

On the Enlightenment Movement: The Impact on Western Society and the Social Problems Brought by the Lack of Chinese Enlightenment

Shuyue Chen^{1,a,*}

¹Licheng Number2 High School, Shandong, China

a. 1625830192@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: In his article "What is Enlightenment", Foucault once said, "By explaining it this way, people can discover a starting point for analysis, which is to describe people's so-called attitudes towards modernity.". The Enlightenment legitimized human rights, and with the Enlightenment as the boundary, humanity entered a stage of modernity. Modern human rights ideology was initially established, and Western social life underwent earth-shaking changes. It also impacted China as far away as the East, as the ideas of the Enlightenment formed the cornerstone of modern society and established the embryonic form of modern society. Although China has been affected by this, due to the lack of philosophical education, people only have a vague understanding of concepts such as human rights, democracy, freedom, and so on, without a profound understanding, which has led to some social problems in China being particularly prominent compared to the West. This article explores the issue of legalization in the Enlightenment by analyzing the ideological context before and after the Enlightenment, focusing specifically on human rights. It also attempts to categorize the concept of power during the Enlightenment period and explore several types of power in human society, discussing the impact of the Enlightenment from the above points. Afterward, this article attempts to analyze the impact of the Enlightenment on Western society, using the presence or absence of the Enlightenment as a variable. As a comparison, it analyzes some social problems in China caused by the lack of popularization of knowledge and philosophical education related to the Enlightenment.

Keywords: natural rights, Natural law, Social contract, Modernity, Legitimacy, human rights

1. Introduction

In an opulent or commercial society, besides, to think or reason comes to be, like every other employment, a particular business, which is carried on by a very few people, who furnish the public with all the thought and reason possessed by the vast multitudes that labor. Only a small part of any ordinary person's knowledge has resulted from personal observation or reflection. All the rest has been purchased, in the same manner as his shoes or his stockings, from those whose business it is to make up and prepare for the market that particular species of goods [1,2].

Under the stubborn rule of feudal autocracy and religious rule that lasted for thousands of years, due to the development and progress of productive forces, as well as the emergence of capitalism, the trend of advocating rationality has caused a great uproar in society. In the 18th century, France was still a feudal country, with extravagant aristocrats and wealthy families in temples, resulting in an empty treasury. Farmers endured the heavy exploitation of feudal lords and churches in rural areas. In terms of culture, churches, and monarchies suppressed the sprouts of new ideas, attempting to implement a policy of foolishness and cultural hegemony [3]. The rise of the Enlightenment movement, viewed from a historical perspective, is a byproduct of the development of capitalism. The Enlightenment was a manifestation of the bourgeois revolution in terms of culture. Regarding this capitalist way of liberation, Marx believed that the bourgeois political revolution destroyed "all levels, guilds, guilds, and privileges, because these were numerous manifestations of the separation of the people from their own community. As a result, the political revolution eliminated the political nature of civil society." [4]. This revolution dissolved the solidity of people in social groups, and Individuals were liberated from the confinement of social organizations. On this basis, "public affairs themselves have instead become the universal affairs of each individual, and political functions have become their universal functions [4].

Many scholars have conducted more specific discussions on the social background of the Enlightenment movement. Historians such as Robert Darnton have studied publications that exploded during the Enlightenment period [5]. Scholars such as Roger Chartier and Robert Muchembled have studied how Enlightenment ideas were spread from elite intellectuals to the working masses [6]. In addition, some scholars have studied the subtle impact of visual art on the intellectual revolution [7]. Many authors also indicate that during this period, many institutions and organizations of various sizes emerged throughout Europe, as well as many commercial and cultural activities where people exchanged ideas [8]. The generalization of reading is also reflected in this era. Fragmented reading has increased, and more people no longer spend a lot of time repeatedly studying religious classics but quickly scan novels and other reading materials and pass them on to others. By the end of the 18th century, the New England community seemed to have wisely abandoned its reliance on limited religious works and was almost submerged by new genres - novels, newspapers, children's books, travel, and natural history - each of which was greedily absorbed and then discarded [9]. Enlightenment relies on knowledge dissemination channels such as libraries, scientific journals, popular science reading materials, encyclopedias, etc [10, 11]. This knowledge dissemination during the Enlightenment era also shaped the establishment and development of modern academic and related institutions [12,13].

