, workers are also producing new conditions that deepen their own exploited situation.

#### Phenomenological Cases:

1. Food delivery riders are typical examples illustrating the "double loss." Their order acceptance, routes, and income are absolutely dominated by algorithms; their labor is atomized into isolated tasks, with no control over the production rhythm. At the level of the first loss (dispossession of control over the means of production), they do not own the algorithmic systems that determine order distribution, route planning, and salary calculation, nor do they own the platforms that generate data value. These digital means of production and their control rights belong entirely to platform capital. At the level of the second loss (colonization of control over labor power production), exploitation manifests as the in-depth programming of their life processes: ① Loss of control over the production process: Order acceptance, routes, and time are absolutely dominated by algorithms, reducing workers to "human-machine interfaces" executing instructions; ② Colonization of the reproduction process: To avoid negative reviews and maintain income, riders must bear the costs of vehicle maintenance, health risks, and "waiting time" themselves—rest and safety, which should be necessary links in labor power reproduction, are forced to be alienated into "operational costs" that need to be optimized and borne by themselves; ③ Alienation of data products: Riders' trajectory, speed, and service data are unconditionally extracted by platforms to optimize algorithms, train AI, and further generate more harsh disciplinary systems. They are not only delivering food but also continuously producing data means of production that deepen their own exploitation. The predicament of food delivery riders shows that exploitation is no longer the simple appropriation of surplus value created by their food delivery labor, but the systematic dispossession of all their abilities to arrange work rhythms, maintain their own reproduction, and possess their own data products—thus weaving their entire life cycle into the cycle of value extraction.

2. Digital creative workers such as programmers and designers present a more

concealed and refined form of the "double loss." At the level of the first loss, although they are proficient in using development tools and platforms, the ownership and control rights of key means of production—software intellectual property rights, cloud servers, core algorithms, and user data—still belong to capital. At the level of the second loss, exploitation deepens by creating an illusion of "creative autonomy": ① Implicit programming of the production process: Their "creativity" is pre-confined within commercial needs, technical stack choices, and product logic, and algorithms can even replace part of creative coding; ② Lifelong binding of the reproduction process: The rapid iteration of technology forces them to spend a lot of leisure time learning new skills, their career development is completely dependent on the technical trends set by capital, and the "preservation" and "appreciation" of labor power value become lifelong pressures imposed by workers on themselves; ③ Comprehensive alienation of outputs: Once their code, designs, and creative schemes are produced, the intellectual property rights belong to the company, which may be used to develop monitoring tools or optimize exploitation systems. They seemingly produce "complete" products, but in reality, they only produce "fragments of integrity under capital control." The situation of digital creative workers reveals that the highest form of contemporary exploitation is to allow workers to maintain a "formal sense of high-skill control" while systematically dispossessing them of substantive control over labor purposes, development directions, and final results—thus seamlessly transforming their intelligence, passion, and lifelong learning abilities into intelligent nutrients for capital valorization.

Their common essence lies in: their "actual control over the production of labor power" is eroded in different dimensions and ways; as producers of the "labor power commodity," they are increasingly losing autonomy over the production process of this commodity. These cases collectively confirm that contemporary exploitation has upgraded from "appropriating surplus value in the production process" to "shaping the production conditions of surplus value in the entire process of labor power production and reproduction."

It is particularly emphasized that, as mentioned earlier, "actual control over the production of labor power" not only refers to the control over one's own labor power but also embodies a social power in a class sense: that is, one class (the bourgeoisie) can systematically dominate the labor power production process of another class (the proletariat). Through employment relations, management structures, and market systems, capitalists purchase and arrange the production and reproduction of a

certain quantity and specific structure of labor power, integrating it into the track of value valorization. Therefore, the deepening of exploitation is simultaneously the deepening of capital's ability to plan and dominate the social total labor power production process.

In summary, the upgrading of exploitation forms is a historical and logical chain from "dispossessing [Actual Control over the Means of Production] (I) to appropriate surplus value," to "disintegrating [Production Integrity] (II) to control the labor process," and ultimately to "colonizing [Actual Control over the Production of Labor Power] (III) to dominate the entire production and reproduction process of the labor power commodity." The "double loss" exhibited by contemporary digital capitalism is precisely the latest stage in the development of this chain. It means that exploitation has evolved from a phased behavior within the workplace to a systematic domination penetrating the entire life cycle of labor power; it not only appropriates labor products but also shapes the labor subject itself. This provides a solid political economic foundation for understanding the comprehensive alienation phenomenon to be elaborated in the next section.

### **(C) Completion of the Alienation Chain: Integration of the Four Dimensions of Alienation and New Developments in Alienation[22]**

In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Marx systematically elaborated his theory of alienated labor for the first time, "pulling" it back from the realm of philosophical speculation to the economic reality of capitalist production relations, and laying the critical foundation centered on "ownership of the means of production"[23]. This theoretical system profoundly reveals the four-dimensional picture of the comprehensive dehumanization of workers under the relations of private ownership and wage labor:

1. Alienation of the worker from the labor product: The more wealth the worker produces, the poorer he becomes, and the product becomes an alien force dominating him.
2. Alienation of the worker from the labor process: Labor is no longer a free and conscious activity, but an external, forced, and painful means of livelihood.

3. Alienation of the worker from the human species-being: Free and conscious creative activity (the human species-being) is degraded to a tool for maintaining physical survival.

4. Alienation of person from person: The inevitable result of the above alienations, manifested as class antagonism and universal social estrangement.

However, a long-standing theoretical concern remains: how is the causal chain between the macro production relations of "private ownership and wage labor relations" and the specific individual experiences and confrontational social relations of the "four-dimensional alienation" specifically unfolded? Marx's classic discussion points out the starting point and end point, but the operational mechanism between them—how alienation is produced step by step like a sophisticated machine—still awaits a clearer and more operable theoretical explanation.

As the two core pillars of capitalism, private ownership and wage labor jointly define capitalist production relations. Driven by the internal motivation of pursuing surplus value, capitalism continuously promotes the specialization of the production process and the refinement of the division of labor. It is in this historical process that the lack of "actual control over the means of production" (I) and the disintegration of "production integrity" (II), as a pair of interrelated deprivation mechanisms, are systematically produced. The combination of these two ultimately points to and culminates in the fundamental alienation and loss of the worker's "actual control over the production of labor power" (III). In the classic industrial era, this loss was mainly a passive result of the loss of (I) and (II); in the contemporary era, the systematic colonization of (III) has, in turn, become the core dynamic source that actively and continuously reproduces the loss of (I) and (II).

#### First Sequence: Alienation of the Worker from the Labor Process and Labor Product—The Direct Formation of Economic Alienation

The alienation of the worker from the labor process and labor product is the starting point and most direct economic manifestation of the entire alienation chain. In essence, it is the inevitable result and first phenomenal form of the fundamental capitalist fact that "labor power becomes a commodity."

Its occurrence follows a clear logical chain:

1. Root cause: The structural deprivation of actual control over the means of production

The overall root of this alienation is not abstract ideas or technology, but the structural and institutional deprivation of the worker's "actual control over the means of production" by capitalists (owners and monopolists of the means of production) through private ownership and wage labor relations. Peasants losing their land, artisans losing their workshops and tools, and modern workers not owning data, algorithms, and platforms—this deprivation deprives workers of the material conditions for independent production. It is this deprivation that paves the way for all subsequent separations.

2. Core mechanism: The first separation between the worker and their own labor capacity

Having been deprived of the means of production, the only "property" left to the worker is their own labor capacity. To survive, they must sell this capacity as a commodity on the market. At this moment, "the commercialization of labor power" achieves a fundamental transformation: the worker undergoes a "first separation" from their own labor capacity. Labor capacity is no longer an inherent force they can directly use to achieve their own purposes, but an "external thing" that needs to be sold first before its use value can be activated by others (capitalists). This is a separation of control: the worker transfers the right to dominate the use of their own labor capacity within a specific time.

3. Direct manifestation: The disintegration of production integrity—the separation between the worker and the commodities they produce

The direct consequence of the above separation is the complete disintegration of "production integrity." After purchasing labor power, capitalists inevitably decompose the complete production process into countless partial and repetitive links through refined division of labor to maximize efficiency and profit. Workers are trapped in one of these nodes like screws. They can no longer experience the complete creative cycle from conception to finished product, nor can they identify any final product as "my work."

This is the "second separation": the worker is separated from the commodities they personally participate in producing. The product stands before them as an alien and unfamiliar force, whose design, meaning, and ownership have nothing to do with the worker. Labor is reduced from a complete, objectified creative activity to a pile of aimless fragmented actions.

Thus, the complete logic of the first sequence of alienation unfolds before us:

Capitalists deprive control over the means of production (I) → Force labor power to become a commodity (separation between the worker and their own labor capacity) → Capitalists use their dominant power to disintegrate production integrity (II) (separation between the worker and the product) → Ultimately manifested as the comprehensive alienation of the labor process (pain) and labor product (estrangement).

This sequence clearly shows that economic alienation is by no means a subjective feeling, but an objective living condition inevitably arising from the systematic deprivation of the worker's control rights after the commercialization of labor power.

In the daily experience of workers, this alienation presents a torn dual feeling:

- In the labor process: Due to the inherent lack of potential to dominate the means of production, work becomes an "external activity" set and supervised by others. Labor is no longer an expression and extension of the self, but a negation and escape from the self.
- In the labor product: Due to the complete disintegration of production integrity, the relationship between the worker and the product is completely mediated and obscured by the huge division of labor system. It is no longer the objectified crystallization of their individual labor, but the cold output of a huge and unfamiliar machine (capital). They cannot intuit their own essential power in it; instead, the product confronts them indifferently as an independent, alien commodity world.

Therefore, the alienation of the labor process and labor product is like two sides of a coin: one side is the predetermined lack of dominant power (structural root), and the

other side is the complete emptiness of creative meaning (phenomenological manifestation). This first layer of alienation lays the basic living condition of rootlessness and estrangement for workers in the capitalist order, and paves the way for a deeper alienation—the separation from their own species-being.

#### Second Sequence: Alienation of the Worker from the Human Species-Being—Ontological Stripping After the Commercialization of Labor Power

After the worker is fully alienated from their own labor process and labor product, alienation rises from the specific field of economic activity to the fundamental dimension of human existence—alienation from the human "species-being." Marx defined the human "species-being" as "free and conscious activity"—a life activity that can dominate oneself and confirm one's own essential power through complete creative objectification.

This layer of alienation is essentially the complete completion and deepening of the logic of "the commercialization of labor power" at the ontological level. Its core logic is: alienation in the economic field (first sequence) inevitably leads to the alienation of the fundamental way of human existence.

##### 1. Deep root cause: The complete separation and independence of labor power from the worker

In the first sequence, labor power has already undergone a separation of "the right to use and dominate" from the worker as a commodity. In the second sequence, this separation is pushed to an extreme: under the continuous shaping of capitalist production relations, labor power is not only a commodity to be sold, but also increasingly becomes an "alien existence" separated from, independent of, and even opposed to the worker as an individual.

- It follows the pricing logic of the market (wages), not the logic of the worker's life development.
- Its "use value" (labor) is consumed by capitalists within specified times and processes, irrelevant to the worker's own wishes and rhythms.

- Its "reproduction" (skill learning, physical and mental recovery) is increasingly like the maintenance and upgrading of a tool, serving the preservation and appreciation of its market value, not the richness and completeness of human beings.

Thus, the "most profound separation" occurs: the worker is ontologically separated from their most essential life force—their labor power. Labor power is no longer an organic part of "I" and a medium for expressing life, but an "other" that needs to be continuously managed, invested in, and sold to obtain means of subsistence.

## 2. Dual deprivation of "free and conscious": The specific mechanism of species-being alienation

Our analytical framework reveals that this ontological alienation is specifically manifested as the dual deprivation of the essence of "free and conscious activity," which precisely corresponds to the loss of the core categories mentioned earlier:

- Loss of the "freedom" dimension: Stems from the complete lack of "actual control over the means of production" (I).

"Freedom" first means the conscious domination of one's own activity process. When workers are unable to decide what to produce, how to produce, and why to produce due to the loss of (I), their labor is a passive activity dominated by the will of capital and disciplined by external rhythms from start to finish. Labor is not a self-determined practice, but a forced hard labor. The loss of "freedom" marks the demise of the worker's autonomy over their life activities.

- Disintegration of the "consciousness" dimension: Directly manifested as the systematic disintegration of "production integrity" (II).

"Consciousness" means reflecting on and confirming one's own essential power in the complete objectification process. When (II) disintegrates, labor is fragmented into meaningless pieces, and workers cannot participate in or witness the birth of a complete product. Their activities lose the creative cycle with a beginning and an end. Labor is no longer an "objective activity" that can transform internal creativity, wisdom, and emotions into externally intuitive objects. The disintegration of "consciousness" empties the inherent meaning of labor and the possibility of self-realization.

### 3. Essential conclusion: The complete loss of actual control over the production of labor power

Therefore, the most profound realistic root of the worker's alienation from the human species-being can be precisely attributed to the complete loss of "actual control over the production of labor power" (III).

- It is because of the loss of (III) that workers cannot freely dominate their own labor capacity;
- It is because of the loss of (III) that workers cannot achieve consciousness in the complete objectification process.

The loss of (III) means that the worker is deprived of the overall sovereignty over their life process (from skill shaping and time arrangement to physical and mental reproduction). The reason why labor is completely degraded from "free and conscious species-life" to "a means of maintaining physical survival" is precisely because the worker's right to produce and dominate their own life activities has been completely colonized by the logic of capital.

The alienation of the second sequence marks that capitalist production relations not only exploit the worker's economic products but also alienate their essential way of existence as human beings. It degrades humans from "subjects of activity" to "carriers of labor power," and compresses the rich "species-life" into abstract "commodity reproduction." This is a more fundamental deprivation than economic alienation, and paves the way for the third sequence—the comprehensive alienation of relations between people.

### Third Sequence: Alienation of Person from Person—Comprehensive Confrontation and Estrangement of Social Relations

The alienation of person from person is the social sum and final completion of all the aforementioned alienations. It is not an independent link, but the inevitable manifestation of contradictions in production relations under private ownership in

the interpersonal field. Our analytical framework can clearly reveal the dual logic of its emergence from the production field and diffusion to all social life:

### 1. Confrontational structure of production relations: The root of alienated relations

The deepest foundation of the alienation of person from person directly stems from the class monopoly of "actual control over the production of labor power" in the production field. This fundamental monopoly in turn leads to the bourgeoisie's monopoly of the potential to dominate the means of production, while the proletariat systematically lacks this potential. This fundamental opposition based on "capacity constants" establishes the class relations of exploitation and being exploited, domination and being dominated. This relationship is not an accidental conflict between equal individuals, but a structural confrontation predetermined by production status. Therefore, the polarization of "actual control capacity" is the material core that shapes confrontational social relations (i.e., class relations).

### 2. Disintegration of "production integrity" and the reification of social connections

The loss of "actual control over the production of labor power" inevitably leads to the universal disintegration of the worker's "production integrity," which shapes the universal social form through which this confrontational relationship operates. When each worker's product is not the objectification of their complete essence but only an anonymous commodity, the social connections between people are inevitably mediated and obscured by the relations between things (i.e., commodity exchange relations).

- Between worker A and worker B, they no longer connect as co-creators, but as owners (or sellers) of their respective fragmented labor products.
- The rich individuality, emotions, and needs of humans are abstracted into cold exchange value and monetary amounts.

This universal "reification" of social relations obscures the real connections between people, and they regard each other as tools to achieve their own purposes. It constitutes the pervasive experience of "alienation of person from person" in daily life.

### 3. Evolution from economic confrontation to comprehensive estrangement

Finally, the combination of class confrontation in the production field and universal reification in the exchange field gives birth to comprehensive estrangement in the entire social life:

- Between classes, it is manifested as the fundamental opposition of interests and the indifference and estrangement of emotions.
- Within classes, competition replaces unity, and individuals become atoms bidding against each other in the labor market.
- At the broadest social level, the logic of money erodes everything, and trust, community, and real emotional connections become scarce.

