

From the "Eagle" of Revolutionary to the "Eagle" of Thinker, A Rethinking of the Relationship between Rosa Luxemburg's Ideas and Marx's Theory

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Since Rosa Luxemburg put forward her own theory of "The Accumulation of Capital" and "Dialectic of Spontaneity and Organization", for more than a century, the criticism, as well as the affirmation, of her ideas in the academic community have never stopped. Moreover, there are varied interpretations and evaluations in varied eras and regions. Especially in the 1990s, "Revolutions of 1989" and "Globalization" triggered the booming of research in the academic community for Rosa Luxemburg's ideas. In particular, "Revolutions of 1989" prompted the scholars to rethink the Social Democracy of Rosa Luxemburg, which inspired the rethinking of her political theory; Meanwhile, "Globalization" stimulated scholars to re-examine Rosa Luxembourg's ideas of "The Accumulation of Capital" from a new perspective, which issued a new exploration of her ideas of imperialism.

Overviewing the research on Rosa Luxemburg throughout the 20th century, it was closely related to important issues happened at that time. Similarly, great transformations of human history in the 20th century must also have been demonstrated in the study of Rosa Luxemburg. Therefore, the study of Rosa Luxemburg must turn on a new look when those great transformations took place in the 1990s. Specifically, keynotes of those studies are as follows: firstly, before the 1990s, she was evaluated as the "Eagle" of Revolutionary, which was a partial affirmation based on the tone of criticism; after the 1990s, she is evaluated as the "Eagle" of Thinker, which is a partial criticism based on the tone of affirmation.

This paper will display those evaluations on Rosa Luxemburg made by Eastern and Western Marxists in the above-mentioned two periods, and try to find out the research paradigm behind those commends, which is, to some extent, a rethinking of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and Marx's theory; moreover, it is a journey to experience the charm of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas.

1 the "Eagle" of revolutionary, a partial affirmation based on the tone of criticism

But in spite of her mistakes she was—and remains for us—an eagle.

Lenin, in his "*Politician Notebooks*" written in February 1922, pointed out that although Rosa Luxemburg had made many mistakes, she was always an "eagle" of the working class. For enumerating the mistakes of Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin wrote: "she made mistakes on the issue of Poland's independence, in her evaluation of Menshevik in 1903, and she made mistakes in the theory of *The Accumulation of Capital*, etc., (Lenin: *The Collected Works of Lenin*, Vol. IV, People's Publishing House, 1995, p. 643) According to this list, Lenin criticized the basic ideas of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, such as her views on the nation-state in the era of imperialism, the view on capital accumulation, and the view on social democracy. Lenin believed that the root of those mistakes made by Rosa Luxemburg was that she paid too much attention to the economy and politics of imperialism; meanwhile, she neglected the particularity of the eastern countries, which made her fail to see the opportunities brought by the unbalanced development of imperialism both for the undeveloped nations and the proletariats.

The criticism reflected the fundamental distinction between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg on their study of imperialism: For Lenin, the starting-point of his study of imperialism was the national liberation movement around the world; however, for Rosa Luxemburg, the starting-point should be the struggle of capitalism for its survival and development in the world. It was precisely the varied starting-points upheld by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg that led them to varied opinions on a series of issues. Take their opinions of the nation-state in the imperialist era as an example: for Rosa Luxemburg, she believed that the public's self-government was the basis of nation self-determination, and nation self-determination was not conducive to solving the problem of the public's self-government; however, Lenin emphasized that countries with underdeveloped politics, economics, and culture must firstly obtain the nation

self-determination, otherwise, the public's self-government was just an empty word. For another example, on the issue of capital accumulation, Rosa Luxemburg advocated external expansion; meanwhile, Lenin advocated internal markets. One more case, their views on social democracy were different from each other. Therefore, when Lenin criticized Rosa Luxemburg's view on these issues, he actually upheld a total negation of Rosa Luxemburg's theory.

However, if Rosa Luxemburg's theory was wrong in Lenin's opinion, why Lenin thought she was an "eagle"? As a matter of fact, it was a comment on Rosa Luxemburg as a brave proletarian revolutionary. Lenin pointed out: "But in spite of her mistakes she was—and remains for us—an eagle. And not only will communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her complete works (the publication of which the German communists are inordinately delaying, which can only be partly excused by the tremendous losses they are suffering in their severe struggle) will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of communists all over the world." (Ibid., p.643-644)