Kant's article "What is Enlightenment" mainly emphasizes two points: 1. Enlightenment is when humans resist authority and bravely use their rationality, and the premise of using rationality is the critique of rationality. 2. Enlightenment is the process of humans reaching adulthood and should be in the overall movement of purposeful history. Kant believed that the important and primary condition of enlightenment was freedom. Freedom encourages people to use their rationality to think. The use of rationality can be divided into two ways: public and private. In fact, this rough classification system is slightly outdated today, as with the continuous development of capitalism and the increasing degree of social division of labor, the multiplicity of individual identities has become increasingly prominent. Foucault used Baudelaire's words to explain modernity. Baudelaire believed that modernity is a heroic attitude towards reality, which is neither idealism detached from reality nor complete abandonment of ideals, but an attitude that respects reality and adheres to ideals. Foucault is committed to defamiliarizing enlightenment to discover the true meaning of enlightenment. On the one hand, he supported Kant's reverence for reason, and on the other hand, he denied the view of confusing enlightenment and rationalism. He believed that the legalization of reason should be considered, at least not confused with transcendental metaphysics. We should

criticize reason because reason belongs to us, this historical subject, and therefore should also be the object of investigation. We should go beyond Kant's pure rational criticism to creatively analyze and construct the society and power of our thinking. At the same time, enlightenment cannot simply be equated with humanistic spirit. Humanism beautifies human nature in its subtext and attempts to prove the natural legitimation of human nature. This concept is not fundamentally philosophical but is more about history and religion. Moreover, he believes that enlightenment is determined by changes in the original relationship between "will," "authority," and "rational use" [1]. In different eras, different aspects of enlightenment were valued, and an enchanting concept of the times thwarted attempts to balance these three. Kant's resolute reform did not break out of the traditional mold but flowed from one mold to another, that is, the myth of rational centrism for reasoning. Foucault believed that Kant's actions were a philosophical problematization of the present. Kant raised a rather historical question, but he did not tend to explore historical, special questions but rather sought the commonalities of history, which were universal questions.

2. THE MAIN IDEAS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT

2.1. Power and Modernity

The concept of power is a typical modern term. If traditional society is characterized by virtue, then modern society is characterized by power. The mainstream power theory is divided into two factions, one focusing on social cooperation, one on social conflict, and another layer of power that is educational. Foucault and Rousseau, who focus on social cooperation, belong to the former. Foucault advocates analyzing power from a micro level, and power is not just a public tool of the state at the macro level. In our history, power has been overly simplistic. If power refers to a power that governs or influences others, then power does not only exist in the rule of the monarch or government over grassroots individuals but also permeates all aspects of social life. The most significant aspect is the control, selection, organization, and redistribution of discourse production in a society. The "literary prison" and cultural dictatorship and ideological monopoly are relatively easy to detect, and there are many more difficult-to-realize parts, such as scientific paradigms, industry rules, theoretical authority, personal qualifications, job qualifications, action plans, and political direction. Countless fields embody the discourse form and composition of power.

2.2. Development of human rights theory

In the Age of Enlightenment, a prominent feature was the rights transfer. "Natural human rights, sovereignty in the people" advocated for the return of human rights deprived by religion and monarchy to individuals. The theory of natural human rights advocated that human life, freedom, and property were enjoyed by everyone and were inalienable and unalienable rights. Freedom and equality were in line with human nature and were natural rights which were endowed by human nature. Western human rights theory has been sprouting since ancient Greece, from Plato and Aristotle's "innate privilege" to Stoicism's refutation of it. The Stoic school's claim has generally considered some important elements of human rights ideology, which is that humans should be equal regardless of race, identity, nationality, property, etc. In this sense, the natural law ideas of the Stoic school can be seen as the ideological source of human rights theory. If the Stoic school provided the ideological foundation for establishing human rights, then another important sprout of human rights thought is Christian thought. The Book of Galatians in the Bible declares, "By believing in Christ Jesus, you are all the sons of God. Those who were baptized into Christ are all clothed in Christ. There is no distinction between Jews, Greeks, free men, slaves, or men or women; for in Christ Jesus, you are all one." (3:28) This idea of Christianity poses a challenge to the hierarchical social ideology of ancient Rome, and it subtly influenced the laws of ancient Rome,

ultimately forming a legal system of equality for all. Even when it comes to human rights ideology in later generations, Christianity has a significant influence that cannot be underestimated. Modern law, directly derived from the norms of religious law, largely inherits the Christian idea of 'equality before God'.

