

# CRITICAL STUDY FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT TO THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY: FROM ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE

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**Keywords:** Enlightenment thought. Cultural industry. Critical theory. Capitalism.

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**Resumen:** El negocio cultural proporciona a la gente productos culturales estandarizados y estilizados con fines políticos específicos, transformándose en un arma de gobierno ideológica falsa y engañosa que paraliza la conciencia pública y elimina la individualidad, así como en cómplice del gobierno centralizado. La industria cultural sofoca la creatividad cultural y la individualidad humana para apoyar la autoridad capitalista mediante la infiltración ideológica. El objetivo de este artículo es promover la cultura al tiempo que se critica la industria cultural. El papel del pensamiento ilustrado era principalmente cumplir una función de crítica cultural, logrando una transformación creativa de la supervivencia humana en la crítica y fomentando así la producción de un nuevo tema. En consecuencia, a la hora de analizar la crítica del pensamiento ilustrado sobre el negocio cultural, es crucial establecer el significado esencial de la teoría crítica de Adorno sobre la industria cultural. Este artículo intenta reinterpretar la crítica de la industria cultural introduciendo ideas ilustradas. El pensamiento ilustrado es inicialmente discordante, aunque engloba métodos de comprensión totalmente distintos. Estas dos perspectivas y tensiones opuestas surgirán sin duda dialécticamente en el futuro proceso de desarrollo histórico, y la crítica de la industria cultural puede desempeñar un papel esencial en el fomento de la construcción cultural.

**Palabras clave:** Pensamiento Ilustrado. Industria Cultural. Teoría Crítica. Capitalismo.

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## CRITICAL STUDY FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT TO THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY: FROM ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article has been to promote culture by criticizing the cultural industry. Enlightenment thought played an essential role in performing the function of cultural criticism and promoting the creative transformation of human survival through criticism towards the generation of a new subject. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the essential significance of Adorno's critical theory of the cultural industry when discussing the criticism of Enlightenment thought towards the cultural industry. This article attempted to reinterpret the criticism of the cultural industry by introducing Enlightenment thoughts, recognizing that Enlightenment thought was not entirely harmonious but contained completely different ways of understanding. These two distinct understandings and their contradictions can dialectically co-exist in future historical development processes, and the criticism of the cultural industry can play an important role in promoting cultural construction.

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### INTRODUCTION

Enlightenment thought has been found worldwide, with the European (French) and Chinese (May 4th) Enlightenment being the most representative. The European Enlightenment provides significant reference value for the May 4th Enlightenment in China. Enlightenment is a process of emergence, formation and development of concepts and values in a new era. From a modern linguistic perspective, Enlightenment can also be interpreted as the emergence of a new language. However, this development follows certain procedures, and although thinking and systems are relatively mature, there are no fully mature ideas during this process. Numerous ideas emerged in competition, with some opposing and others supporting one another.

Eventually, certain ideas gained dominance, and from a historical perspective, these movements were considered Enlightenment. However, even if these ideas eventually became mainstream, they did not result from formal education, but rather as a reflection and choice of personal environment during that era. Therefore, Enlightenment is not equal to "education", and no single "educator" can represent it. Additionally, one might question the aim of "enlightenment" and whether or not it promotes "ignorance". Due to the ideological liberation fostered by the Western Enlightenment, which occurred amidst a crisis of belief,

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many criticisms of faith were espoused. Yet, in terms of its ideological content and many ways of thinking or reflection, these criticisms failed to break free of the cultural atmosphere of orthodoxy. Traditional culture is people-oriented, pays attention to integrity, emphasizes harmony, attaches importance to education and advocates moral governance. It is still an important resource for China's reform and opening-up and cultural construction. However, some traditional cultures are seriously divorced from modern life, which affects people's lives.

The cultural industry's emergence is the inevitable product of the development of productive forces in modern society. In Adorno's view, this new capitalist economic form regards cultural products as a commodity for production and exchange, which may not only improve the output and quality of cultural products, but also bring a series of negative effects, such as entertainment, flooding and commercialization. These negative influences deviate from the intrinsic value of culture itself and the development direction of human civilization. The cultural industry's essence is to serve capitalist rulers through adhering to their ideas. The Frankfurt School enlarged the cultural industry's scope, relating it more closely to real-life situations. However, in doing so, its power to critique society was weakened, leaving it unable to escape the grip of counterfeit art in the modern era. Therefore, only by engaging in criticism and reflection can the cultural industry achieve the goal of enlightening the public and providing services for real-life contexts.