Unlike Lenin's comment on Rosa Luxemburg, Western Marxists upheld positive evaluation of these basic ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. They believed that Rosa Luxemburg definitely did not abandon the tradition of Marxism in her theory of capital accumulation and spontaneity; on the contrary, she developed Marx's dialectics and some other ideas. Certainly, there were flaws in her ideas, for example, she excessively emphasized on spontaneity, which led her to neglect the leadership played by the Proletarian Party in the Proletarian Revolution. Taking Lukács' evaluation on Rosa Luxemburg as an example, in his article "Rosa Luxemburg and Marxism," he claimed that Rosa Luxemburg conducted an overall and historical analysis of capitalism in her book of *The Accumulation of Capital*, which made the accumulation an issue of dialectics. In this sense, it must be admitted that Rosa Luxemburg's theory of capital accumulation did not exclude the tradition of Marxism. On the contrary, it showed that she had returned to the real and pure Marxist tradition—the unique method of Marxism. (Lukács: "Rosa Luxembourg and Marxism", see "History and Class Consciousness", Chongqing Publishing House, 1989, p. 38) It was a method concerning "the concrete totality of historical reality". Lukács believed that the

reason standing behind the distinction between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg was that these two great thinkers interpreted transformations of world from varied perspectives. Therefore, it was not a question of being right or wrong. As a matter of fact, each interpretation had developed the theory of Marx. However, in the field of political theory, Lukács criticized Rosa Luxemburg's interpretation. He pointed out that Rosa Luxemburg denied "the full role played by the party in the revolution and its consciously political activities." (ibid., p. 394) on the issue of land in Russia. The denial of the possibility of a national war on ethnic issues had already been proven wrong. There were many other issues similar to this case. Even there were criticisms; Lukács did not completely deny the correctness of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of spontaneity. He believed: "What matters is the interrelationship between spontaneity and conscious mastery." (ibid., p. 342) In the critique of spontaneity, the consciousness of the proletariat was established, and from which Lukács included Rosa Luxemburg's theory of capital accumulation and spontaneity into his critique of class-consciousness.

Comparing Lenin's and Lukács's evaluations on Rosa Luxemburg, it suggested that even though Eastern and Western Marxists faced the same issue in reality, and both of them criticized Rosa Luxemburg for her negation of the bright role played by the proletarian party in workers' movement (neither could her negation of the consciousness of the proletarian revolution win the credit from other thinkers), they did not completely reject her views. They believed that although Rosa Luxemburg's political theory went on with flaws, her emphasis on the methods of historical analysis and her ideas of the struggle in daily life were the inheritance and the development of Marx's historical dialectics, which was also the resource for constructing Marxists' theory of ideological critique. At this point, Rosa Luxemburg's ideas were an indispensable part of Marxists' interpretations of Marx's theory in the 20th century. Although the evaluations on her ideas had a critical tone, it also had some positive implications.

2 the "Eagle" of thinker, a partial criticism based on the tone of affirmation

On the common negation of Rosa Luxemburg in 1920s and 1930s, Lefebvre firstly proposed a new principle of researches on Marxists. In the book "On the

State-from Hegel to Stalin and Mao Zedong", he claimed: " The ideological movement that has been going on for more than a century should not be attributed just to 'Marxism' alone, or even just to the work of a certain "Marxist". Instead, we should look at the issue in a big picture, and look at the issue as a whole... Each piece of work must be treated as a hypothesis about a political possibility, and it should also be treated as an obstacle standing in a future. It might be a possibility that without Marx and Marxists, the modern world would not have such an out-looking. It is also possible that even if this or that person did not exist, the direction of the development of the world would have been determined already." (Henry Lefebvre: *On the State - from Hegel to Stalin and Mao Zedong*, Chongqing Publishing House, 1988, p.176) It should not be doubted that this principle is conducive for evaluating Rosa Luxemburg's ideas. Because he asked to break up the exiting paradigm that simply put Marx and Marxism in opposition; moreover, he did not approve of solving problems in isolation. He believed that when examining an individual or the philosophy of an era, one should regard neither the individual nor the philosophy of an era as a simple and non-contradictory whole. As a matter of fact, in proposing this research approach, he had already regarded Rosa Luxemburg's ideas as a complex whole, and he emphasized that evaluators should and must put this complex whole in multi-angle observation. For Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, Lefebvre did not approve of her political theory; however, for her core idea-the accumulation of capital, he affirmed it. He believed that her view not only ran through Marx's historical dialectics, but also developed Marx's theory of Capital. In Marx's theory of Capital, only the production of surplus value was examined; but in the theory of Rosa Luxemburg, she examined the realization of surplus value. (Lenin's discussion on this issue was weaker than Rosa Luxemburg.) Although Lukács also affirmed Rosa Luxemburg's theory of capital accumulation from the perspective of historical dialectics, Lefebvre not only affirmed the significance of her theory in the field of methodology, but also affirmed its own value as a theory with insightfulness. Lefebvre thought it was "a dialectical, distinctive and attractive view of Rosa Luxemburg" (ibid., p. 181). It was not only an affirmation of Rosa Luxemburg's thought, but also put her ideas under a new paradigm to discover its values.