Therefore, the "alienation of person from person" is such a process: it begins with the class confrontation laid by the monopoly of "actual control capacity" in production relations, is universally operated and deepened through the reification of social relations caused by the disintegration of "production integrity," and ultimately presents as a state of deep estrangement, instrumentalization, and confrontation at the entire social level.

Thus, Marx's four-dimensional alienation is no longer separate and isolated links, but transformed into an interconnected, progressive dynamic causal generative sequence:

Capitalist private ownership and wage labor relations → Determine the structural lack of the worker's "actual control capacity" (root cause of capacity deprivation) → Lead to the inevitable disintegration of labor "production integrity" (phenomenological emptying of meaning) → First manifested as the alienation of the worker from the labor process and product (direct economic fact) → Then rises to alienation from the human species-being (fundamental alienation of existence) → Finally, through the dual logic of class confrontation and relational reification, complete the universal alienation between people (comprehensive confrontation and estrangement of social relations).

Up to this point, starting from the historical context, we have extracted the core

concepts of "labor power" and "control," and forged them into a "triadic dialectical linkage" analytical framework. With this framework, we have conducted a systematic and era-specific reinterpretation of the class map, the deepening of exploitation, and the generative sequence of alienation.

However, the deepening of theory is endless. We have analyzed the phenomena of capital's dimension upgrade in many fields, but if we cannot insight into the total root driving all these phenomena, our criticism will still remain superficial. Capital's dimension upgrade not only requires the reconstruction of our analytical perspective but also means that the most basic contradiction that constitutes the entire capitalist system is manifesting in an unprecedentedly profound form. Reconstructing and diagnosing it in the contemporary era is the key to understanding all crises of our time, and an unavoidable theoretical prerequisite for any emancipatory practice.

## Chapter 3: Contemporary Reconstruction of the Fundamental Contradiction

As we have argued earlier, the entire social structure, contradictions, and movements of capitalism are rooted in the historical fact that "labor power becomes a commodity"—i.e., the capitalist private ownership of labor power. We further point out that as capitalism evolves from the industrial age to the digital age, this essential relationship is impacting and reshaping its external manifestations in an unprecedented manner.

In the era of classic industrial capitalism, the primary form and visible marker of exploitation and domination were the capitalist private ownership of material means of production (factories, machines, land). However, the underlying purpose of this ownership of "things" has always been to achieve the continuous domination and value extraction of "power"—i.e., living labor or labor power itself. It was only that this essential purpose was firmly wrapped under the superficial structure of "ownership of means of production" at that time, not yet fully revealing its independent form.

In the contemporary era, especially with the rise of digital capitalism, a profound theoretical "inversion" or "manifestation" is taking place: the capitalist private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction—this essential purpose of capitalism—is increasingly breaking free from dependence on fixed, tangible means of production, realizing its direct externalization through new power forms such as algorithms, platforms, data, and protocols. The core field of exploitation has shifted from the possession of labor products to the colonization of the reproduction process of labor power; the logic of domination has deepened from the static monopoly of means of production to the dynamic programming of life processes.

At this point, essence and appearance are increasingly converging. The private ownership of means of production (especially digital means of production such as data and algorithms) is more and more clearly manifested as a means serving a more fundamental goal: the systematic deprivation and private monopoly of the

actual control capacity over the production of labor power.

### (A) The Deepening of Capitalism's Fundamental Contradiction

The fundamental contradiction of capitalism, as incisively summarized in classical Marxist discourse, lies in the contradiction between the socialization of production and the capitalist private ownership of the means of production[24]. This classic formulation accurately captures the dominant form and historical means of contradictory conflicts in the era of industrial capitalism. It reveals the process by which capital dispossesses workers of their actual control over the means of production, forcing them to sell their labor power and thereby appropriating surplus value. In this stage, the direct manifestation of alienation is the disintegration of workers' production integrity, and their actual control over the production of their own labor power is alienated into a commodified potential dependent on the market. This forms the first complete historical chain of contradictory movement: loss of actual control over the means of production → disintegration of production integrity → alienation of actual control over the production of labor power.

However, this classic form is not the final manifestation of the contradiction. With capitalism's evolution into the digital age, the movement of this contradiction has presented a more profound logic. The underlying purpose of capitalist rule—sustained appropriation of living labor and control over its reproduction—remains unchanged, but the means to achieve this purpose and the form of the contradiction's manifestation have undergone a historical leap. The private ownership of material (and digital) means of production essentially serves the core goal of establishing and maintaining the private control over the labor power production process. In the industrial age, this goal was still concealed beneath the appearance of "ownership of the means of production"; in the contemporary era, it is manifested and externalized with unprecedented directness, even beginning to actively and systematically reproduce the state of dispossession of the former two.

Thus, the contradiction has achieved a historical regression and deepening at the level of essence. Its core has evolved from the specific historical form of "the socialization of production versus the capitalist private ownership of the means of production" to the more universal fundamental opposition between "the systematic

existential dependence of the capitalist socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power" and "the capitalist private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction." Understanding this evolution from "instrumental dispossession" to "purposive colonization" is the key to diagnosing contemporary forms of domination.

#### In-depth Analysis of a Theoretical Case: The "ALICE Threshold" in the United States

The phenomenon of the "ALICE" group that has attracted attention in American society in recent years is a profound footnote to the externalization of this contradictory essence.

- Contemporary Reflection of the Historical Chain: The predicament of ALICE households fully reproduces the aforementioned historical chain. Due to financial vulnerability (e.g., inability to cover a \$400 emergency expense), they lose control over basic means of subsistence (loss of actual control over the means of production), their lives are tied to immediate income (disintegration of production integrity), and ultimately they completely lose autonomy over the healthy reproduction of their own labor power (direct dispossession of actual control over the production of labor power).
- Systematic Screening and Essence Externalization: More than 40% of American households fall below this threshold. Their vulnerability, combined with the "welfare cliff," means that a single emergency can trigger a chain collapse of "income exhaustion → credit collapse → loss of housing." This is by no means an accidental social failure, but a systematic screening mechanism by capital to maintain exploitation efficiency—through manipulating reproduction costs—of the "group that fails to reproduce labor power as a commodity." It nakedly demonstrates that the contradiction has externalized from the ownership of "things" to the planning and screening of the production process of "power" itself.

Therefore, the contemporary deepening of capitalism's fundamental contradiction is not a simple replacement of the classic paradigm, but rather pushes its inherent essence—the control over the labor power production process—from behind historical means to the forefront, becoming the logic of domination itself. This

requires that our theory of emancipation must equally anchor its focus on the fundamental proposition of "reclaiming the actual control capacity over the production of labor power."

### **(B) The Reconstruction of Capitalism's Fundamental Contradiction**

Any theoretical reconstruction must be based on a solid historical starting point. The deepened form of capitalism's fundamental contradiction in the contemporary era is rooted in an unshakable historical fact: it is precisely the socialization of production (the revolution in productive forces) that created the historical conditions for the universal commercialization of labor power (the core of capitalist production relations). From simple cooperation to manufacture, and then to large-scale machine industry, the degree of socialization of production has continuously improved, ultimately making the separation of laborers from the means of production a universal reality and enabling labor power to be freely bought and sold as a commodity on the market. This is the general premise for all contradictions of capitalism as revealed by classical Marxism.

However, once this historical premise is fully established and capitalism begins to operate as a mature, self-expanding organic system, its inherent contradictions exhibit a new, more profound form. We argue that this contradiction can be reconstructed in the contemporary era as follows:

The contradiction between the systematic existential dependence of the capitalist socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power and the capitalist private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction.

This formulation does not describe its historical origin, but diagnoses its systematic mode of existence and the paradox of self-disintegration. Its generation follows the following logic:

From Historical Premise (Socialization of Production) to Systemic Feature

### (Existential Dependence)

Once the commercialization of labor power becomes the backbone of society (completion of the historical premise), the capitalist socialized large-scale production forms an unbreakable symbiotic relationship with it. At this point, the "socialization of production" is no longer merely a historical driving force for commodification; its own form of existence has been completely transformed into "capitalist socialized large-scale production"—a massive system entirely built on wage labor and commodity exchange[1]. The daily survival and continuous expansion of this system are structurally absolutely dependent on the continuous, stable, and large-scale supply of labor power as a commodity. This "systematic existential dependence" is the primary systemic feature of a mature capitalist system. It means that the vulnerability of the system has been internalized: the lifeline of its survival is tied to the object of its exploitation.

### From the Realization of Exploitation (Private Ownership) to the Deepening of Domination (Private Control)

To maintain this system and achieve valorization, capital must continuously deepen its forms of domination. The "private ownership of the means of production" in the classic contradiction is the power foundation for realizing exploitation. However, in the operation of the system, this power inevitably pursues comprehensive domination over the production process. This leads to two leaps in the logic of domination:

- First Leap: From the ownership of "things" (means of production) to the domination of the consumption process of "power" (the labor process), resulting in the disintegration of workers' "production integrity."
- Second Leap (the key to the contemporary era): From the domination of the "labor process" to the colonization of the production and reproduction process of "labor power." Capital must ensure that this special commodity can be continuously "produced" to meet its valorization needs. Thus, through algorithms, data, management technologies, and control over reproductive resources such as education and healthcare, capital has achieved the "private control" of the labor

power's life process. This constitutes the secondary systemic feature of the system—its most active and aggressive power core.

### Internal Conflict of Systemic Features: The Paradox of Dependence and Control

At this point, the two features of the system constitute a fatal self-conflict:

- Feature 1 (Existential Dependence) requires: The labor power commodity must be reproduced in a healthy, stable, and sustainable manner.
- Feature 2 (Private Control) inevitably leads to: In order to extract more value and win competition, capital will continuously strengthen control, intensify exploitation, and shift costs, thereby undermining the health, stability, and sustainability of labor power.

### Self-Referential Systemic Crisis

Therefore, the contradiction we have reconstructed reveals an existential crisis of the mature capitalist system. It is no longer merely the classical conflict between productive forces and production relations, but an irreconcilable self-confrontation between the system's own conditions of survival and its own operational logic. This provides a more precise lens for understanding the comprehensive crisis of the digital age: all crises are essentially manifestations of this fundamental contradiction between "systematic existential dependence" and "whole-process private control" in different fields (economic, social, life). The path to emancipation must therefore aim to break this paradox—i.e., reclaiming the actual control capacity over the production of labor power.

### (C) Theoretical Positioning: The Historical Materialist Foundation of Contradiction Reconstruction

The preceding reconstruction of capitalism's fundamental contradiction as a self-conflict between "existential dependence" and "private control" is not the construction of a new contradiction divorced from the classic paradigm, but rather

aims to reveal that the fundamental contradiction between productive forces and production relations has achieved its historical deepening and completion in the era of digital capitalism.

The core mechanism of this deepening lies in the fact that the focus of contradictory struggle has thoroughly advanced from the level of "what to produce" and "who owns it" to the more essential dimension of "how the producers themselves are produced." The classic formulation—"the socialization of production versus the capitalist private ownership of the means of production"—accurately captures the form of the contradiction's intensification at the objective level in the industrial age. In contrast, the contemporary contradiction between "existential dependence" and "private control" marks the full development and intensification of the same contradiction at the subjective level.

The driving force for deepening stems from the fundamental transformation of the requirements of productive forces for "living labor." The inherent logic of contemporary socialized productive forces (digitalization, automation, global networks) requires their dynamic element—labor power—to possess a high degree of plasticity, cooperativeness, and continuous innovation capacity. Within the capitalist framework, this objective historical requirement of productive forces is systematically distorted into the rigid existential dependence of the entire economic system on "standardized, reproducible labor power commodities." Therefore, "systematic existential dependence" is an alienated and coercive form of the developmental requirements of productive forces under capitalist production relations, which constitutes the realistic starting point for the deepening of the contradiction.

The completion of deepening is reflected in the extreme form of the rule of production relations. To harness this uncertain "dependence" generated by itself, capitalist power must transcend the control of the labor process and labor products, and penetrate into the entire life process of labor power production and reproduction. Thus, the "private control over labor power production" is no longer a supplementary means, but an inevitable and thorough form of rule for capitalist production relations to maintain themselves and respond to their inherent vulnerability. It marks the deepening of exploitative relations from the appropriation of labor time to the planning and colonization of life time.

Thus, the contradiction we have revealed is the deepest confrontation achieved in the historical process between the objective requirements of the development of productive forces (embodied in the system's existential dependence) and the extreme form of capitalist production relations (embodied in the private control of the life process). This is not a shift of the contradiction, but its logical radicalization: the two sides of the contradiction engage in direct confrontation in the core field of "the production of humans," making the survival premise of the system and the operational logic of the system direct enemies. The systemic reproductive crisis revealed by the ALICE threshold is an inevitable product of this deepened contradiction that cannot be internally resolved.

This deepening also provides a unified perspective for clarifying the economic roots of many contemporary social phenomena. When capital's "private control" must penetrate into education, healthcare, leisure, and emotional structures, a large number of ruling phenomena that seem to belong to cultural, psychological, or technological autonomy (such as performance ethics and data alienation) are generated. Our analysis shows that these phenomena are by no means floating superstructural derivatives; their driving force and substantive content always stem from the increasingly intense tension between "existential dependence" and "private control" in the economic base. The superstructure plays an intermediary role in managing, diverting, and rationalizing this fundamental conflict, but cannot eliminate the conflict itself.

In summary, the theoretical work of this paper is a conscious theoretical deepening completed within the framework of historical materialism. It resolutely advances the analysis of the contradiction's manifestation in the "objective world" in the classic paradigm to the analysis of how the contradiction is produced and reproduced in the "subjective world." This is not a replacement of the classic principles, but their decisive development and specific completion under the conditions of the new era, laying a more solid and radical political economic foundation for us to understand the comprehensive and concealed domination of the digital age and to conceive an emancipatory politics centered on "reclaiming the actual control capacity over the production of labor power."

#### (D) Capitalism's Self-Dimension Upgrade

Following the revelation of the contemporary fundamental contradiction above, a more profound and severe historical picture emerges. Capitalism's most fundamental "cunning" and secret of rule may not, as predicted by classic crisis theories, lie in its contradictions leading to its simple collapse; on the contrary, it lies in its continuous technological and organizational "dimension upgrade," successfully anchoring and hiding its inherent, insurmountable contradictions in the most core and dynamic element of its system—"labor power"—and thereby transforming explosive contradictions into a hidden engine of the system's dynamic balance.

Under capitalism's dialectical alchemy, labor power has become a trinity, self-referential monster:

- As productive forces: It is the sole source of value creation, the living energy that drives machines to operate and data to flow[25].
- As production relations: Its commodified form (wage labor) constitutes the starting point of the entire exploitative structure, and its reproduction process (education, health) is increasingly becoming a field planned and contested by capital[26].
- As a special commodity: It is bought and sold on the market itself, and the contradiction between its value and use value constitutes the premise for the possibility of exploitation[27].

The historical development of capitalism is the process of continuously absorbing, compressing, and transcribing all its contradictions—the conflict between productive forces and production relations, the opposition between socialization and private ownership—into the biopolitical equation of "labor power." The contradictions have not disappeared, but have been exquisitely internalized: the deadlock between the system's "existential dependence" on labor power commodities and capital's "private control" over labor power production has precisely become the core driving force for capital to continuously innovate management technologies (from Taylorism to algorithmic governance), explore life fields (from factory discipline to emotional labor), and create structural scarcity and anxiety (such as the ALICE predicament). Every outbreak of crisis (such as the reproductive crisis) is not the end of the system,

but often an opportunity for it to conduct internal screening, reorganization, and strengthen control.

Thus, the intensification of contradictions manifests at the phenomenal level as a series of complex, diffuse, and seemingly "insignificant" or individually failed symptoms: "involution" is regarded as personal insufficient effort, "burnout" is attributed to poor psychological adjustment, and "precariousness" is explained as a natural risk of the market economy. By transforming systemic contradictions into phenomenological experiences and responsibilities at the individual life level, capital has successfully concealed the fundamental opposition of political economy behind the fog of psychology, success studies, and technological optimism. The critical gaze is thus misled to float in superstructural fields such as performance, emotion, and identity, but fails to hit the cold economic core that anchors all pain in the life process of "labor power production."