Platformization can transform the cultural industry's political economy. The expansion of the economy and infrastructure of online platforms influences the production and circulation of cultural content and creates opportunities for critical dialogues across business research, political economics, and other fields (Nieborg; Thomas, 2018, p. 4275). However, a thorough comprehension of popular culture and its pedagogical function is necessary (Maudlin; Jennifer, 2015, p. 368). In the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno, two completely distinct views on Enlightenment coexist. The first views Enlightenment as a self-preservation confusion that began on the day Western culture emerged. Prior to the end of the 17th century, French women had limited access to education. However, by the end of the 18th century, they made significant contributions to the history of French Enlightenment and thought (Talamante; Jasmine, 2021, p. 37). Reflecting on the history of the Enlightenment and the significance of reading, writing and critical thinking has become increasingly crucial in addressing contemporary discrimination (Swales, 2017, p. 131).

Adorno's critical thoughts on the cultural industry played a crucial role in the Enlightenment thoughts of the Frankfurt School. He believed that the essence of material worship in the cultural industry marked the end of true art. Even when it appears to play a leading role in the cultural industry, people's consumption interests are actually a social preconstruction manipulated by the cultural industry (Duffy Brooke, 2016, p. 441). The

cultural industry's standardization and unity control not only individuals but also the entire society. Although Adorno partially acknowledged the recreational function of popular culture, he held a negative view on the cultural industry. However, Adorno's critical theory of the cultural industry retains its unique value in the modern era of popular culture. Adorno aimed to build a theory for modernist art and find a way through art to criticize the alienated reality of capitalism.

In the first part, this paper introduced Adorno's ideological background and put forward his conceptual framework of criticizing cultural industry in the context of Enlightenment. In the second part, they discussed three specific criticisms of cultural industry put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer. In the third part, the paper described the influence of Adorno's perspective on the reconstruction and development of China's cultural industry.

## **1 EMERGENCE AND DEFINITION OF THE CRITICAL THEORY OF CULTURAL INDUSTRY FROM ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL INDUSTRY CRITICISM**

#### (1) Social background

Adorno began his formal education in 1922 and lived through a period of significant societal transformation until his passing in 1969. During his time in Germany, the rise of Hitler's faction and fascist dictatorship resulted in the intellectuals' brutal persecution, leaving a legacy of white terror and totalitarian influence on society (Jones, 2016, p. 751). Additionally, the success of the October Revolution in Russia had a tremendous impact on the capitalist system. Following the Revolution and under the Bolsheviks' leadership, workers and peasants' alliance established a socialist country in which the proletariat took center stage. The end of bourgeois domination and the transition from capitalism to socialism effectively marked the end of an era.

Between 1929 and 1933, a devastating economic crisis swept through the capitalist countries, beginning in the United States and rapidly spreading throughout various economic fields, resulting in an unprecedented recession. It was during this period that Keynesianism emerged as a viable economic theory and practice. Following the technological revolution that occurred after World War II, a series of consequential changes occurred within many Western capitalist countries. These changes allowed for the rapid application of technology and manpower developed during the war to every material production sector, thus leading to large-scale production and playing an instrumental role in advancing the development of social productivity. Keynes' generalization of reality and the resulting capitalist production relations once again turned to socialized mass production, easing the historical contradictions of capitalism. The emergence of state monopoly capital is based on the alleviation of the two

opposing contradictions of socialized mass production and private production. As a result, the modern capitalist production relations have granted new growth opportunities to the cultural industry's productive forces.

## (2) Cultural background

Adorno and his contemporaries considered this shift a brand new cultural phenomenon within the industry (Yao; Wang, 2015, p. 175; Johnston, 2015, p. 5). It is important to note that the shift was not solely due to the emergence of film and television as mass media. Rather, it was the result of an amalgamation of regional and social changes that occurred in the mid-19th century and the new aesthetic concepts that emerged from them. The cultural industry was forced to adapt to these changes, which led to the industry's technological and industrialization-driven transformation. There are both advanced culture and extreme culture in modern one. There are differences in regional cultures in China, and the blending of multi-ethnic cultures has the particularity of complexity, diversity and inheritance. Advanced culture not only plays a systematic role in the education of socialist core values, but also plays an important leading role in economic and social development.

For cultural consumers, the shift towards a visual culture has resulted in the availability of information that previously required reading to be solely accessible through visualization. Thus, the so-called visual culture constitutes a culture of electronic images. Adorno was active during an era when he was highly critical of the cultural industry. During this time, printing culture was on a decline, while the popularity of visual culture was rapidly increasing. It can be argued that Adorno's critical theory of the cultural industry was born out of this situation and that it emerged as a direct response to it.