The modern theory of human rights originated from the Renaissance movement in the 14th to 16th centuries, but at that time, human rights thought was only a very simple sprout. Until the 18th century, the Enlightenment was vigorously carried out, and human rights ideology was inherited and developed among representatives of the Enlightenment. Thinkers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau further explored Locke's theory of natural rights, believing that human rights, as a fundamental right of human beings, were inherent and nontransferable. Because the fundamental rights of humans stem from natural law that predates human law, people only transfer their right to enforce natural law and self-jurisdiction to the constitutional state when entering contracts with the state, and their fundamental rights have never been and cannot be transferred. As Rousseau once said, "The main natural endowments of humanity, life, and freedom - these gifts that everyone can enjoy, are at least questionable as to whether they have the right to abandon them. If a person abandons freedom, they devalue their own existence; if they abandon life, they eliminate the existence of freedom... Therefore, abandoning life and freedom at any cost is against nature and rationality." (P137) [14]. Rousseau's human rights theory had a significant impact on the later practice of human rights in the West. From the human rights theories of Enlightenment thinkers, the human rights thoughts during the Enlightenment far exceeded the simple human rights thoughts of the Renaissance, forming a conscious and systematic theory, namely the theory of innate human rights.

The idea of innate human rights holds that human rights are natural rights granted to humans, emphasizing the natural attributes of human rights, which carry a worship of natural forces. People come into this world with the rights granted by nature, and in the process of participating in the formation of a country, they hand over their innate human rights to society and the state in the form of a contract, forming legal rights. This is a process of transferring rights. Moreover, people can withdraw the right to entrust themselves at any time.

As the epitome of the Enlightenment movement, Kant raised objections to the idea of innate human rights. From Kant's perspective, there was a shift from innate human rights to human rights. The legitimacy of morality and rights no longer stems from nature but from human practical rationality. Nature lost its sublimity here in Kant to give way to the law generated by common free will, with the moral law of the heart higher than the starry sky above. Morality belongs to the realm of human practical rationality and the realm of freedom that transcends external inevitability. The will establishes universal moral principles through self-legislation that states, 'You should act in this way to elevate your principles to universal law.' From this perspective, freedom is the foundation of rights. Kant established the position of freedom above nature by dividing the world into nature and freedom, and human nature is reflected in the freedom of self-legislation.

2.3. Limitation of Freedom

Kant's 'freedom to use reason openly' and 'freedom to use reason privately'[15]. The freedom to openly use reason is roughly equivalent to freedom of speech, publication, and other freedoms related to public opinion and the dissemination of ideas. The freedom to privately use reason is to use one's own reason to handle all matters that belong to one's own position. Kant believed that the freedom in the front should be infinite, while the freedom in the back must be restricted. He gave an example that an officer must obey and execute the orders of his superiors, but he also has the right to express his own opinions on the gains and losses of this order from the perspective of a scholar. A citizen must pay the prescribed tax amount, but as a scholar, he can also protest against the

unfairness of this tax law. A pastor has the obligation to preach doctrine according to the requirements of the church, but also the right to collaborate with scholars in other fields to express their criticism of such doctrine. This inconsistency between words and actions is necessary for a legal society. However, if a scholar thinks that they have mastered the truth and can use their authority to promote their ideas, disregarding their social obligations or even treating the implementation of such personal opinions as their own obligation, then it is not only promoting enlightenment but also hindering it [16].

2.4. Reflection on Kant's Philosophy

Kant's criticism of reality is incomplete and has a compromising attitude towards the shortcomings of existing systems. Hegel also made a sharp critique of this: 'We have all kinds of commotion happening in and above our minds; but the German mind can still sit quietly in a nightcap, allowing the mind to freely move within.'