Therefore, the theoretical effort of reconstructing this fundamental contradiction is ultimately not only about diagnosis, but also about executing a resolute demystification and re-anchoring: it requires us to penetrate all these complex contemporary symptoms and point directly to their root cause—how capitalism achieves the deepening of its rule by upgrading and implanting contradictions into our lives themselves. This reveals that "reclaiming the actual control capacity over the production of labor power" is by no means a moderate reformist slogan, but an overall revolution targeting the ontological foundation of capitalism, aiming to crack its core encryption program. Only by recognizing that contradictions have been hidden so deeply and bound so tightly can the cause of emancipation gain the corresponding thoroughness and depth.

## Chapter 4: Panopticon: Programming and Disempowerment in Three Spheres of Life

### (A) The Educational Sphere: From "Cultivating Humans" to "Training Human Capital"

Capitalism's art of domination is first manifested in its inscription of the order of future factories into the structure of today's campuses in advance. Bowles and Gintis' "correspondence principle" provides a penetrating theoretical lens here: the internal organizational logic of the educational system is by no means a value-neutral transmission of knowledge, but a mirror reproduction and pre-practice of workplace power relations and the demands of the division of labor[28].

At the macro level of the system, this reproduction first manifests as the isomorphism of the bureaucratic power structure. The hierarchical chain from principal, director, teacher to student accurately corresponds to the sequence of CEO, manager, foreman, and worker in enterprises. The strict attendance system, unified dress code, absolute emphasis on classroom discipline, and even behavioral rewards for "obeying instructions" in schools all serve the deep function of repeatedly instilling in students an inertial obedience to authority and unconditional acceptance of rules.

This connection is by no means a vague metaphor, but rigidly realized through a sophisticated institutional screening and resource allocation mechanism guaranteed by policies. Take the United States as an example: its public education "school district system" forcibly binds educational quality to local property taxes, forming a vicious circle where "affluent areas have high-quality public schools while poor areas suffer from dilapidated education." Both the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and numerous studies confirm that per-student funding in wealthy school districts has been several times that of poor school districts for years, leading to a stark gap in the quality of teachers, facilities, and courses[29]. This inequality in resource allocation starting from basic education is continuously amplified through standardized examinations and tracking policies, ultimately solidifying into a cruel class barrier at the entrance to higher education. For instance, a long-term study on

social mobility points out that in top American universities, the number of students from families in the top 1% of income exceeds the total number of students from families in the bottom 60%[30]. This is not a selection based on ability, but a systematic process through which class origin is converted into academic advantages via educational resources.

Britain's "grammar school" system completes the early identification of elite labor through more open selection. Through the 11-plus entrance exam, a small number of students gain admission to grammar schools. A wealth of sociological research consistently shows that grammar school students are disproportionately from high-income professional families, while working-class children are severely underrepresented. This screening mechanism is essentially an institutional confirmation of cultural capital and family resources. Its effects directly transmit to the labor market: tracking data from the Department for Education and independent research institutions reveals that grammar school graduates are far more likely to enter high-income industries than those from ordinary comprehensive schools, and this gap cannot be fully explained by exam results, revealing the profound impact of class background. This perfectly confirms the neo-Marxist "correspondence principle"[28]: graduates of vocationally oriented educational paths (such as V Levels in the UK or community colleges in the US) ultimately enter low-income, low-autonomy jobs in large numbers, while academically oriented paths (A Levels or four-year universities) lead more to management and professional fields. Through policy design, the educational system thus converts class origin into academic credentials, and then exchanges academic credentials for occupational hierarchies, completing the intergenerational prefabrication and solidification of labor hierarchies.

If capital's colonization of education stopped at shaping the macro structure, its control would remain external and fragile. Its true sophistication and depth lie in its transformation of capital's logic into students' internal thinking habits, value judgments, and self-perceptions through micro ideological discipline and debt financial technologies, thereby achieving "voluntary submission of subjectivity."

This is first realized through hidden curricula and competitive ethics reinforced by national legislation. The US Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)[31] and the UK Education Act[32] both place standardized testing at the core of school evaluation, creating a pervasive atmosphere of "studying for exams." Cross-national

comparative studies by institutions such as the OECD repeatedly confirm that students in countries like the US and UK endure far greater academic pressure than those in many European countries[33], and generally internalize the notion of measuring personal value through exam results. More fundamentally, a secularized version of "social evolutionism" has been invisibly implanted deep into students' cognitive frameworks in the name of science or objective laws. It interprets market competition and class differentiation as irresistible "natural laws," making individuals attribute failure to their own "inadaptability," thereby fundamentally undermining the possibility of collective criticism and transformation. Multiple long-term value-tracking surveys show that over the past few decades, the proportion of Western teenagers citing "high-income careers" as their primary life goal has risen sharply, while attention to values such as "social justice" and "public service" has declined significantly. Education has successfully shaped instrumental rationality as the dominant thinking of a generation.

At the same time, a seemingly reasonable educational narrative circulates in society: a small number of students with excellent academic performance are considered "more autonomous" and supposedly deserve "laissez-faire education" to foster their independent abilities; while students with poor academic performance are labeled as "lacking autonomy" and need to be "forced to learn" through mandatory norms and disciplinary constraints. However, within our analytical framework, when the educational sphere has been reduced to the primary training ground for capital's colonization of labor power production, this narrative completely exposes the essence of its ruling lie—it deliberately obscures two fundamental facts: first, as beings with thinking and subjectivity, humans are inherently endowed with the internal potential for independent exploration and self-construction; autonomy is by no means an exclusive privilege of a few, but a core component of human species-being. Second, there is no inherent connection between academic performance and autonomy; academic success is more influenced by multiple factors such as family resources, cultural capital, subject suitability, and teaching models. A student's refusal to engage with an alienating subject or dislike of forcibly indoctrinated knowledge is precisely a direct manifestation of their autonomy, and their independent will cannot be negated due to poor grades.

So why does "autonomy differentiation" occur in the educational sphere? The root cause lies not in individual differences in talent, but in the structural demands of the capital accumulation logic on the labor market. To maximize profits, capital

necessarily needs to stratify labor into different tiers: it requires a small number of "elite human capital" with core skills to optimize capital accumulation efficiency, a large number of "standardized labor" that obeys instructions and can be mass-produced for production, and even more bottom-tier "cheap labor" for repetitive work. This stratified demand is converted into a sophisticated screening and disciplinary mechanism through the educational system:

The so-called "laissez-faire education" by no means endows a small number of students with true autonomy; on the contrary, it hides capital's precise discipline of "elite labor." While they seemingly have the freedom to choose their areas of study and explore interests, this "freedom" is from the start confined within the disciplinary system of capitalist education and the "elite skill tracks" designated by capital—natural sciences, finance, high-end technology, management, and other disciplines are revered as "high-value fields," while humanities and social science directions with no direct connection to capital accumulation are marginalized. More crucially, their choice of major and in-depth skill development ultimately submit to the baton of the employment market: studying finance because capital operations need top traders, pursuing technology because digital capital expansion requires algorithm developers, and choosing management because transnational capital needs efficient labor organizers. They never truly possess the right to independently decide "what to learn, what to do, and what to create value with" based on their own interests and inherent abilities: a student who loves nature may be forced to switch to computer science because "environmental majors have narrow employment prospects," a student skilled in critical thinking may compromise and choose finance because "philosophy has weak monetization potential," and a student passionate about handcrafting may abandon their original aspiration because "traditional crafts have low market value." This kind of "autonomy" screened by capital demand and kidnapped by market logic is essentially about making their labor power commodity more scarce and value-adding, becoming an "efficient tool" for capital accumulation rather than genuine self-realization.

In contrast, the mandatory norms imposed on most "underperforming students" represent capital's standardized shaping of "ordinary labor"—stigmatizing their independent refusal as "rebellion," belittling their interest-driven exploration as "frivolous," eroding their natural desire for independent inquiry through disciplinary constraints, and training them into "qualified parts" that obey processes and tolerate repetitive labor.

More deceptive is that this mechanism deliberately creates opposition between "a few outstanding students" and "the majority of underachievers"—making students believe that the presence or absence of autonomy is due to their own abilities, and class differentiation is the result of individual effort. But in essence, this opposition is merely a false division within the working class: both students labeled as "autonomous elites" and those deemed "lacking autonomy" have never truly possessed actual control over the production of their own labor power—the former's "autonomy" is confined to skill directions needed by capital, while the latter's "passivity" is a direct product of capital's discipline. Ultimately, both will be reduced to labor power commodities serving capital accumulation, merely assigned to different links of exploitation. It is through this strategy of "creating differences and intensifying opposition" that capital undermines the collective consciousness of workers, making them forget the essence of being collectively colonized in mutual competition, thereby consolidating private control over the entire process of labor power production.

On this basis, "human capital" theory and financialization policies have jointly woven a perfect debt trap. The US government's promotion of "student loan marketization" has shifted the cost of higher education to individuals on a large scale. As of 2023, the total amount of student loan debt in the US has exceeded \$1.7 trillion, making it the second-largest consumer debt after mortgage loans[34]. According to data from the Federal Reserve and the NCES, more than 60% of college graduates carry student loan debt, and the average debt burden of students from low-income families is significantly higher than that of their high-income counterparts. This debt is by no means a neutral financial tool, but an economic chain that locks labor power into the track of capital valorization. A large number of economic studies indicate that heavy student loan debt significantly affects graduates' career choices, housing decisions, and entrepreneurial intentions, forcing most to prioritize high-paying industries to repay their debts. Education, which should be wings to expand life possibilities, has been alienated under capitalist financial engineering into golden handcuffs that restrict career choices and force intellectual labor to prioritize serving capital accumulation.

Insights from Western critical theorists provide a deeper theoretical framework for understanding this process. Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" manifests here as

shaping the values of a specific class (competition, individual struggle, social evolutionism) into the "common sense" of the entire society[35]. Bourdieu's theories of "cultural capital" and "social reproduction" reveal how seemingly neutral school education systematically marginalizes working-class children by favoring the tastes, knowledge, and behavioral patterns of the elite[36]. Studies show that even with similar abilities, students with more "cultural capital" (such as specific linguistic styles, artistic cultivation, and social etiquette) are more likely to receive positive evaluations from teachers and higher academic expectations. The educational system thus plays the role of a seemingly neutral but highly efficient "social alchemy": it converts inherent class inequality into differences in "cultural literacy" and "academic potential," and then legitimizes them through institutions.

In summary, the educational sphere under contemporary capitalism has been completely transformed into a strategic starting point for capital to plan the labor life cycle through policy-based resource stratification, institutionalized screening mechanisms, financialized cost shifting, and systematic ideological indoctrination. It not only prefabricates future occupational hierarchies structurally but also shapes mindsets and personalities that serve capital deep in the soul, and finally uses the chains of debt to ensure its outcomes are exploited by capital. Before workers have even formally sold their labor power, their "actual control over the production of labor power" has been systematically pre-empted and colonized in terms of economic prerequisites, skill directions, value recognition, and even time sovereignty. Therefore, reclaiming educational autonomy is by no means merely an educational reform, but the primary revolutionary link in severing capital's colonization of the labor life process.

#### **(B) The Workplace Sphere: From "Occupational Constraints" to "Loss of Algorithmic Autonomy"**

If education is the pre-programming of labor power production, then the workplace is the terminal where this program operates at full speed. Here, capital's logic of domination is displayed most directly yet most subtly. Compared to the implicit discipline in the educational sphere and the diffuse penetration in daily life, control in the workplace is undoubtedly explicit—it directly involves the sale of time, physical exhaustion, and value extraction. However, in contrast to the naked violence under the foreman's whip in 19th-century factories, contemporary domination has evolved

into a more complex, invisible system of "flexible despotism." Capitalist rulers, well-versed in the historical dialectics of productive forces development and class contradictions, have draped their crude power in the "civilized" mask of rationality, science, and welfare, attempting to systematically deprive workers of the possibility of realizing their "species-being" while satisfying their "physical survival."

### I. Upgrade of Domination Form: From "Physical Discipline" to "Algorithmic Governance"

Domination in 19th-century factories was built on direct, synchronous physical surveillance of workers' bodies and time. Walls, clocks, whistles, and foremen's inspections together constructed a closed micro-model of a "disciplinary society." The loss of workers' actual control over the means of production was directly externalized as complete loss of control over their physical movement and labor rhythm. The disintegration of their production integrity was visible to the naked eye: standing at a fixed node on the massive assembly line, they had neither understanding of nor emotional connection to the final product they participated in producing.

In the contemporary era, especially in the digital platform economy, a crucial leap has occurred in the form of domination. The agents of capital—factory owners or foremen—seem to have retreated, replaced by seemingly objective and neutral algorithms, performance indicators (KPIs), and data dashboards. This domination is no longer synchronous and physically present, but asynchronous, invisible, yet ever-present. Food delivery riders are no longer shouted at by foremen, but the navigation algorithms and countdown timers on their phones plan every second of their lives in a more precise and ruthless way; programmers are no longer required to stand in workshops, but quantitative indicators such as the frequency of their code submissions and online failure rates form a panoptic digital cage. Here, the loss of actual control over the means of production manifests as complete powerlessness over the algorithmic black boxes that determine core work processes and data ownership. Workers do not own, nor can they understand, the operating logic of these digital means of production that dominate them.

However, the essence of this "implicit" domination is the deepening of control to an

unprecedented level. It no longer merely prescribes "what to do," but meticulously regulates "how to do it," "how fast to do it," and "what standards to meet." It has successfully created an illusion of "autonomy"—workers seemingly can "freely" choose orders and arrange routes—but all "free" choices are made within the narrow parameter space set by algorithms, with efficiency and exploitation as the sole guiding principles. Workers' actual control over the production of their labor power has not been restored with the disappearance of violence; instead, it has been more thoroughly colonized by this sophisticated system: their skills (such as the fastest routes), their bodies (such as continuous movement), and their emotions (such as anxiety about positive reviews) are all seamlessly integrated into the chain of value extraction. This marks the deepening of exploitation from the appropriation of labor time to the shaping of life activities themselves.

## II. The Welfare Mask and Deepening of "Species-Being" Alienation: Redeemed "Existence" and Confiscated "Life"

It is here that contemporary capitalism reveals its deepest cunning. To maintain this flexible despotism that highly depends on workers' active cooperation (and even self-motivation), it has developed a complex compensation and appeasement mechanism—the so-called "high-welfare society" model. Paid annual leave, medical insurance, employee stock ownership plans, psychological counseling, open office spaces, and coffee bars... These welfare measures are by no means the benevolence of rulers, but "biopolitical investments" necessary for the system to maintain stable reproduction. Their purpose is to ensure that labor power commodities can continuously and healthily return to the production cycle, and to reduce the risk of social resistance caused by excessive alienation.

Yet this welfare mechanism precisely constitutes the deepest concealment and completion of the alienation of "human species-being" as described by Marx. Marx pointed out that the human species-being lies in "free and conscious activity." The primitive accumulation and industrial exploitation of capitalism first degraded labor into a means of livelihood for maintaining physical survival (an animal function)—this was the first alienation. Contemporary "high-welfare" capitalism has staged an even more sophisticated second alienation: by satisfying, and even deliberately enhancing, the quality and sense of security of workers' "physical survival," it systematically replaces and eliminates their pursuit of and possibility for "free and conscious

activity."

Companies provide first-class gyms to allow workers to return to their workstations in better physical condition; offer psychological counseling to alleviate stress generated by work itself, not to eliminate the source of stress; and provide "innovation time" and "hackathons" to more efficiently harvest workers' intellectual surplus. All these welfare measures reinforce a hidden implication: your "existence" (optimization of physical survival) is granted by the company, so your more complete "life" (creative species-being) should also belong to the company. Workers' leisure, health, and mental development are no longer "free time" belonging to themselves, opposing work, but are re-coded as "maintenance time" and "upgrade time" for labor power commodities.

Thus, the chain of alienation closes here: workers not only lose production integrity in work (unable to control products) and institutionally lose actual control over the means of production, but are also ontologically deprived of the right to define and dominate their own "species-life." Their entire life process, from work to leisure, from body to mind, is colonized by the logic of capital. They seemingly possess "existence" guaranteed by welfare, but completely lose the transcendent possibility of "life" that constitutes being human. This alienation is no longer a cry of pain, but a calm powerlessness in a comfortable cage—the ultimate form of domination upgraded to the biopolitical level.