## 1.2 PROCESS OF CRITICIZING THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY UNDER THE ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHT FROM ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE

In history, industry initially began as a handicraft trade, which then evolved into a large mechanical industry (Bronner, 2011, p. 41). As industry began to penetrate other industries, it played a significant role in promoting productivity. However, once industrial products entered the category of culture, there remained skeptical debates surrounding their ability to bring about cultural prosperity and development. It is widely accepted that machinery cannot create civilization, but it can create human spiritual products. Many have expressed doubts regarding this phenomenon. Proponents of cultural industrialization argue that it is a means to achieve nationalization, enabling all individuals to enjoy the spiritual wealth that humanity creates. Conversely, some argue that the cultural industry is subordinate to commerce, characterized as a purely commercial behavior rather than cultural development. In Adorno's later years, he relentlessly criticized the cultural industrial revolution, which

resulted in an aesthetic criticism of the cultural industrial revolution. Adorno's critique represented a significant contribution to the ongoing debate over the cultural industry.

The reproduction of original artwork under industrialized conditions can still achieve certain dissemination effects of art. Adorno rejected the notion of the artistic essence of "reproduction" from an elitist perspective, attributing it instead to commercialization (Fatorachian, 2018, p. 642). Furthermore, Adorno criticized the cultural industry from another perspective, namely its control over thought. He believed that the media, such as newspapers, magazines and radio, conveyed the legitimacy of ruling ideologies, which allowed the fascist regime to ascend to power. Adorno, together with Horkheimer, wrote *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, an influential book that contained thorough and strongly critical analyses of the cultural industrial revolution, including its role in perpetuating mass deception (Crawford, 2009, p. 220).

Cultural industry and modern art are two objects that Adorno's aesthetics focuses on. Adorno's criticism of cultural industry stems from his firm belief in human freedom and realistic concern.

Adorno only saw that technological progress would make culture lose its aesthetic value, and ignored that the application of scientific and technological means in the development of art was inevitable for historical development. The emergence of new scientific and technological means will create more new cultural forms.

### 1.3 RE-UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRITICAL THEORY OF CULTURAL INDUSTRY FROM ADORNO'S PERSPECTIVE

#### (1) Cultural industry and mass culture

Adorno was a founding member of the Frankfurt School and the first to draw attention to mass culture in contemporary cultural theory. In the early 1940s, he began to explore the issue of popular culture and established a special forum dedicated to its analysis from multiple perspectives. Adorno, along with Horkheimer, published *Dialectics of Enlightenment* in 1947, a critical work that thoroughly analyzes popular culture (Pocius, 1988, p. 87). Among the notable essays in the book, "The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as a Deception to the Masses" served as an important critique of the phenomenon (Marland, 2017, p. 1). In this piece, Adorno aimed to examine the interplay between higher culture and mass culture, marking the inception of a new era in the study of culture and society.

## (2) Concept of cultural industry

The term “popular culture” was commonly used before the publication of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. However, Adorno later changed the terminology to “cultural industry” in his subsequent book, *Re exploring the Cultural Industry* (Shang, 2021, p. 121). Adorno was notably opposed to so-called mass culture, asserting that it was a dominant culture, rather than a culture that served the public. He believed that mass culture had a strong tendency to suppress its audiences’ individuality and framed creativity under the guise of an instrument of capitalist interest (Levman, 2013, p. 145).

Adorno and Horkheimer’s preference for the term “cultural industry” over “popular culture” is rooted in Adorno’s belief that the mass culture concept may potentially be mistakenly associated with serving the people. The cultural industry refers to an industry that mass-produces and disseminates cultural products, combining both concepts of ideas and economy, and embedded within the confines of a capitalist commodity economy. As a modern cultural form that mirrors contemporary societal developments, it is characterized by information, commercialization and industrialization. Its primary features include the industrial production of culture, mass consumerism, as its market and modern media, as its primary method of dissemination (Lawrence; Nelson, 2002, p. 430). In *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno extensively analyzed and critiqued the fundamental characteristics of the cultural industrial revolution.

## (3) Cultural industry’s characteristics

The primary characteristic of cultural industrialization is its commercialization of cultural and artistic products. Adorno regarded every cultural industry’s product as being tainted with commercialism, lacking the special meaning and creation rules of art itself. The value principles obtained through commodity exchange heavily influence the cultural industry’s production. Adorno argued that cultural industrial products were not works of art but rather mere handicrafts. Completely commercialized, the cultural industry only recognized benefits (Li, 2012, p. 63). The cultural industry’s primary goal is to accurately estimate the practicality of a commodity, meet people’s needs and capture the market. Consequently, artistic creation is forced to conform to market competition, while the cultural industry prioritizes the economy over aesthetic value and critical function of art. The cultural industry’s close association with markets, commodities and exchanges has transformed it into an industry of mass production, completely eroding its humanistic significance and value. Culture is no longer a means of enriching people’s lives, but instead, it has become a tool for generating profit. Adorno’s criticism of the cultural industry points to the commodification of culture as a grave loss of humanistic values, placing increased emphasis on the value of artistic creation beyond its exchange value.