3. The Impact of the Enlightenment on Western Society

The Enlightenment had a profound impact on Western society, involving multiple fields such as ideology, politics, culture, and society. The Enlightenment emphasized individual freedom of thought and rights, which had a profound impact on later democratic systems and human rights laws. The section on human rights has already been discussed in the previous text. The American Declaration of Independence states that "all men are born equal and have certain inalienable rights" and manifests this ideology. At that time, thinkers advocated for the decentralization and supervision of political power, which laid the foundation for later modern constitutional systems, such as the US Constitution and the French Revolution. The popularization of education was considered important during this period, which directly promoted education reform. People believed that education was the key to cultivating free citizens, which led to the establishment of a modern education system. The Enlightenment also prompted people to reflect on the expansion of colonialism and slavery in Europe, which ultimately led to the movement of abolishing slavery and liberating colonies.

However, the results of the Enlightenment movement do not seem optimistic. After the Enlightenment, people believed that they were able to master the material world in a way that was free from illusions, myths, internal power, and worship. Anything that does not conform to scientific principles should be questioned. Every mental resistance it resists is just to enhance strength [17]. In fact, it can be said that Horkheimer and Adorno's articles have cast doubt on contemporary intellectuals' belief in self-awareness and subjectivity, as well as cast a long shadow over the debate on the social and political order established by this concept of subjectivity. The Enlightenment movement cannot resist the continuous threats of rationalization, mythology, and domination. Despite the efforts of the Enlightenment, its progressive goals have not yet been achieved: "In the most universal sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed to liberate people from fear and establish their sovereignty. However, the fully enlightened Earth is triumphantly emitting the light of disaster." [18].

If we further consider this issue, we will find that there are still things worth comforting. Theodor Adorno once said, "Philosophy, once seemingly outdated, survived because it missed the moment to realize it. After the attempt to change the world failed, people simply judged that it was only intervening in the world, and in the face of reality, resigned to fate itself weakened the world, which became rational defeatism. After breaking the promise of integrating with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy had to mercilessly criticize itself [19]. The spirit of enlightenment can survive in self-criticism. At the end of the 18th century, romanticism replaced the

Enlightenment spirit as the main trend of thought in the intellectual world [20]. Romanticism critically inherited and developed the spirit of Enlightenment. Romanticists believe that the Enlightenment overly emphasized rationality, and exploring nature may not necessarily lead to human happiness but may lead to another form of misfortune [21].

4. The Lack of Enlightenment Thought in the Modernization Process of Chinese Society

4.1. Historical Causes

4.1.1. The Development of Enlightenment Thought from the Late Qing Dynasty to the Founding of the People's Republic of China

Due to the influence of the feudal system, China has taken a dominant position, and the sprouts of capitalism have not developed well. Specifically, although China's feudal system is increasingly disintegrating and it difficult to achieve complete rule, it has become increasingly strict, with professions divided into three, six, and nine levels. At the grassroots level, agriculture has been promoted, while commerce has not been promoted, resulting in a slow development of capitalism. From a historical perspective, the feudal agricultural economy in the East and West of Europe, Asia, and Europe emphasized agriculture and suppressed commerce, both of which were self-sufficient economies that combined farming and weaving. However, the feudal agricultural economy in the West had its noteworthy characteristics. The shift from agriculture to commerce initially occurred in Western Europe, originating within the agricultural economy. Commerce and urban economy developed from being vassals of feudal agricultural economy to competing objects, ultimately reversing the primary and secondary relationships, and agriculture became vassals of the urban economy.

4.1.2. Two Enlightenment Movements in China

China has undergone two Enlightenment movements in modern history, and the common feature of these two Enlightenment movements is their short duration. Even though it was grand at the beginning, with the turning of the political situation, it soon became depressed and even criticized and forgotten in turn.

4.2. Current issues

996 refers to working 6 days a week from 9am to 9pm daily. Under the 996 working system, employees work 11 hours a day and 66 hours a week, which is clearly in violation of labor laws. In October 2016, Internet company 58 was reported to have implemented a "996" work system for all employees in the same city, working from 9am to 9pm, working six days a week without subsidies or overtime pay, and not allowed to take leave. In January 2019, it was revealed that "Hangzhou Youzan Technology" company would implement the "996" working system [22]. 996 instantly became a hot topic on the internet. A project called "996. ICU" has appeared on GitHub, listing companies implementing the 996 work system to resist it. This move received an immediate response from many programmers [23].