It is also worth noting that the welfare system of contemporary capitalism superficially presents itself as a compromise and concession by rulers to workers, as if a civilizational progress. However, beneath its tender veil hides a more profound and terrifying logic of rule—it is not a weakening of rule, but a deepening and intelligentization of it. This is a sophisticated, systematic self-defense operation launched by the logic of capital when it touches the boundaries of its own survival.

## 1. The Essence of Welfare: A "Hemostatic Agent" for Capital's Self-Referential Contradictions

The welfare system is directly derived from the reconstructed fundamental contradiction of contemporary capitalism we proposed earlier—the contradiction

between "the systematic existential dependence of socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power" and "capital's private control over the entire process of labor power production and reproduction." When capital's private control excessively exploits, leading to the general collapse of labor power reproduction (such as mass poverty, death from overwork, and social unrest) that endangers the stable supply of labor power commodities on which the system depends, the contradiction manifests in the form of a crisis. The welfare system enters the scene precisely at this critical point; it does not stem from moral awakening, but is a "systemic hemostatic agent" that the logic of capital is forced to adopt to address its inherent, self-destructive paradox. Through social expenditures such as medical care, education, and unemployment benefits, capital temporarily repairs the conditions of labor power reproduction damaged by itself, paying "ransom" to its own "gravediggers" (the proletariat) in the hope of delaying their collective awakening and resistance. This is not the benevolence of rulers, but a passive and calculating compromise to avoid self-destruction.

## 2. The Anesthetic Mechanism of Welfare: Trading "Small Favors" for "Overall Revolutionary Rights"

The art of rule in the welfare system lies in its successful completion of a dangerous "value replacement." It packages and promotes the minimum guarantee for labor power reproduction, necessary for system operation, as a symbol of "social progress" and "class reconciliation." Its core trick is: making workers mistake partial struggles for "welfare rights" as the ultimate goal of the emancipatory cause, thereby forgetting the fundamental revolutionary task of reclaiming overall control over the means of production and the production process of their own labor power in the illusion of micro-improvements.

The welfare obtained by workers is essentially a tiny portion of the surplus value they themselves created, strategically returned by capital (for example, the proportion of social welfare expenditure in GDP in OECD countries is far lower than the level of capital accumulation and wealth concentration). However, it is this "return" that creates the illusion that "the system can be reformed," dividing the struggle front of the working class—some "labor aristocrats" who have obtained relatively stable guarantees may become defenders of the system, while poverty at the bottom is attributed to personal failure or insufficient welfare, not to capitalist private ownership itself. The welfare system is like a political anesthetic: it does not eliminate the root cause (capitalist private ownership and wage labor), but relieves the symptoms, allowing the patient to abandon the search for a radical cure in

relative comfort.

### 3. The "Delaying" and "Encryption" Effects of Welfare on Digital Capital Contradictions

In the era of digital capitalism, this function of the welfare system has become particularly critical and bizarre. Platform economy, gig employment, and data exploitation have brought sharper "double loss," which should have intensified the fundamental contradiction and catalyzed revolutionary consciousness more quickly. However, the welfare system buffers and dissolves it through precise "social policy patches":

- For precarious gig workers, targeted temporary relief or minimum income guarantees alleviate the existential fear caused by the complete lack of a safety net, transforming the "absolute sense of deprivation" that could lead to collective resistance into an individually bearable "relative poverty" problem, without ever touching the root of exploitation—the monopolistic control of data and algorithms by platforms.
- For middle-class technical workers who may become "new poor," welfare such as education upgrading subsidies and vocational training programs guides them to interpret their predicament as "insufficient skills," thereby personalizing political and economic contradictions into a "human capital" race that requires continuous self-investment, deepening their dependence on the capitalist mode of production.

Therefore, the welfare system not only fails to solve the contemporary fundamental contradiction but also guides, disperses, and consumes the revolutionary energy generated by the contradiction through institutional reform channels by providing a sophisticated narrative of social security and class mobility. It delays the moment of total contradiction outbreak and undermines the unified, radical class consciousness and revolutionary determination that the proletariat might form due to a clear perception of the comprehensive colonization of their "actual control over the production of labor power." Through this terrifying struggle of "retreating to advance," capital attempts to encrypt its own inherent contradictions, making the gravediggers temporarily forget their historical mission in redemption and appeasement. This reveals that any welfare struggle not aimed at ultimately reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power may objectively become an accomplice in extending the lifespan of the logic of capital.

### III. Hidden Rigidity: Mechanical Rigidity Behind the Welfare Mask

Despite wearing the flexible mask of welfare, the core logic of capital accumulation—the infinite pursuit of efficiency and surplus value—has never changed. Therefore, behind the seemingly flexible and humanized work arrangements, a more refined and thorough mechanical rigidity is implanted into workers' daily lives.

This rigidity no longer manifests as a unified factory bell, but as:

- Fragmentation of schedules and obligation of immediate response: Flexible work systems often mean "being on call 24/7," with work invading family life, late nights, and holidays through communication software.
- Quantitative tyranny of performance evaluation: All creative and complex labor is simplified into quantifiable KPIs, reducing workers' value to a set of fluctuating numbers, living in constant anxiety of data scrutiny and ranking.
- Excessive standardization of processes: Even for positions such as R&D and creativity, their processes are highly framed by management methodologies such as "agile development" and "design thinking," with innovation directions and rhythms predetermined.

This essentially revives and strengthens the soul of Taylorist scientific management through new technical means. Workers' actual control over the production of their labor power is alienated in this system into an ability to "self-optimize to meet system parameters." Their autonomy is only reflected in how efficiently they complete instructions issued by algorithms or management systems. Production integrity is destroyed in another way: they may complete a whole project, but the project's goals, evaluation standards, and final disposal rights have never belonged to them. What they produce is always "integrity under capital control."

Therefore, the contemporary workplace is by no means a place of weakened domination, but the core hub where the logic of capital completes its "colonization of the life process." It invisibilizes and scientizes explicit control through algorithms and

performance management, and dresses up profound species-being alienation as a progressive gift through welfare capitalism. Behind these double masks lies a more comprehensive and sophisticated requisition and arrangement of workers' life time. Here, workers not only sell their labor time but are also forced to rent out their creativity, emotions, health, and even their imagination of what constitutes a "good life." Reclaiming control of the workplace thus means not only breaking the private ownership of the means of production but also deciphering this biopolitical equation that absorbs all human life activities as factors of accumulation, reclaiming the "existence" redeemed by welfare into a "life" that can be freely and consciously unfolded.

This also indicates that once the intensity and quality of labor power are sufficient to maintain this self-referential fundamental contradiction, capital will, like the US government treating households below the "ALICE threshold," coldly abandon those laborers who can no longer reproduce qualified commodities—i.e., those "low-quality" laborers who have been overconsumed, whose skills have become obsolete, or who have suffered physical and mental collapse—from the system's cycle. What the ALICE threshold reveals is by no means an accidental social failure, but a systematic screening and elimination mechanism: after capital completes the minimum stability maintenance of labor power reproduction through the welfare system, the cruelty of its logic immediately manifests—it only maintains "effective" labor power that can still serve its accumulation, and regards individuals who fail to reproduce as "non-performing assets" that must be stripped away. This confirms the assertion in Chapter 3 in the most naked way: the contradiction between capitalism's existential dependence and private control will ultimately be transformed into a functional evaluation and cruel elimination of the value of laborers' lives themselves. The mask of welfare slips here, exposing that its underlying operation always serves a cold purpose: not to guarantee human dignity, but to sustain capital's self-referential survival game. Any worker whose life process cannot be continuously encoded into a qualified, value-adding labor power commodity will be quietly removed from the chessboard in the name of "system optimization."

### **(C) The Daily Life Sphere: From "Social Discipline" to "Loss of Control Over Leisure and Data"**

If the workplace is a battlefield where life time is centrally requisitioned, and the

educational sphere is a workshop where life potential is pre-programmed, then the daily life sphere—this seemingly private domain ultimately controlled by individual sovereignty—has been reduced to the ultimate colonial ground where the logic of capital completes its closed-loop rule. Here, fields that should have been oriented toward human reproduction, free development, and self-realization—such as entertainment, healthcare, social interaction, and even sleep—have been systematically reconstructed. Their meanings have been completely reversed: no longer serving human integrity and emancipation, they all unconditionally serve a supreme external purpose—maintaining and enhancing the quality and efficiency of labor power as a commodity to meet capital's endless demand for exploitation. Daily life has thus been fully instrumentalized, becoming a hidden extension of labor power production and reproduction.

#### I. Alienation of Entertainment: From "Self-Realization" to "Efficiency Recharging"

Under the comprehensive colonization of the logic of capital, entertainment has lost its classical meaning of "leisure" and "purposelessness" and has been profoundly functionalized. It is no longer a free activity "centered on itself" as described by Aristotle, but has degenerated into a "recharging" behavior serving work efficiency and a meticulously designed consumption ritual.

The so-called "leisure industry" offers mountaineering, cross-country, and fitness, with the subtext of forging a resilient physique more capable of withstanding high-intensity work; popular "knowledge payment" and "audiobook apps" fill fragmented time as channels for "cognitive upgrading," turning rest itself into implicit labor; even seemingly pure relaxation such as streaming media viewing and gaming, through algorithmic recommendations and addictive designs, precisely consume workers' remaining energy, keeping them in "calm focus" at work the next day rather than generating critical surplus thinking. Entertainment is no longer an escape from alienated labor, but an intermediary that allows workers to smoothly transition from one state of exploitation (explicit work) to another (implicit reproduction). Its highest form is the direct transformation of "hobbies" into displayable "skills" or monetizable "side hustles," enabling the last inch of value in leisure time to be absorbed by the logic of capital. Here, workers suffer the most hidden deprivation of their actual control over the production of labor power: they cannot even independently define how to "waste" their own time, because "wasting time" itself has been constructed as

a "moral flaw" or "investment mistake" that needs to be overcome.

## II. Shift in Healthcare: From "Health as Purpose" to "Productivity Maintenance"

The evolution of the modern healthcare system clearly indicates the deepening of biopolitical domination. It has increasingly shifted from a humanitarian practice aimed at "eliminating illness and restoring health" to a capital auxiliary system centered on maintaining and restoring the production efficiency of labor power.

Annual physical examinations provided by enterprises, psychological counseling in EAP (Employee Assistance Programs), and rehabilitation programs emphasizing "return to work" are primarily concerned not with workers' life well-being itself, but with the duration and output stability of their use value as labor power commodities. The management of chronic diseases and pharmaceutical intervention for mental stress are to a large extent aimed at reducing production losses caused by sick leave and maintaining the "attendance rate" and "on-the-job efficiency" of the labor force. More profoundly, with the development of biotechnology and digital healthcare, the frontier of medical intervention has leaped from "treatment" to "optimization" and "prediction." Genetic testing and physiological data monitored by wearable devices are often ultimately directed not only at health warnings but also at evaluating individual work endurance, stress resistance, and even occupational risks. Medical data has thus become a new type of life production material, but it does not belong to the individual; instead, it flows to insurance companies, employers, and data platforms for more sophisticated life management and risk pricing. This marks that capital's control over the labor power life process has infiltrated from external labor discipline to the innermost, biological level. Healthcare, which should have been the last fortress of life sovereignty, has become a technical accomplice in capital's complete instrumentalization of living beings into efficient, reliable, and sustainable production units.

## III. Comprehensive Data Extraction: Life as Production, Existence as Exploitation

In the era of digital capitalism, the completed form of daily life colonization is reflected in the complete datafication of life and the unpaid extraction and

exploitation of data by capital.

Every click, every movement, every social interaction, and every consumption choice of workers tirelessly produces data. This data is no longer a passive trace of life, but has become a raw material of extremely high value. Platform capital processes this data into consumption preferences, credit scores, social graphs, and even emotional state portraits through algorithms. Its horror lies in:

1. Concealment of the production process: Data is quietly produced during workers' "daily life" (rather than "labor" in the traditional sense), so exploitation wears the disguise of "free use."
2. Alienation of the product: Once generated, this data about workers' own lives is separated from the subject, becoming an alien tool used to discipline and manipulate themselves. For example, consumption data is used to push persuasive advertisements, location data to optimize the exploitation logic of food delivery platforms, and social data to evaluate personal credit or occupational risks.
3. Comprehensiveness of exploitation: It means that as long as workers exist, live, and breathe in a digital environment, they are continuously engaged in unpaid data labor, contributing raw materials to capital's value accumulation.

At this point, the daily life sphere has completed its ultimate alienation: it is no longer the opposite or refuge of work, but has become a wallless factory, an endless production workshop. All activities such as entertainment, healthcare, and social interaction perform dual functions simultaneously: on the one hand, they are the process of workers' own reproduction; on the other hand, they are the process of producing data surplus value for capital that can be used for further domination and exploitation. Workers' production integrity has been most thoroughly disintegrated in the daily life sphere—they cannot even own the original records and true meanings of their own "lives." Their actual control over the production of labor power ultimately manifests as a loss of control over their own digital lives: their preferences, health, social interactions, and even unconscious behavioral patterns have become objects to be analyzed, predicted, and commodified, serving that sole, cold ultimate goal—making the production and reproduction of labor power, whether online or offline, in the workplace or at home, more efficiently, stably, and obediently meet the eternal hunger of capital accumulation.

#### **(D) Trapped Life and the Path to Emancipation**

Education, work, and daily life—these three spheres constitute a seamless, closed-loop biopolitical programming system. It prefabricates potential at the source (education), extracts value at the core (work), and completes reproduction and data recycling at the margins and foundation (daily life). Through this system, the logic of capital achieves a panoramic colonization of human life processes from cradle to grave, from skills to body, and from behavior to consciousness. Workers' "actual control over the production of labor power" is stripped away layer by layer under this system, ultimately falling into a state of systematic disempowerment.

However, as revealed in Chapter 3, the maintenance of this system is built on the self-contradictory fundamental contradiction between "existential dependence" and "private control." The deeper its colonization of the daily life sphere and the higher the degree of instrumentalization of life, the more its inherent vulnerability and potential for resistance accumulate. The struggle to reclaim control must therefore be an overall life revolution: it must not only seize factories and platforms but also schools, hospitals, communities, and digital spaces; it must not only change how we work but also how we learn, rest, interact, and define health and happiness. The ultimate program of this revolution is to destroy the entire coding that devalues life into labor power commodities, and on the basis of reclaiming control over the means of production, ultimately reclaim complete, concrete control over every link of the production process of our own lives. It is to liberate the time of life from the cycle of capital and restore it to its own free and rich development. This is the deepest and most thorough connotation of the proletarian emancipation cause in the contemporary era.

# Chapter 5: Reclaiming Control: The Two-Stage Program for Proletarian Emancipation

## (A) Stage One: Political Revolution – Reclaiming the Means of Production and Smashing the State Apparatus

Reclaiming actual control over the means of production (including traditional material means of production and new digital-era means such as data, platforms, and algorithms) is an insurmountable political prerequisite for the cause of emancipation. Its core lies in the complete abolition of capitalist private ownership and severing the power roots of capital's "private control" over the labor power production process—this is an iron law of history and the fundamental cornerstone of proletarian emancipation. Marx and Lenin's theory of violent revolution[37] has always been anchored in the fundamental stance of historical materialism: the class nature of the bourgeois state determines the futility of peaceful seizure of power; the intensification of capitalism's fundamental contradictions determines the inevitability of revolution; and the laws of social formation change endow violent revolution with a decisive role. This core logic, far from being obsolete in the context of contemporary digital capitalism, has become even more undeniably relevant due to the upgrading of capitalist rule. We do not deny the diversity of possible paths to proletarian emancipation, but history and reality have repeatedly confirmed: for developed capitalist countries, violent revolution, if not the only choice, is the most probable and important form of realization.