Furthermore, Vranicki and Kołakowski had made interpretations of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas under the same paradigm. According to Vranicki, even though both Rosa Luxemburg and Kautsky were members of the Second International as Marxists, they represented two theoretical directions of this period: "Kautsky reflects, to some extent, the ups and downs of theories of the Social Democratic Party. However, Rosa Luxemburg is not only the most outstanding glorious image of this social democratic period, but also the negation of this era." (Vranicki: History of Marxism, People's Publishing House, 1986 edition, p. 367) Since Rosa Luxemburg's thinking was a negation of that era, one cannot just evaluate the correctness of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas by specific historical events happened at that time. Instead, one should interpret Rosa Luxemburg's ideas from a historical perspective of the future, which would lead us to discover the eternity and profound contents contained in Rosa Luxemburg's thoughts. At this viewpoint, Vranicki not only affirmed the creativity of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of capital accumulation, but also defended Rosa Luxemburg on every issue criticized by Lenin. The reason he provided was that Lenin's proposal on the workers' movement was in line with the situation at the time, but Rosa Luxemburg's forewarn of the dangers of leadership bureaucratization is predictive. (Ibid., p. 372)

In "Main Currents of Marxism", Kołakowski considered Rosa Luxemburg as an extremely important part of Marxist history. On the one hand, she developed Marxism by her work of the Accumulation of Capital; On the other hand, she had become the most important ideological resource of the New Left movement in the 1960s as a symbol of opposition to Soviet Orthodox Marxism. (Kołakowski: Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. 2(Oxford) Craredon Press, 1978, p.97)

Many scholars of Marxism gave positive comments Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, which were parts of Marxist's studies that consider Rosa Luxemburg's ideas as a complex whole. Although, until now, the comments on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas still have been varied, the keynote was certainly the affirmation. At this point, Rosa Luxemburg was no longer just praised as an "eagle" of revolutionary, but also as an "eagle" of thinker.

3 a rethinking of the relationship between Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and Marx's theory

Marxists have never stopped excavating the theoretical value of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, but tones of evaluation have not been flat. For example, in the 1920th and 1930s, people generally denied the insightfulness of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas; but, since then, due to the change of research paradigm, the public began to hold a positive attitude toward Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, which was specifically reflected in the two above-mentioned periods. Comparing the researches of Rosa Luxemburg within these two periods, although both of them maintained a positive attitude, neither the degree of certainty nor the research paradigms were the same.

For the first period that happened in 1950s and 1980s, the research on Rosa Luxemburg had been under the paradigm of "Back to Marx", and during that time she was praised as the "Eagle" of Revolutionary that was a partial affirmation based on the keynote of criticism. In this period of time, the research on Rosa Luxemburg was mainly carried out as part of Marxist history, which focused on the inevitability in politics and economics. The reason that Rosa Luxemburg's ideas could be affirmed in the paradigm of "Back to Marx" was that she adhered to the revolutionary conclusion of Marx's book of Capital, and she insisted on explaining the phenomenon of imperialism from the perspective of historical inevitability. Therefore, in the paradigm of "Back to Marx", she was often recognized as a brave revolutionary who upheld Marx's theory of revolution. Although the study during this period could not completely change the keynote of criticism upheld by previous scholars, neither could it be regarded as a great breakthrough in ideological research on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, however, it was definitely a turning-point in the study of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, and it laid the foundation for further researches after the 1990s.

For the second period that happened after the 1990s, researches on Rosa Luxemburg had been under the paradigm of "Marxism", and at that time she was credited as the "Eagle" of Thinker that was a partial criticism based on the keynote of affirmation. During this period of time, scholars no longer sought to

evaluate Rosa Luxemburg from the identity between Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and Marx's theory; instead, they made effort to find out the uniqueness and creativity of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas. Under the paradigm of "Marxism", Rosa Luxemburg was recognized as a great thinker who contributed to the innovation of Marx's theory of Capital. More specific, at this time, scholars explained how Rosa Luxemburg developed the ideas of Marx in the light of the issues happened in modern world, which was a great change compared with the previous one that took Marx's word as the only method to explain the issues of capitalism. It examined the inheritance between Rosa Luxemburg and Marx, and the contribution that Rosa Luxemburg had done in practice as a supplementary theory to Marx thought of Capitalism. In other word, interpreting Rosa Luxemburg's ideas under the paradigm of Marxism, it not only revealed the identity between Rosa Luxemburg and Marx in exploring historical inevitability, but also showed the uniqueness and creativity of Rosa Luxemburg in her theory of imperialism.

"Back to Marx" and "Marxism" symbolized two completely different periods in the study of Marxist's ideas. By comparing these two periods, we could see clearly not only the pattern of scholars' evaluation of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, but also the difference between Rosa Luxemburg' ideas and Marx's theory, which also triggered our reconsideration of the relationship between Marx's theory and Marxists' ideas. More specifically, overviewing these studies, we could see the changed pattern on the research of Rosa Luxemburg in the field of epistemology and methodology: In epistemology, the comments of affirmation on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas focused mainly on the process of capitalization within and without the capital countries, as well as her ideas of the social democracy; in terms of methods, the research on Rosa Luxemburg paid more attention to explain the creativity of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas. As a matter of fact, it could be said that the study of Rosa Luxemburg had become an important part of the public's interpretations of the world in the 20th century. No matter whether they held a positive attitude towards Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, or a negative one, the questions she raised could not be bypassed. In addition, because of the changed research paradigm, Rosa Luxemburg did not appear in the eyes of the public and scholars as a radical leftists in the early 20th centuries, but appeared as a

foreteller and pioneer of Marxism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Last but not the least, overviewing the changed keynote of comments on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, what we could see is not only the shift of research paradigm, but also the charm of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas that is a complex deserved multi-angle observation, which has passed the test of time and the re-examination of other scholars.