The 996 reflects a mentality of being eager for quick success and instant benefits, reflecting that the ideas of the Enlightenment movement have not been truly implemented in China. The two Enlightenment movements cannot be said to have ended in failure, but their core was a religious fervor for slogans, which fundamentally violated the spirit of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment emphasized the need for continuous development, continuous criticism, and the constant use of one's own intelligence. However, the two Enlightenment movements that occurred

in modern China were both a kind of guidance from the intellectual elite class, and these elites had a dictatorial attitude that they believed a theory was correct and wanted to eliminate all dissenting ideas, which precisely violated the spirit of the Enlightenment's continuous criticism. At the same time, their behavior reflects an attitude of being eager for quick success and instant benefits.

5. CONCLUSION

The Enlightenment was just a liberation of thought, eager to make it effective and immediately become a practical idea, which was too hasty. The result is that everyone's understanding of enlightenment is limited to the hope of having a so-called correct idea to immediately change society, using ready-made theories from Western society without hesitation, like a frenzied monsoon that leaves nothing behind after blowing away. If it is not for the recognition of the Enlightenment ideology itself but for the purpose of practical application, then when encountering more urgent matters for the development of society, the Enlightenment ideology, so-called human rights, and freedoms will immediately be abandoned like a clog and thrown aside. They have not realized or attempted to make others aware that the spirit of enlightenment is an important cornerstone of the human rights ideology that constitutes the bottom layer of modern society.

References

- [1] M. Foucault, (1997) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. The New Press, then New York.
- [2] Scott, W. R. (1965) *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*. Augustus m Kelley Pubs, the New York.
- [3] Enlightenment (2013) Britannica Online Encyclopedia.
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>.
- [4] Marx, K.H., Engels, F. (2009) *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Volume 1. Beijing: People's Publishing House, the Beijing.
- [5] Darnton, R. (2009) *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. Basic Books, the New York.
- [6] Chartier, R., (1988) *Cultural History: Betteen Practices and Representations*. NCROL, the New York.
- [7] Crow, T. (1987) *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Yale University Press, the Yale
- [8] Jacob, M.C. (2006) *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*. Cornerstone Book Publishers, the Hot Springs Village
- [9] Joyce, W.L. (1983) *Printing and Society in Early America*. Amer Antiquarian Society, WorcesterMassachusetts.
- [10] Mason, D.S., (2010) *A Concise History of Modern Europe: Liberty, Equality, Solidarity*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, the Washington
- [11] Ayers, P., Matthews, C., Yates, B. (2013) *How Wikipedia Works: And How You Can Be a Part of It*. No Starch Press. The San Francisco.
- [12] Israel, J. I. (2002) *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford University Press, the New York.
- [13] Burns, W.E. (2003) *Science in the Enlightenment: An Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO, the Texas.
- [14] Rousseau, J.J. (2010) *On the Origin and Foundation of Human Inequality*. St. Martin's. the New York.
- [15] Kant [permanently disabled link]. (2013) Encyclopedia Britannica.
<http://daying.wordpedia.com/content.aspx?id=039610>.
- [16] Hegel, C.f., (1978) *Hegel: Lectures on the History of Philosophy volume 4*. Oxford University Press, the Oxford
- [17] Hegel, C.f., (1977) *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press, the Oxford.
- [18] Horkheimer, M., Adorno, T. (1972) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Continuum, the New York.
- [19] Adorno, T. (1979) *Negative Dialectics*. Seabury Press, the New York.
- [20] Snopek, J. (2011) *The Polish Literature of the Enlightenment*.
https://web.archive.org/web/20111005232247/http://f.poland.pl/files/86/0/234/Literature_of_Enlightenment.pdf.
- [21] Burns, W.E. (2003) *Science in the Enlightenment: An Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO, the Santa Barbara, California.
- [22] Xinhua News Agency. (2019) 996 Work System Forces Employees to Volunteer Overtime? Labor Supervision Department Intervention Investigation.
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1624236204778487503&wfr=spider&for=pc>.
- [23] People's Daily. (2019) Whose ideal plan is the 996 work system.
<http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0402/c119388-31009768.html>.