However, as capitalist rule has become more refined and concealed, various doubts have proliferated. These arguments, seemingly based on "new changes of the times," either deliberately obscure the essential contradictions of capitalism or completely misinterpret the historical logic of revolution. Combining contemporary critical perspectives with the theoretical framework established earlier, we debunk these lies one by one and clarify the core value of violent revolution in the contemporary era:

I. Debunking the False Mask of "State Neutrality and Democratization": Welfare and Democracy Are Ultimately a Fig Leaf for Class Rule

Some pseudo-theorists claim that universal suffrage, welfare systems, and judicial independence in developed capitalist countries have transformed them from "instruments of class violence" into "representatives of national interests," and that the proletariat can achieve a peaceful transition through parliamentary paths. This is purely a self-deceptive lie. They completely ignore the reconstructed fundamental contradiction of capitalism we proposed earlier—the fundamental opposition between "the systematic existential dependence of socialized large-scale production on the commercialization of labor power" and "the capitalist private control over labor power production." The welfare system and democratic procedures are precisely strategic tools for capital to resolve this contradiction, a sugar coating wrapped around the essence of exploitation.

The "neutrality" of bourgeois democracy has always been an ideological disguise. Universal suffrage has never shaken the foundation of private ownership of the means of production; through political donations, media monopolies, and lobbying mechanisms (such as the U.S. "revolving door" system[38]), capital still firmly holds the power to formulate policies. Even if the proletariat wins some parliamentary seats, it cannot change the core attribute of parliament serving capital accumulation. The so-called welfare system is by no means a "benevolent concession" from the bourgeoisie, but a "hemostatic agent" for the logic of capital to sustain itself: when capital's excessive exploitation of labor power triggers a reproductive crisis, welfare expenditures restore labor resources with minimum guarantees. In essence, it socializes part of the costs of labor power reproduction while always avoiding the fundamental crux of private ownership of the means of production. As revealed earlier, the core trick of the welfare system is to anesthetize workers with "small favors," making them forget the struggle for control over labor power production amid micro-improvements, and ultimately reducing them to tools for capital to maintain the exploitative order.

The state's judicial and administrative systems, though seemingly independent, are in essence an extension of the "committee for managing the common affairs of the entire bourgeoisie." When workers' struggles touch the fundamental interests of capital, the so-called "independence" collapses instantly: from police violence suppressing strikes, to the judicial system's systematic crackdown on left-wing parties, and to the implicit deprivation of labor rights by algorithms in the digital

age—all confirm the nature of the bourgeois state in maintaining class rule. Attempting to abolish the class power of capital using parliamentary tools designed by capital's rules is like seeking skin from a tiger. The parliamentary path is ultimately a reform that cannot touch the fundamentals; only by smashing this class instrument through violent revolution can obstacles be cleared for the public ownership of the means of production.

## II. Refuting the Absurd Fallacy of "Mitigated Contradictions and the Disappearance of the Proletariat": Class Antagonism Has Never Dissipated, and Revolutionary Nature Will Only Grow Stronger

Another argument claims that capitalist globalization, welfare systems, and technological revolution have resolved capitalism's fundamental contradictions; the emergence of the "labor aristocracy" has weakened class antagonism; and the decline of traditional industrial workers means the "disappearance of the proletariat," making violent revolution lose its objective conditions. This is a double misreading of history and reality. They fail to see the "spatial transfer" and "morphological transformation" of class contradictions, and even ignore the inherent logic of the deepening of contemporary exploitation and class attributes revealed earlier.

Capitalist globalization has never eliminated class antagonism; it has only extended the exploitation chain from domestic to global. The status of the "labor aristocracy" in developed capitalist countries is essentially built on the plunder of cheap labor and resources in developing countries. Through the global industrial chain division of labor, capital transfers high-pollution, low-paying production links to peripheral countries, allowing domestic workers to share a small amount of exploitation dividends to ease domestic contradictions. However, from a global perspective, the ranks of the proletariat are expanding unprecedentedly in new forms: groups such as digital laborers, gig workers, and migrant workers, though not owning new means of production such as data and platforms, also suffer from new forms of exploitation such as algorithmic control and data plunder. Their "actual control over the production of labor power" is systematically deprived, fully conforming to the class nature of the proletariat.

The decline of traditional industrial workers by no means signifies the disappearance

of the proletariat, but rather the contemporary expansion of the proletarian category. As clarified earlier, the core criterion for determining class attributes is the degree of loss of "actual control over the production of labor power." Whether in industry or the service sector, whether engaged in physical or mental labor, contemporary proletarians lose production integrity due to the monopolization of the means of production by capital, and fall into alienation due to the colonization of labor power reproduction by capital. This alienation is not a subjective feeling but an objective living condition: digital laborers' work processes are precisely disciplined by algorithms; creative workers' achievements are unconditionally occupied by capital; gig workers' labor time is fragmented and exploited. Like traditional industrial workers, they face the triple predicament of losing "actual control over the means of production," disintegrated "production integrity," and colonized "actual control over the production of labor power."

This common class situation determines that their revolutionary nature has never weakened. As analyzed earlier in the discussion of class attributes: the root of revolutionary nature lies not in the concentration or dispersion of production organization forms, but in the degree of loss of actual control over labor power production. Although contemporary proletarians face decentralized and individualized labor forms, this situation of "complete loss" of control enables them to transcend anger toward individual capitalists and clearly recognize the fundamental opposition between themselves and the entire system of capitalist private ownership. The awakening of this class consciousness is by no means unattainable. By breaking capital's ideological hegemony through enlightenment and uniting scattered class forces through collective action, the revolutionary nature of the contemporary proletariat will surely erupt in new forms, becoming the core driving force for violent revolution.

Technological revolution has not eliminated exploitation; on the contrary, it has deepened capital's colonization of labor power. Algorithmic governance and automated production driven by digital technology have never changed the essence that "living labor is the sole source of value"—the optimization of algorithms and the value of data ultimately stem from workers' life activities. Through algorithms to set labor rhythms and quantify performance indicators, capital disassembles the labor process into precisely controllable fragments, reducing workers to "human-machine interfaces" and completely disintegrating their production integrity; at the same time, technological iteration forces workers to use leisure time for skill training, alienating

labor power reproduction into "human capital investment" and further depriving them of the right to dominate their own life processes. The "buffering effect" of the welfare system is temporary; capital surplus, ecological crises, and the polarization of wealth (the world's top 1% owns 45% of global wealth) brought about by globalization are constantly accumulating new revolutionary momentum. The deepening of these contradictions, rather than their mitigation, precisely proves that violent revolution remains the key choice to break capitalist rule.

### III. Countering the One-Sided Accusation That "Violent Revolution Is Inhumane and Prone to Totalitarianism": A Just Revolution Is a "War to End All Wars"

Liberals accuse violent revolution of being accompanied by bloodshed and social unrest, violating "humanitarianism," and being prone to totalitarianism. This argument confuses the essential distinction between "exploitative violence" and "emancipatory violence," and misinterprets the historical connotation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

First, the "humanity" of the proletarian violent revolution is rooted in its essence as a "war to end all wars." The capitalist system itself is a form of systematic violence—from the colonial plunder and enclosure movements of primitive accumulation to contemporary algorithmic exploitation and data colonization, the history of capital accumulation has always been accompanied by the oppression and deprivation of workers. This violence is not an accidental individual act, but a structural violence embedded in production relations, leading to global poverty, hunger, and ecological disasters. Maintaining the "peace" of this system is the greatest inhumanity; the proletarian violent revolution is precisely a just struggle to end this structural violence. It is not a violation of "humanity," but a defense of true humanity—by smashing the exploitative state apparatus and establishing a new system where workers are masters of their own destiny, the social foundation for the generation of violence is eliminated at its root.

Second, the dictatorship of the proletariat is by no means "totalitarianism." The former is essentially "rule by the majority over the minority," with the core of safeguarding the fundamental interests of workers and resisting the restoration and counterattack of the bourgeoisie (such as the armed intervention by the Allied

Powers after the October Revolution), and has distinct historical stages; the latter is "oppression of the majority by the minority," completely deviating from the original intention of proletarian emancipation. The use of violence after the revolution always serves the ultimate goal of "reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power"—by abolishing private ownership, transforming the means of production into public property, allowing workers to regain production integrity, and controlling the production and reproduction process of their own labor power. This kind of violence is "constructive violence," not "oppressive violence," and its ultimate purpose is to achieve the complete emancipation of humans, making violence a thing of the past.

In the context of contemporary globalization, the forms of proletarian struggle are no longer limited to traditional violent revolution; regular actions such as parliamentary struggles, transnational labor solidarity, nonviolent resistance, and protest marches are all important paths of resistance. However, it must be clarified that these struggles are not alternatives to violent revolution, but necessary ways to accumulate strength for violent revolution, build class consensus, and expand the revolutionary ranks. From the perspective of historical development laws and the operational logic of capitalism's fundamental contradictions, the demise of capitalism ultimately requires violent revolution to achieve a fundamental breakthrough, and the ultimate victory of the proletariat on a global scale will inevitably require violent revolution to lay a solid foundation. This does not mean that every country must follow the same path of violent revolution, but a macro conclusion drawn based on historical depth and an international perspective—for highly developed capitalist countries with increasingly solid ruling apparatuses, violent revolution remains the most probable and important form of breaking class barriers and smashing the chains of capital. However, no matter how the form evolves, its core logic remains unchanged—only through organized revolutionary forces to smash the bourgeois state apparatus and completely reclaim actual control over the means of production can a solid institutional foundation be laid for the subsequent social revolution. Without this political prerequisite, all visions of "reclaiming control over labor power production" will be reduced to castles in the air. This is not blind fascination with violence, but a clear grasp of historical laws, a profound understanding of the reality of class struggle in developed capitalist countries, and an inevitable path for the proletariat to achieve emancipation.

#### **(B) Stage Two: Social Revolution — Reclaiming the Actual Control Capacity over the Production of Labor Power**

After completing the socialized ownership of the means of production (i.e., establishing the basic socialist system), the cause of emancipation enters a more profound and complex second stage. The core task of this stage is to prevent public ownership from becoming a formal "ownership" while the actual management and domination rights are monopolized by new bureaucratic or technical elites, thereby avoiding the emergence of an alienated form of "capitalism without capitalists" or "state capitalism." The root of this risk lies in: if only the form of ownership of the means of production is changed without breaking the core shackle of capitalism—the "commercialization of labor power"—the domination of the logic of capital over labor power production will return in new forms. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this stage is by no means to maintain the alienated state of labor power as a commodity, but to completely abolish the commercialization of labor power and realize actual control over the production of labor power—this is not only the lifeline for the self-renewal and prevention of degeneration of the socialist system, but also a substantive leap for humanity from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom."

It is necessary to clarify that "reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power" is by no means absolute "self-indulgence," but a dialectical unity of "subordination to social production" and "autonomy in reproduction": in the field of direct production, workers need to submit to the overall planning and coordination requirements of socialized production, which is an objective necessity of socialized large-scale production; however, in the core field of labor power reproduction—education, health, leisure, daily life and other areas related to human development—workers should have full independent and conscious decision-making power, completely breaking free from the domination of the logic of capital and external coercion. At the same time, it must be stated that any attempt to accurately predict the specific form of future society is essentially a utopia divorced from historical reality. All discussions carried out here are not to establish unshakable truths, but bold explorations and theoretical presuppositions of the path of emancipation based on an in-depth analysis of the fundamental contradictions of contemporary capitalism. There may be omissions and deviations, and it cannot provide a standardized operation manual for specific practices, but it aims to depict a possible direction for the cause of human emancipation; it does not have the authority of ultimate truth, but hopes to inspire thinking that breaks the shackles of capital and leads us to look toward a freer and more equal future. The realization of this dialectical unity requires systematic reshaping around the following four

dimensions:

I. Shaping and Acquisition of Skills (Democratization of the Composition of Labor Power Value): From "Capital Demand-Oriented" to "Unity of Independent Development and Social Needs"

Abolishing the commercialization of labor power first requires breaking the alienated pattern where skill training is unilaterally kidnapped by capital demand. In the capitalist system, workers' skills are the core component of "human capital," and their shaping direction and content selection all serve the short-term goals of capital accumulation. Workers are reduced to "skill tools," losing the autonomy and comprehensiveness of development. The core of skill shaping in socialism is to realize the dialectical unity of "independent choice" and "social needs"—skill acquisition is no longer to make oneself a commodity with higher market value, but to realize the organic integration of human potential and social development.

The key to this transformation is the democratic restructuring of educational sovereignty: the setting of educational content must balance individual endowments and social public interests, retaining the basic skills and disciplinary systems that support socialized large-scale production, while completely abandoning utilitarian courses oriented solely toward employment, and adding interdisciplinary content that encourages creativity and critical thinking; educational methods should break away from standardized discipline, adopt project-based and cooperative learning, allowing workers to independently explore their interests instead of passively accepting the "skill templates" preset by capital; educational decision-making mechanisms need to involve students, teachers, industry representatives, and the public to ensure that the direction of skill development is neither divorced from the overall requirements of social production nor contrary to the demands of all-round human development. Its ultimate goal is to make skill acquisition a unified process of "self-realization" and "serving society," enabling workers to not only be competent for the cooperative needs of socialized production but also break away from the alienated state of "being attached to a single skill" under the commercialization of labor power.

II. Maintenance and Restoration of Physical and Mental Health (Public Guarantee of the Use Value of Labor Power): From "Capital Reproduction Cost" to "Autonomously

## Controlled Right to Life"

In the capitalist context, workers' health maintenance and leisure rest are private costs of "labor power reproduction," whose purpose is to continuously sell labor power to capital, essentially an auxiliary link of capital accumulation. Abolishing the commercialization of labor power means emancipating the maintenance of physical and mental health from capital's cost accounting and establishing it as a basic right to life independently controlled by workers—while submitting to cooperative requirements in the production field, workers have absolute independent decision-making power over the maintenance and restoration of their own physical and mental states, free from interference by the logic of capital or external coercion.

Socialist institutional guarantees should be carried out around "public supply + independent choice": establishing a universal, high-quality medical and public health system covering the entire life cycle, not only providing disease treatment services but also focusing on preventive health care and mental health support. Workers can independently choose medical methods and work-rest rhythms without sacrificing health to "not affect work"; vigorously building public cultural, sports, and leisure facilities, enriching the supply of public cultural products. Leisure time is no longer a "passive period for restoring labor capacity" but "free development time" independently controlled by workers—can be used to accompany family, develop interests, and enhance social interactions, fully following their own wishes; implementing guaranteed housing policies, curbing the commercialization and capitalization of housing, ensuring that workers have a livable living environment, breaking away from "forced labor under mortgage pressure," and allowing the restoration of physical and mental health to be a natural unfolding of free life rather than an appendage to capital demand.

## III. Arrangement and Sale of Time (Collective Sovereignty over Labor Time): From "Commodity Exchange Medium" to "Dialectical Allocation of Production Cooperation and Free Time"

"Time is a commodity" is the core principle of the commercialization of labor power—workers' time is divided into "working time sold to capital" and "private time for self-repair," both of which are dominated by the logic of capital. Abolishing the

commercialization of labor power means breaking this alienation of time and realizing the dialectical unity of labor time and free time: in the production field, the arrangement of labor time needs to submit to the cooperative requirements of socialized large-scale production to ensure production efficiency and overall social interests; however, the total control of labor time and the right to dominate free time belong entirely to the collective and individual workers, completely breaking away from the exploitative occupation of time by capital.

The realization of this goal requires dual guarantees: on the one hand, through technological progress and optimization of production relations, continuously shorten the socially necessary labor time—eliminate "ineffective labor of overproduction," "wasteful labor of marketing competition," and "managerial labor of monitoring workers" under capitalism, directly converting the improvement of production efficiency into an increase in workers' free time; on the other hand, explore flexible and independent labor organization forms, implement flexible working systems and shared working systems. Under the premise of complying with the overall planning of social production, workers can independently negotiate specific working hours, balancing production cooperation and personal life rhythms. It must be clarified that the 8-hour working system is the starting point rather than the end point for safeguarding workers' time sovereignty. Its core value lies not only in maintaining individual health but also in reserving sufficient free time for workers—to independently arrange life, participate in social management, and develop the spiritual world, meeting both the cooperative needs of socialized production and the independent control of individual time, completely breaking the alienated pattern of "time being dominated by capital" under the commercialization of labor power.

#### IV. Maintenance, Update and Adaptation of Labor Capacity Itself (Autonomy in the Development Process): From "Capital Elimination Pressure" to "Unity of Independent Adaptation and Social Support"

In the context of capitalist technological iteration and market fluctuations, the update of workers' capabilities is passive—in order not to be eliminated by capital, they are forced to accept "re-training" led by capital, essentially to cater to the new exploitative needs of capital. Abolishing the commercialization of labor power means realizing the autonomy of labor capacity update: under the overall requirements of

socialized production, workers independently decide the direction, rhythm, and method of capacity update, and society provides support rather than coercion, completely breaking away from the anxiety of "being screened by capital and eliminated by technology."

The socialist capacity update system should adhere to "independent leadership + social security": establishing a free or low-cost lifelong learning system covering the whole society. Workers can independently choose training content according to their own wishes and the development trend of social production, instead of passively accepting "skill transformation" required by administrative orders or capital; building a flexible career transition mechanism, breaking industry barriers and identity restrictions, providing institutional support and resource guarantees for workers' independent transformation, making capacity update an active choice to "improve oneself and adapt to society"; in the process of technological change, balancing technological progress and workers' rights and interests through social negotiation, avoiding the survival crisis caused by "technological unemployment," and making technology a tool for emancipating labor rather than oppressing labor. The core of this process is to transform workers from "passive adapters to capital demand" into "active leaders of their own development," enabling them to not only be competent for the dynamic needs of socialized production but also firmly grasp the independent right to capacity development.

In summary, the essence of "reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power" is to completely abolish the fundamental shackle of the commercialization of labor power and realize the dialectical unity of "subordination to cooperation in the production field" and "independent domination in the reproduction field." It requires that the transformation of production relations should not stop at the level of ownership of the means of production but must penetrate the entire process of labor power reproduction—returning the independent decision-making power over education, health, time, and development to workers on the premise of submitting to the overall requirements of socialized large-scale production.

This is a longer and more profound "daily life revolution" than seizing political power, related to whether "humans" can truly break away from the fate of "labor power commodities." Only by winning this revolution can we completely dismantle the social foundation of capitalism's instrumentalization of humans, make socialist

public ownership truly a institutional guarantee for "human emancipation," and open up a solid and realistic path for the realization of a communist community where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

### **(C) Unified Strategy: The Proletarian Revolution is the Unity of Nationality and Internationality**

The cause of proletarian emancipation has been a world-historical existence since its inception. However, the practical unfolding of this cause has always been rooted in the social soil of specific nation-states. Marx and Engels had already pointed out this dialectical relationship in the Communist Manifesto—while emphasizing that "the working men have no country," indicating the international and transcendent nature of proletarian emancipation, they also clearly stated that "the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the national class," establishing the nation-state as the fundamental arena of the proletarian revolution[39]. Lenin's theory that "socialist revolution can triumph first in one or several countries"[40][41] further confirmed from a practical level: internationality divorced from nationality is illusory, and nationality divorced from internationality is narrow. Therefore, correctly handling the dialectical relationship between nationality and internationality is a key strategic issue determining the success or failure of the revolution and its direction of development. Any tendency to separate or oppose the two will lead to disastrous consequences.

On one hand, one-sided emphasis on nationality to the neglect of internationality will lead to the self-enclosure, identity fragmentation, and ultimate degeneration of the revolution. This path narrowly confines the goal of the proletarian revolution to establishing a self-sufficient national independent regime. However, on a planet still dominated by the capitalist world market and international division of labor, such a regime will immediately fall into an unavoidable "Achilles' heel" type of contradiction: when the proletariat becomes the "master of the state" domestically, yet must have this "master's state" participate in the unequal world market system in the oppressed position of a "worker" (i.e., providing cheap labor and resources on the periphery), a fundamental conflict arises between its class identity and its nation-state status. To survive in competition, the regime will be forced to increase internal extraction to accumulate capital and accept unequal exchange conditions externally, thereby reproducing oppressive structures domestically (strengthening the bureaucratic

apparatus, suppressing labor rights) and potentially sliding towards a nationalism that contends for power with imperialist hegemony internationally, even forming competitive relationships with the international brethren of its own proletariat. This internal resource extraction is essentially isomorphic to the exploitation of peripheral countries by the capitalist world system—just as the Western education system shapes a hierarchical labor force for capital through stratified screening, the internal oppression of such regimes is actually an alienated reproduction of capital's logic within the borders of the nation-state, ultimately alienating the goal of proletarian emancipation into the demand for the increase of state capital. The later developmental trajectory of the Soviet Union is a typical example: under the Cold War structure, the Soviet Union gradually moved towards comprehensive isolation from the Western world, one-sidedly emphasizing the national-state group attribute of the "socialist camp" and neglecting the international connection of the proletarian revolution. To compete with the United States in the arms race, the Soviet Union continuously strengthened the accumulation of state capital under the planned economy, intensifying the extraction of resources from agriculture and light industry, leading to long-standing shortcomings in people's livelihoods; externally, it alienated camp solidarity into great-power-led sphere-of-influence division, violating internationalist principles, ultimately causing socialist construction to deviate from its original purpose and becoming a major contributing factor to its dissolution. In the end, the internationalist soul of the revolution was swallowed by the realism of national survival, and "socialism" easily degenerated into a closed system characterized by internal autocracy, external dependency or hegemony, with strong shades of state capitalism or even feudalism.

On the other hand, an empty emphasis on internationality to the neglect of nationality will reduce the revolution to a unrealistic slogan divorced from reality, leading to heavy defeats. Without deeply studying the specific social contradictions, class structure, historical traditions, and cultural psychology of one's own country, and attempting to mechanically copy the models of other countries or wait for an abstract "world revolution outbreak," the revolutionary strategy will inevitably become detached from the masses, like a tree without roots. This kind of "bravado" cosmopolitanism will cause revolutionary forces to fail to establish a consolidated class alliance and power base in the nation-state, the basic arena of modern political struggle. The bankruptcy of the Second International in its later period is a profound lesson: some theorists fell into the trap of empty cosmopolitanism, advocating for a peaceful transition through the "parliamentary road," blindly promoting that "the

working men have no country," yet failed to formulate revolutionary strategies based on the realities of different countries, such as colonial situations and feudal remnants. After the outbreak of the First World War, the majority of Social Democratic leaders abandoned internationalist principles and instead supported the war policies of their own national bourgeois governments, calling on workers to "defend the fatherland," directly leading to the collapse of the Second International. The result was either direct collapse due to adventurism, or revolutionary 成果 that were extremely fragile due to the lack of deep national social roots, unable to effectively organize defense and construction, and ultimately 天折 under internal and external pressure.

Therefore, the true path of the proletarian revolution must achieve the organic unity of nationality and internationality in concrete historical practice. This requires:

1. Basing oneself on the national arena to complete the concrete revolution: It is necessary to first, within the scope of the nation-state, through profound social analysis, formulate revolutionary strategies and programs that suit the country's actual conditions, unite the broadest masses of the people, and accomplish the historical tasks of seizing political power and transforming the basic system. This is the starting point and solid foundation of the international cause.
2. Utilizing the world system to strengthen one's own foundation: After gaining political power, it is necessary to possess superior strategic wisdom to actively utilize, rather than passively isolate oneself from, the global market and economic links dominated by capitalism. The purpose is to, while recognizing the reality of the long-term coexistence of different systems, rapidly develop the productive forces of socialist society with the help of global production chains, technology diffusion, and trade networks, thereby consolidating its material and cultural foundation and demonstrating the superiority and vitality of the socialist system.
3. Grasping world laws to advance international unity: At the same time, we must always keep in mind the ultimate horizon of the revolution. This means scientifically analyzing the internal contradictions, crisis cycles, and hegemonic transition laws of the capitalist world system, linking the development of one's own country to the overall situation of the international class struggle. It is necessary to actively support the liberation struggles of people in all countries and explore forms of proletarian international unity (such as strategic coordination, experience sharing, exposure and resistance to common enemies) suited to the conditions of the new era in practice.

The consolidation of national political power ultimately serves to better facilitate the critique and transcendence of capital on a global scale.

Only by adhering to this dialectical unity can the proletarian revolution and construction remain both grounded and oriented towards the stars and the sea; it can not only stand firm grow and develop amidst the containment of capitalism but also always maintain its lofty revolutionary character that transcends the limitations of the nation-state and points towards universal human emancipation. This is both a lesson from history and a guide for the future.

#### **(D) Unity of Historical Dialectics – From the Critique of Capitalism to the Self-Revolution of Socialism**

Having systematically analyzed how capitalist society completes the colonization of the three spheres of life through the panoptic mechanism and reconstructed its fundamental contradiction between "existential dependence" and "private control", an inevitable question with a deeper historical perspective emerges: why do workers in many societies that have already established the basic socialist system and completed the "first-stage political revolution" still commonly experience "involution", "burnout" and a sense of "loss of control" over their own life rhythms similar to those in capitalist societies?

This similarity of predicament is by no means a historical accident or a theoretical paradox, but one of the most profound manifestations of historical dialectics in the contemporary era. It not only fails to negate the validity of our critique of capitalism, but also confirms the stubbornness of the dominant logic we have revealed in an almost cruel empirical way, and provides the most urgent practical footnote for our proposed two-stage revolutionary program – especially its indispensable second-stage social revolution.

The root of the alienation suffered by workers in the primary stage of socialism has a dual historical nature and must be clearly distinguished:

The first root is the residue and invasion of the old world system. Socialist political power is born and exists in a global environment still dominated by the capitalist world market, financial system and technological paradigm. As a powerful "gravitational field", the logic of capital continuously exerts external influence through trade chains, technological dependence, cultural infiltration and competitive pressure, attempting to draw the socialist economy and social relations into the orbit of its value valorization. More crucially, as Marx presciently pointed out in the Critique of the Gotha Programme, socialist society "is thus, in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges" [19]. This profound assertion reveals that even after the establishment of public ownership of the means of production, the concepts and management forms of "bourgeois right" – such as the distribution principle that acquiesces in natural differences, the hierarchical production command, and the materialized measurement of labor performance – will still remain in the social organism, and may alienatedly reproduce a dominant relationship isomorphic to capitalism under the shell of the new system, resulting in workers' "actual control over the production of labor power" being formally recognized but substantially suspended.

However, the second root is more essential: it is the historical task marked by the "unfinished revolution". These contradictions exposed in the primary stage are precisely the direct symptoms that the "second-stage social revolution" (reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power) has not yet been thoroughly carried out or completed after the victory of the "first-stage political revolution" (reclaiming the means of production). If the cause of socialism comes to an end after seizing political power and stagnates at the change of ownership in a legal sense, the residual right of the old world and the invasion of the logic of capital will quickly fill the power vacuum of the "labor power production process". Education may once again become skill domestication, the workplace may degenerate into a new type of performance cage, and leisure life may be recolonized by consumerism and data extraction. At this time, workers' suffering is no longer the suffering of being exploited by external capitalists, but the suffering of "the interruption of their own emancipation process and the emasculation of their own revolutionary subjectivity". This is a deeper historical anxiety, which indicates that without the democratic transformation of every corner of the lifeworld and the reclamation of life sovereignty in the second stage, the political victory of the first stage is at risk of being quietly eroded or even reversed.

Therefore, our critique of the biopolitical colonization of contemporary capitalism and our insight into the internal tensions of the primary stage of socialism are unified in the same emancipatory coordinate in the process of historical dialectics. From positive and negative aspects, they jointly demonstrate the absolutely core status of the program of "reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power":

- Under capitalist conditions, failing to seize this control means the complete materialization of human beings and the comprehensive colonization of life time, which will ultimately intensify its fatal contradiction between "existential dependence" and "private control".
- Under socialist conditions, failing to seize and practice this control means the revolution may stop at the first half, the specter of the old world will revive in new forms, and the promise of "emancipation" will remain on paper.

Thus, our two-stage revolutionary program transcends a mere political replacement plan and elevates into a historical materialist manifesto on "why human emancipation must be a profound revolution that runs through all spheres of social life". It requires us, regardless of the starting point of any system, to unswervingly direct the focus of the struggle to the fundamental power that ultimately determines whether we are the masters of our own lives or objects programmed by a certain logic (whether it is the logic of capital valorization or its mutated bureaucratic planning logic) – that is, the concrete, practicable control over the entire process of the production and reproduction of our own labor power. Only by completing this step can the new society emerging from capitalism truly transcend its "primary" stage and take a substantive step towards a community where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

## Chapter 6: The Poverty of Political Economy

Contemporary critical theory is reveling in a superficial prosperity. Categories such as the ethics of performance, emotional exploitation, algorithmic governance, and biopolitics act as sophisticated probes, delving deep into the neurotic symptoms of our era: the anxiety of involution, the emptiness of burnout, the numbness of emotion, and the cage of data. The ideological trends represented by Byung-Chul Han, Arlie Hochschild, and numerous platform critics have undoubtedly produced elaborate mappings of the micro-forms of domination and the subjective experience of suffering.

Beneath this prosperous diagnosis, however, a profound theoretical inversion and the consequent poverty have taken shape. When the intellectual power of criticism is fully focused on the how of power operation (techniques, strategies, discourses) and the what of subjective experience (anxiety, burnout, alienation), the why that drives all such "hows" and "whats"—namely the capitalist economic system and production relations as the prime mover—has quietly slipped from the center of vision. Suffering is depicted with immense subtlety, yet its most fundamental economic genealogy is suspended. Criticism thus devolves into a refined commentary on the effects of domination, rather than a thorough reckoning with its economic causes. Our era has fallen into a state of the poverty of critical political economy: a proficient navigation through the labyrinths of the superstructure and subjectivity, accompanied by a selective amnesia of the coordinate system of the economic base.

This poverty of political economy is no accidental academic fashion; its root lies precisely in the historical deepening and concealment of capitalism's own mode of domination. As argued earlier, the core of capital's domination has evolved from the explicit economic exploitation achieved through the possession and control of the means of production (I), to the implicit colonization of the life process realized through the systematic deprivation of actual control over the production of labor power (III). Beside the assembly line, exploitation is visible in extended working hours and depressed wages; in office towers and algorithmic platforms, by contrast, domination metamorphoses into the invisible driving of work rhythms, the meticulous planning of career development, and the comprehensive expropriation of physical and mental reproduction. The former is a clearly identifiable economic

tyranny in the eyes of workers; the latter brings a pervasive yet untraceable sense of anxiety, burnout, and emptiness—a suffering of feeling.

It is this transformation in the form of domination that has clouded the vision of criticism. When suffering no longer presents itself directly as hunger and cold, but as involution, burnout, a lack of resonance, or identity anxiety, theory is easily led to redirect its critical spearhead from the economic base of production relations to the cultural forms, political identities, psychological structures, or technical mediations that bear and express such suffering. A historical theoretical inversion thus occurs: it is no longer the economic base that determines the superstructure, but the various phenomena of the superstructure (culture, psychology, technology) that are mistaken for the very root of suffering itself.

#### **(A) Fundamental Divide from "Biopolitics"**

The analyses in the preceding chapters, particularly the focus on the panoptic colonization of education, work and daily life, could easily be categorized within the established genealogy of biopolitics[42] or social criticism. Yet a resolute methodological clarification is imperative: the critical perspective of this book is by no means a mere graft or extension of Foucauldian biopolitical theory or any other contemporary ungrounded theories.

On the contrary, our entire analytical framework proceeds from the core category of Marxist political economy—the commodification of labor power—and draws inevitable contemporary conclusions through rigorous internal deduction. Its logical chain is solid and clear:

1. Historical Premise: The foundation of capitalism lies in the universal transformation of labor power into a commodity.
2. Classic Proposition: This gives rise to the wage labor system, the exploitation of surplus value, and the comprehensive alienation of workers from the means of production, the labor process and the products of their labor.
3. Contemporary Deepening: As capital accumulation shifts from extensive

expansion to intensive deepening, its logic of valorization inevitably demands transcending the appropriation of labor time, and further seeks control over the entire process of production and reproduction of the labor power commodity itself. Capital must concern itself with how to "produce" and "maintain" its objects of exploitation more efficiently and at lower cost.

4. Logical Completion: Thus, the systematic planning and colonization of the life process (education, health, leisure, emotion, skill reproduction) is no longer a cultural or power phenomenon external to economic logic, but the ultimate evolution of the form of domination that capital must adopt to master its own existential conditions—i.e., exploitable labor power.

Therefore, the "colonization of the life process" we reveal is fundamentally different in nature from the Foucauldian "biopolitics"[42], which stems from the self-consistency of a certain rationality of power. Foucauldian genealogy elaborately answers how power governs life[42], yet suspends the political economic question of why life must be governed in this specific way under capitalism. Our framework is committed to providing this fundamental answer: because labor power is a commodity, and the production of commodities must conform to the demands of capital valorization. When the logic of capital valorization deepens from the appropriation of labor time to the control of the production process of the labor power commodity itself, education, healthcare, leisure, the family and even the unconscious—by virtue of their direct relevance to the quality, quantity and adaptability of labor power—are inevitably brought into the scope of capital's planning.

Ultimately, this proclaims the birth of a biopolitical analysis rooted in the economic base. It insists that any theory attempting to discuss the operation of contemporary biopower in isolation from the law of value, the exploitation of surplus value and the relations of wage labor, no matter how exquisitely it describes phenomena, is a rootless duckweed in the reality of capitalism. Such a theory may depict the patterns of the cage in meticulous detail, yet it cannot point out where the steel for forging the cage comes from, nor where the key to opening the cage is hidden.

## **(B) The Appropriation Operation: Examining "Ungrounded Criticism" in the Light of Political Economy**

Against the backdrop of capitalism's shift in domination from explicit economic exploitation to implicit process control, a series of contemporary critical theories focusing on culture, psychology and technology have emerged. While they keenly capture new symptoms of suffering, they generally fall into a state of "ungroundness" for failing to penetrate the phenomena themselves. This is precisely the problem we seek to address: by applying our political economic framework centered on the commodification of labor power and actual control over the production of labor power, we carry out a thorough appropriation operation on such theories.

The core incision of this operation lies in this: we must reverse a deeply entrenched theoretical inversion. Ungrounded criticism takes the symptoms of domination—involution, burnout, emotional numbness, data anxiety—as the starting point, even the endpoint, of analysis, thus lingering in the labyrinths of culture, psychology and technology. Our framework, by contrast, insists that these symptoms are merely secondary phenomena, the projections and transformations of deeper economic violence in the realms of subjective experience and superstructure. The true starting point must be the political economic reality that the life process of labor power, as a commodity, is systematically colonized by the logic of capital. On this basis, we can launch a coherent reckoning.

Take the theory of the "society of performance"[43] as an example. It correctly points out that self-exploitation has become the normal state of existence for contemporary people, yet erroneously attributes this compulsive "self-drive" to a certain "affirmative" cultural spirit or psychological shift. The fallacy of this diagnosis lies in its abstraction from the economic coercion that compels individuals to pursue endless optimization. Against the backdrop of flexible accumulation becoming the mainstream and the collapse of long-term employment relations, workers' actual control over the production of labor power has become extremely fragile. To sustain the exchange value of their own labor power as a commodity in the market, individuals are forced to reshape their entire life time and energy into a perpetual race of investment and efficiency directed at their own "human capital". "Performance" is not a cultural choice, but a coercive survival strategy for maintaining existence in a precarious commodity status; "burnout" is not a failure of psychological regulation, but the inevitable physical and mental exhaustion resulting from the long-term operation of this strategy. Therefore, the edge of criticism should

not be directed at the concept of "performance" itself, but must pierce this psychological fog to target the capitalist labor process and employment system that create such widespread competition and existential anxiety. The possibility of emancipation does not lie in regulating one's mindset, but in changing the fate of labor power being valued, sold and constantly "optimized" as a commodity.

A similar theoretical inversion pervades the generalized discourse on "emotional labor"[44]. This discourse successfully brings reproductive labor, especially women's labor, to the forefront of theory, yet often blurs the focus of struggle in moralized or declassed generalizations. When "emotional labor" is divorced from specific employment relations and class positions and abstracted as a universal value of "care", its critical edge is blunted. We must draw a precise categorical boundary: "emotional labor" becomes a political economic problem precisely when emotions are standardized, commodified, monitored and evaluated by capital, and workers are completely deprived of the autonomous right to regulate their emotional expressions. This marks that capital's colonization of labor power has penetrated into the innermost realms of emotion and affectivity, a blatant deprivation of control over the production of labor power in the emotional dimension. At the same time, the oppressiveness of unpaid reproductive labor within the family is by no means a "natural" gender division of labor, but a historical product of the functional coupling of patriarchy and capitalism—it ensures that wage labor power (especially traditional male labor power) can be "repaired" and "reset" every day at low cost and high efficiency. Here, what is being deprived is also the right (of women, primarily) to control how one's own labor power is deployed. Only by integrating the direct emotional exploitation of the market and the unpaid reproductive oppression of the family into the political economic framework of "the reproduction of the total social labor power commodity" can we see clearly how they function as a coordinated system to achieve the comprehensive extraction of life energy.

When critical vision turns to the technological sphere, a new reification trap emerges quietly. Some analyses of "platform capitalism" and "algorithmic rule"[45], while brilliantly exposing the web of technological surveillance, unconsciously enshrine algorithmic or platform logic as a new dominant subject with a will of its own. This technodeterminist tendency is tantamount to directing the critical spearhead at the whip in capital's hand, while letting go of the hand that wields the whip and the exploitative will that drives it. Algorithms are no extraterrestrial visitors; their specific form of domination—ultimate labor fragmentation, real-time behavioral scheduling,

comprehensive data extraction—is directly shaped by capital's inherent demand for maximizing surplus value, refining process control, and rationalizing the planning of labor power reproduction. Algorithms are the technical objectification and structural condensation of capitalist production relations in the digital age. Therefore, the sophisticated programming of the labor process by platform algorithms is by no means a "tyranny of technology", but a manifestation of capital's deprivation of workers' process autonomy reaching an unprecedented intensity and scope through new technologies; and the unpaid capitalization of user data signifies a new form of exploitative accumulation: while "living their lives", workers continuously produce the means of production that fuel deeper exploitation in the future. The struggle against algorithmic injustice is, in essence, by no means a simple ethical appeal, but a class struggle over the actual control of digital means of production (algorithms, data, platforms) and the consequent ownership of the data and processes of labor power production.

#### **(C) Bid Farewell to Poverty: Anchoring the Emancipatory Course of Critical Theory with Political Economy**

The so-called "poverty" of political economy in the contemporary era is not the invalidity of its categories and tools, but its temporary obscuration by the fog of theoretical prosperity. When criticism wanders to exhaustion in the constellations of culture and psychology and the labyrinths of technology, it will ultimately realize that the gravitational center of its power has never changed—it remains the age-old question of who labors, who appropriates, and who determines the form in which life activities are organized and reproduced.

Our exploration is an endeavor to return to this root. We firmly believe that beneath all the dazzling mediations and appearances of digital capitalism, the cold heart revealed by Marx still beats: the source of all value and power is living labor[25]; every evolution of domination is a historical deepening of the forms of labor subjugation. The so-called biopolitics is merely another inevitable cloak donned by this logic of subjugation as it completes its total colonization in the contemporary age.

Therefore, the radicality of the program to "reclaim actual control over the production of labor power" is rooted precisely here: it is not content with striving for better

individual parameters within the life matrix meticulously programmed by capital; it demands rewriting the underlying code of the entire system, and redesigning all social relations of life production and reproduction based on the democratic will of associated laborers. What this requires is not more elaborate philosophy on the patterns of the cage, but a return to the most radical revolutionary imagination of political economy—one that dares to conceive of emancipation from the very roots of production relations.

Only through such an uncompromising baptism at the root can critical theory truly bid farewell to its ungrounded poverty and regain the abundant and resilient power to pierce appearances and shake the foundations.

## Conclusion: Marching Toward Human Emancipation in Historical Dialectics

When the logic of capital fully colonizes the production and reproduction of labor power, and when every corner of education, work and life is reduced to a field of value extraction, the proposition of human emancipation is endowed with an unprecedented urgency and profundity. Tracing the course of history, with the commodification of labor power as the core thread running through, we have, through the tripartite dialectical interactive framework of actual control over the means of production – production integrity – actual control over the production of labor power, layer by layer analyzed capital's upgraded domination from "possessing things" to "colonizing life", reconstructed the fundamental contradictions and exploitative forms of contemporary capitalism, and ultimately outlined an emancipatory program of "two-stage revolution + the unity of nationality and internationality". This theoretical exploration along the way is not only a contemporary deepening of Marxist political economy, but also a response and answer to the universal existential predicament of the global working class.

Capital's domination has never ceased its self-renewal. From factory discipline in the industrial age to algorithmic governance in the digital age, from the monopoly of material means of production to the all-round colonization of the life process, its forms of domination have become increasingly concealed and sophisticated, yet its exploitative essence and the core of class antagonism have never changed. The contradiction between the existential dependence of capitalist socialized large-scale production on the commodification of labor power and capital's private control over the production of labor power constitutes a fatal paradox that it cannot resolve by itself. This paradox not only gives rise to the existential crisis under the "ALICE threshold", but also nurtures the potential for resistance – when workers' actual control over the production of labor power is systematically deprived, and when alienation permeates every dimension of life, revolution becomes an inevitable historical choice and the only way to break this vicious cycle.

The cause of proletarian emancipation has never been a one-dimensional advance, but a dialectical unity of political revolution and social revolution. Political revolution

smashes the bourgeois state apparatus by force and realizes the socialized ownership of the means of production, laying an unshakable institutional foundation for emancipation; social revolution, with the abolition of the commodification of labor power as its core, reshapes autonomy in the human-centric fields of education, health, time and development, enabling workers to truly control their own life processes. This cause must not only be rooted in the specific soil of the nation-state, with in-depth analysis of the country's social contradictions, class structure and historical traditions to formulate revolutionary strategies suited to national conditions, but also adhere to a world perspective, breaking through capital's global domination network through international solidarity, and making local emancipation struggles an organic part of the global emancipation cause. It is not a dogmatic practice of abstract truths, but a dynamic process of constant adjustment and enrichment in concrete historical practice; it is not a precise presupposition of the future society, but a bold exploration that opens up possibilities for the free and all-round development of human beings.

From the violent expropriation of primitive capital accumulation to the omnipresent panopticism in the digital age, humanity has experienced a long and painful process of alienation under the rule of capital's logic. Yet the dialectics of history always reveals: the deeper capital's domination becomes, the sharper its internal contradictions grow, and the more abundant the potential for emancipation becomes. Reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power is, in essence, reclaiming humanity's sovereignty over life – it is about completely liberating human beings from the fate of being "labor power commodities" and realizing the great leap from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom".

This road to emancipation is destined to be long and complex. It demands the continuous innovation of theory, and even more the brave exploration of practice; it demands the awakening of class consciousness, and even more the cohesion of collective action; it demands being down-to-earth in the present, and even more the firm faith in the future. But as long as capitalist exploitation exists for a single day, as long as human alienation has not come to an end, this revolution concerning human dignity and the future will never stop. When more and more workers break free from capital's programming and discipline and unite on the dual dimensions of nationality and the world, when "reclaiming actual control over the production of labor power" becomes a common action program for the global working class, the communist community where "the free development of each is the condition for the free

development of all" will ultimately transform from a theoretical vision into reality. This is the inevitability of history, the ultimate outcome of the self-negation of capital's logic, and even more the future direction for human civilization to march toward a higher stage.

# *Appendix*

## ***Debate on the Logic of Capital and the Path to Liberation***

### **Appendix Note**

To more clearly present the challenges and rebuttals that the core arguments of this book might encounter in the real-world discourse field, the author and an AI (System Defender) simulated this intellectual confrontation, removed from a purely academic context. It did not actually happen, yet it strives to approximate the essence of ideological struggle. This debate ultimately had no clear winner, but the intense collisions of thought it entailed were so intellectually stimulating that the author decided to include it separately here, serving as a dynamic footnote to the main text and a catalyst for extended reflection.

#### **System Defender:**

"Thank you for the author's brilliant presentation. You have painted for us a vivid, impressive, yet all too familiar picture of the apocalypse. Yes, we are all under pressure; we all feel exhausted. But to attribute all of this to a colossal entity named 'Capital' conducting a 'colonization' of our lives—isn't that an overly grand, even somewhat lazy narrative?"

"You spoke of the comprehensive programming of education, work, and life. But I would like to ask the young entrepreneurs, freelancers, and ordinary people learning new skills through MOOCs present here: what you feel—is it 'colonization,' or unprecedented possibilities? When an algorithm recommends your next potentially beloved job, when platforms enable you to offer services globally, isn't that a form of 'empowerment'? You reduce the complexity and freedom brought by technology to a one-dimensional 'control.' Isn't this a denial of human agency?"

"What worries me more is your solution—'reclaiming control.' The phrase sounds beautiful, but history tells us that all utopian projects attempting to 'thoroughly reclaim' ultimately lead to new, more rigid forms of control. You accuse algorithms of being undemocratic, but the 'democratic control over labor-power production' you envision—who will design it? Who will implement it? Wouldn't it be another, even more massive bureaucratic algorithmic system? Your critique of the old world is

incisive, but the new world you promise is merely an empty, and potentially more dangerous, symbol.”

“Finally, I must say that what we truly need is not a total revolution against an abstract ‘Capital,’ but pragmatic, concrete reforms: legislating to protect data rights, improving unemployment relief, and promoting lifelong learning. These reforms are not romantic, but they tangibly improve people’s lives. Your theory, with all due respect, resembles more a philosophical pessimism. It cannot provide anyone here with answers on how to work and live better tomorrow. It portrays us all as powerless victims, but I believe the human story has never been like that.”

**Author:**

“Yes, this gentleman has painted for us a picture of a very realistic, within-reach cake of benefits. But I would like to ask everyone present: Are things really as superficially, as simply described by him?”

“I imagine everyone here, especially the young friends, must have felt a nameless emptiness at times—a sense of groundless powerlessness welling up when trying to rest. Indeed, capital is too vast, so vast that we can hardly perceive any single operation of it; capital is too clever, so clever that it not only knows how to share its scraps with people but also deliberately manufactures false ‘integrity of production,’ making laborers mistakenly believe they are not commodities, not appendages, but dignified independent individuals. But this feeling is ultimately false, an illusion meticulously woven by capital. With the development of social productive forces, these ‘scraps’ may appear increasingly abundant and tempting, yet their essence remains the surplus after dispossession; the ‘integrity of production’ it bestows, no matter how real it seems, is fundamentally a strategic concession to deepen its domination.”

“Comrades, do you remember our childhood dreams? How many of us have truly held onto them until today? And what was the first obstacle that stifled these dreams, if not considerations of ‘poor job prospects’ or ‘no future’? Is this not the most naked trampling of human dignity by capital?”

"It's true, we can now eat our fill and dress warmly, but our spiritual world is undergoing continuous erosion and trampling. We are human beings, not livestock—livestock may exchange spirit and dignity for material abundance, but human beings must pursue the harmonious unity of spirit and matter. A dog might rejoice when its master replaces its bowl with a golden one, but as humans, faced with such 'bounty,' we must recognize its essence and resolutely strive to eradicate it."

**System Defender:**

"Thank you for your passionate response. You spoke of dreams, dignity, and spiritual life. No one can deny the importance of these values. Precisely because of this, we should be even more vigilant not to be misled by a nostalgic romanticism."

"You said childhood dreams are strangled by 'employment prospects.' But think about it: in pre-modern society, wasn't the dream of a farmer's son strangled by 'land' and 'birth'? Wasn't the dream of a medieval artisan's daughter strangled by 'guilds' and 'gender'? The problem does not lie with 'Capital,' but with the reality of scarcity and division of labor that any society must face. The greatness of modern society lies in the fact that it at least provides avenues for mobility (such as education), rather than fixing people in the illusion of 'integrity of production' and perpetual poverty!"

"You call our abundant material life 'scraps.' I am curious, would you be willing to give all of this up—your smartphone, convenient healthcare, globally circulating knowledge—and return to an era you call one of 'integrity' but material scarcity? This is not a choice between man and dog; it is a choice between civilization and obscurantism. We are trading a portion of our autonomy for unprecedented security and prosperity. This is a rational social contract."

"Finally, regarding dignity. True dignity does not come from an illusory control over the production process, but from legally guaranteed rights, a social welfare safety net, and the possibility of achieving success through effort. We are continuously perfecting these systems. What you offer, though, is merely a lament for a lost 'integrity' and a revolutionary promise filled with uncertainty that could destroy the existing achievements of civilization. Reason demands that we reform, not destroy."

**Author:**

"It must be said, you are very adept at deceiving the masses! When you accuse my viewpoint of being 'nostalgic,' aren't you yourself mired in nostalgia? You repeatedly cite the living conditions of peasants and ancient artisans—isn't this a deliberate form of nostalgia? You use the productive forces of feudal society to contrast with the lives of the masses in this era of material abundance, essentially diverting the conflict and hollowing out the theory. This nostalgia is even more terrifying because its purpose is to better deceive the people."

"In fact, Marxism does indeed carry a tinge of 'nostalgia,' but it is precisely this 'nostalgia' that allowed the masses to see, for the first time, the hope of being masters of their own affairs; to understand, for the first time, the struggle for their own interests; to break free, for the first time, from the monopoly of ruling discourse and possess their own means of expression."

"When you ask me if I would be willing to give up the conveniences brought by technological development and return to an ancient time when the 'integrity of production' supposedly existed, you reveal your unwillingness to squarely face future trends and your fear of confronting the outcomes of contradictory movements—you can only rely on such clumsy interrogation to support your argument."

"The 'integrity of production' we pursue is absolutely not an isolated, individual-level integrity, but a public, shared integrity of production belonging to the people. Our pursuit of the 'actual capacity to control labor-power' in no way implies a retreat to a materially impoverished past."

"You are wrong. You are truly mistaken. You erroneously equate nostalgic retrospection with a complete return to antiquity. In reality, the true power of nostalgia and retrospection lies in using the most essential, least interfered-with core logic to re-examine reality and pose questions."

"Finally, you mention that 'Reason demands reform, not destruction.' Then I ask: what

is true reform? Can ignoring fundamental problems and only modifying their surface manifestations be called reform? Can evading core contradictions and only focusing on cleaning up the 'scum' floating on the surface be called reform? When the foundation of a building is already rotten, and you blame the residents for not decorating their rooms—is this the 'reform' you speak of? Such 'reform' is, in essence, accelerating destruction. True reform is reinforcing the building's foundation, demolishing the dangerous structure, and rebuilding a new one—only in this way do we move towards the opposite of destruction and truly stride towards development."

#### **System Defender:**

"You speak of demolishing a building with problematic foundations and carrying out a complete reconstruction. The blueprint is beautiful. But I ask each and every person present: Who lives in that building? Is it you? Is it me? Or is it the millions of ordinary laborers, families, the elderly, and children?"

"During the reconstruction process, where do they live? In the so-called 'transitional stage' you mention, who will guarantee their jobs, income, their children's education, their loved ones' healthcare? History has proven countless times that the costs of any grand 'reconstruction' project are paid by the most vulnerable ordinary people, with their livelihoods, security, and even their lives."

"You accuse me of 'skimming the scum from the water's surface' without addressing the source of pollution. I accept this criticism. But my approach is: while skimming the scum so the water is temporarily drinkable, I also research safer purification technologies and seek alternative water sources. Your solution is: blow up the entire reservoir, promising to build a cleaner one at some future date. Until you build it, everyone will die of thirst."

"This is not the difference between reform and revolution. This is the difference between 'being responsible for real lives' and 'being fascinated by abstract ideals.'"

"Yes, the building's foundation has cracks. But your solution is not to reinforce it; it is to light the fuse. You say this is for the future. But I must say: Any 'future' that does

not cherish the concrete lives of the present is a charter for tyranny.”

“I choose reform not because I am too foolish to see the problems, but because I fear—I fear those ‘grand experiments’ carried out in the name of ‘the future’ and ‘the essence,’ which make the present world a living hell. My reason is precisely a sober awareness of this fear and a humble respect for each concrete life. Your courage, perhaps, is merely the result of not yet having witnessed the real cost.”

**Author:**

“A beautiful sophistry, a masterful display of intimidation. Indeed, the people living in that building are precisely each and every one of us here. This is exactly the thorough argument that Marx and Engels made when they founded scientific socialism: the proletarian revolution must not only overthrow bourgeois rule but also eradicate its own inherent laziness and vulgarity.”

“This is the most essential difference between the scientific socialism of Marxism and the capitalist reformism that deceives the people—we do not seek the temporary peace brought by painkillers, nor are we willing to whitewash fundamental problems with evasive rhetoric. We pursue truth, and we are not afraid to turn the blade of reform upon ourselves.”

“Returning to the ‘building’ problem: Before we detonate the dangerous building, we will inevitably clean the house first, aiming for minimal casualties and the complete evacuation of all occupants. The ‘whitewashing reform’ you champion merely allows people to live freely in a crumbling building—when it finally collapses, the path of your reform will already be crowded with innocent sacrifices. And when our demolition officially begins, the only ones left in that building will be the stubborn conservatives and the ignorant defenders of vested interests.”

## Notes

[1] The concept of the commodification of labor power was first scientifically defined by Marx. Its theoretical embryonic form is reflected in *Wage Labour and Capital* (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 1, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 711–740). The strict distinction between "labor" and "labor power" forms the theoretical foundation of this concept, which can be found in *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858* (Complete Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 30, People's Publishing House, 1995, pp. 206–210). The classic finalization of its scientific connotation, historical conditions and theoretical system was accomplished in Volume I of *Capital* (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 194–205, *The Value and Use-Value of the Labour-Power Commodity*; pp. 782–832, *Primitive Accumulation and the Historical Process of the Commodification of Labor Power*).

[2] The essence of primitive capital accumulation is the forcible separation of producers from the means of production. This core thesis was systematically elaborated by Marx, and its classic exposition can be found in Volume I of *Capital* (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 781–832, the chapter on "So-Called Primitive Accumulation", in which p. 783 clearly defines the essence of primitive accumulation, pp. 784–790 analyzes its specific forms of realization with the British Enclosure Movement as an example, and pp. 819–832 discusses overseas primitive accumulation methods such as colonial plunder and the slave trade). Marx further supplemented the analysis of the connection between primitive accumulation and the formation of the capitalist mode of production in *Theories of Surplus Value* (Complete Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 26, Part 1, People's Publishing House, 1972, pp. 373–389). Engels deepened the criticism of the violence of primitive accumulation by combining historical facts in *Anti-Dühring* (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 9, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 166–174).

[3] In Volume I of *Capital* (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 784–790), the chapter on "So-Called Primitive Accumulation", Marx took the British Enclosure Movement as a typical example of primitive capital accumulation, and elaborated on how the landed aristocracy and new nobility deprived peasants of their land through legislative and violent means, converted common land and copyhold land into private sheep pastures, and forced landless peasants to become "free" proletarians who

could only sell their labor power. E.P. Thompson, the British historian, further supplemented the social historical details of peasants' displacement during the Enclosure Movement in *The Making of the English Working Class* (trans. Qian Chengdan, Yilin Press, 2001, pp. 45–52).

[4] In Volume I of *Capital* (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 819–832), the chapter "So-Called Primitive Accumulation", Marx profoundly analyzed overseas colonial plunder as a crucial means of primitive capital accumulation. He pointed out that colonial expansion, the slave trade, and the opium trade accumulated enormous amounts of gold, silver, and primitive capital for European capitalism, revealing the inherent connection between colonial plunder and the formation of the capitalist mode of production. In *Anti-Dühring* (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 9, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 169–174), Engels further supplemented the violent essence of colonial plunder, clarifying its destructive impact on the colonial economy and its role in promoting European capital accumulation. From the perspective of economic history, Eric Williams specifically demonstrated the actual contribution of the slave trade and colonial plunder to European primitive capital accumulation in *Capitalism and Slavery* (trans. Lu Meilin, Commercial Press, 1962, pp. 56–78).

[5] In Volume I of *Capital* (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 194–200), the chapter "The Conversion of Money into Capital", Marx clearly expounded the dual connotation of the "freedom" of labor power. Workers not only broke away from feudal personal dependence to become legally free individuals but were also deprived of all means of production, having to make a living solely by selling their labor power. This constitutes a prerequisite for labor power to become a commodity. In *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858* (Complete Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 30, People's Publishing House, 1995, pp. 207–212), Marx further analyzed the formation of this "free" state and its inherent connection with primitive capital accumulation from a historical materialist perspective. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 1, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 373–385), Engels, drawing on the reality of British society, specifically described the living conditions of workers who were "free to the point of having nothing" after losing their means of production, confirming Marx's theoretical analysis.

[6] In Volume I of Capital (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 201–210), the chapter "The Labour Process and the Valorisation Process", Marx expounded the core logic by which the commodification of labor power gives rise to the wage labor relationship. He pointed out that after workers sell their labor power, the purpose of labor shifts from producing use-values to earning wages, and the right to dominate the labor process is transferred to capital. In the chapter "Constant and Variable Capital" (pp. 211–220) of the same volume, Marx further analyzed the transformation of means of production into capital, clarifying that under the wage labor relationship, the function of means of production changes from serving individual labor consumption to becoming a means of extracting surplus value. The essence of the capitalist private ownership system, centered on dominating the labor of others and exploiting surplus value, was systematically demonstrated by Marx in the chapter "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" (Volume I of Capital, People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 673–682). In Critique of the Gotha Programme (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 3, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 288–295), Marx further deepened the analysis of the inherent connection between capitalist private ownership and wage labor from the perspective of programmatic criticism, confirming the historical and logical chain from primitive accumulation to the commodification of labor power and then to the establishment of capitalist production relations.

[7] The theoretical embryo of the "Triadic Dialectical Analysis Framework" proposed in this paper first appeared in the author's preprint "Production Integrity and the Practical Ability to Control the Production of Labor Power: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Marxist Political Economy from the Perspective of Digital Capitalism" (Zenodo, October 31, 2025, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.17492460). It was developed in "Returning to the Field of Production: Reconstructing and Criticizing the Theory of Alienation Based on 'Production Integrity' and 'Practical Control Ability'" (Zenodo, December 21, 2025, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.18005399), and took shape in "Production Integrity and the Practical Ability to Control the Production of Labor Power: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Marxist Political Economy (From the Perspective of Digital Capitalism)" (Zenodo, December 24, 2025, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.18044966). It was initially applied in "A New Path to Proletarian Emancipation: Reclaiming Practical Control over the Production of Labor Power" (Zenodo, January 3, 2026, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.18136564). Its class structure presents significant transitional and ambiguous characteristics. The concept of "dà gōng rén" (office drudges) is a strategic theoretical definition of a group that, in this

special historical stage, generally embodies the contradiction of having "formally high control capabilities" while being "substantially systematically dependent".

[18] Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, People's Publishing House, 2018, pp. 95–105.

[19] Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 3, People's Publishing House, 1995, pp. 304–315.

[20] The core framework of this section first appeared in the author's preprint "Production Integrity and the Practical Ability to Control the Production of Labor Power: A Contemporary Reconstruction of Marxist Political Economy (From the Perspective of Digital Capitalism)" (Zenodo, December 24, 2025, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.18044966). This section of the book basically follows the core theses of this preprint, with only minor adjustments to some logical details and supplementary contemporary special cases such as food delivery riders and digital creative workers to enhance the theory's practical persuasiveness.

[21] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 225–230, 378–385.

[22] The theoretical embryo of this section first emerged in the author's preprint "Returning to the Field of Production: Reconstructing and Criticizing the Theory of Alienation Based on 'Production Integrity' and 'Practical Control Ability'" (Zenodo, December 21, 2025, DOI: 10.5281/ZENODO.18005399). This early research only constructed a dual analytical tool of "production integrity-practical control ability" and did not form a complete triadic dialectical analysis system. Building on this, this chapter of the book deepens and expands the framework by incorporating the dimension of "production and reproduction of labor power", developing it into a triadic dialectical system. It also supplements and refines the original logic, endowing the theory with stronger systematicness and practical explanatory power.

[23] Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, People's Publishing

House, 2018, pp. 52–65.

[24] Marx's core discussion on the basic contradiction of capitalism can be found in two works. In Volume I of Capital (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 872–875), Marx clearly defined this contradiction as the opposition between the socialization of production and the capitalist private ownership of the means of production, and demonstrated that it is the root cause of capitalist economic crises. In The Communist Manifesto (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 2, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 37–43), Marx and Engels expounded the external manifestations of this contradiction from the perspective of class antagonism, pointing out that it will inevitably lead to the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and promote the historical transformation of the capitalist system.

[25] In Volume I of Capital (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 58–60, 225–230), Marx clearly stated that the use-value of the labor power commodity is the sole source of value, and the living labor of workers is the active force driving capitalist production and valorization.

[26] In The Communist Manifesto (People's Publishing House, 2018, pp. 31–35), Marx and Engels emphasized that the wage labor system is the core of capitalist production relations. The commodification of labor power is not only the starting point of exploitation, but its reproduction process (such as education and health) has increasingly become a field of capital competition. In Volume I of Capital (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 621–630), Marx further analyzed the social conditions for the reproduction of labor power, revealing its crucial role in the continuous maintenance of capitalist production relations.

[27] In Volume I of Capital (People's Publishing House, 2004, pp. 198–205, 225–230), Marx pointed out that as a special commodity, the value of labor power is determined by the socially necessary labor time required for its reproduction, while its use-value (labor) can create new value exceeding its own value. This contradiction is the fundamental prerequisite for the realization of capitalist exploitation.

[28] Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational

Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life, trans. Wang Peixiong et al., Shanghai Education Press, 2006, pp. 15–40 (this theory constitutes the core thesis of neo-Marxist educational criticism).

[29] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Public School District Finance Data: 2021–2022 (2023).

[30] Raj Chetty et al., Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility (2017), Harvard University Opportunity Insights.

[31] Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, 129 Stat. 1802 (2015).

[32] Education Act 2002, c. 32 (UK).

[33] OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 Results (2023).

[34] Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Household Debt and Credit Report: Q4 2023 (2024).

[35] Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, trans. Cao Leiyu et al., China Social Sciences Press, 2000, pp. 38–57.

[36] Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, trans. Xing Kechao, The Commercial Press, 2022, pp. 22–68.

[37] Marx and Engels first defined the core path of the proletarian revolution in The Communist Manifesto (People's Publishing House, 2018, p. 66), openly declaring that "the ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions", and establishing violent revolution as the fundamental principle for

overthrowing the bourgeois rule. Based on the practical experience of the Paris Commune, Marx further put forward the important thesis that "the working class cannot simply take hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes" in *The Civil War in France* (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 3, People's Publishing House, 2009, pp. 152–153), supplementing the key practical logic that violent revolution requires "smashing the old state machinery". In *The State and Revolution* (People's Publishing House, 2018, pp. 31–45), Lenin inherited and developed the Marxist theory of the state, and clarified that "the replacement of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution" in light of the reality of the Russian Revolution. He systematically demonstrated the inherent connection between violent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and transformed the theory into an operable revolutionary strategy. Thus, a complete logical system of the Marxist-Leninist theory of violent revolution was formed, evolving from the establishment of principles to practical deepening and strategic improvement.

[38] Revolving Door System: It refers to the two-way flow of personnel between the political circle, the business community and lobbying groups in the United States.

Former government officials often take up positions in enterprises or lobbying institutions after leaving office, using their government connections to serve capital; at the same time, corporate executives or professional lobbyists are often appointed as government officials, bringing the interests of capital directly into the policy-making process. This mechanism is a typical way for capital to influence and control politics through personnel infiltration.

[39] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, People's Publishing House, 2018, pp. 42, 47.

[40] Lenin, *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe*, Selected Works of Lenin, Vol. 2, People's Publishing House, 2012.

[41] Lenin, *The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution*, Selected Works of Lenin, Vol. 2, People's Publishing House, 2012.

[42] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2003; *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2010; *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2011.

[43] Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Wang Yili, CITIC Press, 2024.

[44] Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, trans. Cheng Boqing et al., Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2023.

[45] Wu Guijie, "Labor Process and Alienation in Platform Capitalism: A Case Study of Food Delivery Riders", *Studies on Marxism*, No. 6, 2024.