In the cultural industry, artists are subordinated to the economy, their creations subjected to a production process that adheres to fixed frameworks. Their structures conform to factory standards, and movies and broadcasts can no longer be considered as art, but rather as commodities. As commodities, artistic products lose their individuality and are reduced to mere objects of exchange, becoming subservient to the economy. Adorno took music as a case study and identified three aspects of its impact in this regard. First, he argued that the distinction between “light music” and “serious music” should be replaced with “music with a market” and “music without a market” (Brown, 2002, p. 292). Secondly, creators of music no longer seek artistic perfection and aesthetic value, but instead prioritize economic gain, catering purely to the customer’s taste and ultimately becoming slaves to their customers. Thirdly, the value of most works of art is determined by their saleability, and their worth is dependent on whether the viewer can cough up the required price, representing an investment effect.

#### (4) Cultural industry’s nature and role

Firstly, from the perspective of the relationship between cultural industry and art, Adorno posited that the cultural industry’s emergence represents the demise of art from the perspective of their relationship (Fatorachian, 2018, p. 633). Although industrialization has made art widely accessible, it has also transformed it into a mere commodity with little intrinsic value. The incorporation of industrial technologies into art has externalized its original intrinsic meaning, turning it into a finished product without inherent goals. Adorno argued that an extremely industrialized art would represent the culmination of this process, serving as an overall transformation to meet higher technological standards. This industrialization marks the end of art, exacting a toll on its essential nature. Art has been reduced to a pure technological domain, subjected to repression and deprived of its meaning. In this essence, the cultural industry employs extreme approaches, such as concretization and mentalism, to further its aims.

Adorno’s elitism and pessimism that cultural industry is the social cement to control the masses, and the masses are completely passive, have a far-reaching influence on the later study of mass culture. Even if it is questioned and criticized, this just highlights the importance of Adorno’s thought. The development of popular culture is a historical progress-; The masses are not passive, but active. They can utilize and transform mass culture according to their daily situations and needs.

Concretization, as Adorno argued, refers to the use of art as an object of utility, thereby altering the audience’s relationship with it. The audience no longer perceives art as an aesthetic illusion that they become a part of it, but merely as a material commodity, stripped of its individuality. Meanwhile, mentalism perceives art as a mere projection of the

audience's psychology onto a blank canvas, devoid of any spiritual or intellectual shock. With the cultural industry's aid, authentic art and artists are disregarded and swallowed up, serving to fill the void and paralyze the public. This cultural industry's characteristic has the function of deceiving people into seeking solace in the colorful and varied products it offers, thereby masking the frustrations of their daily lives.

The cultural industry has successfully convinced people that the current order is inherently orderly, resolving contradictions in their lives. However, in reality, the contradictions continue to exist and remain unresolved. From Adorno's perspective, the cultural industry serves as a manipulative, Enlightenment mechanism, perpetuating a universally enforced ideal of an eternally better and more valuable world that people must unconditionally embrace (Fatorachian, 2018, p. 644). Consequently, the cultural industry instills a sense of obedience, which reinforces the existing order and established rule. In contrast to *laissez-faire* periods, industrial civilization can express its displeasure with the capitalist system but is unable to pose a real threat to it at its core. This is the crux of industrial civilization. In this alienated society, the cultural industry has become an integrated tool for manipulating and controlling people's ideology to augment their power. All entertainment activities in the cultural industry are dull and tedious, depriving consumers of their thoughts, emotions and subjective consciousness. The cultural industry has become a materialized existence that deviates from the essence of the subject. With the monopoly control of entertainment means and media, cultural industry has the power to manipulate people's daily life until their inner consciousness.

Adorno pointed out that cultural industry was kidnapped by capital logic and eventually became an accomplice of bourgeois rule. Facing the cultural reality of late capitalism, he fundamentally reflected and criticized the abstract rational identity thinking mode and the alienation of Enlightenment rationality caused by it, and revealed the negative role of instrumental rationality and its cultural crisis.

#### 1.4 CULTURAL INDUSTRY'S ENLIGHTENMENT AND ANTI-ENLIGHTENMENT

Adorno argued that the cultural industry does not prioritize literal understanding, but instead it rationalizes and standardizes communication technology to exhibit an established order (Feng, 2020, p. 253). The cultural industry operates on a universal scale, influencing people's judgment and playing a pivotal role in social life, which some interest groups exploit. These groups continuously instill illusory ideas into the masses through modern scientific and technological media to propagate the notion that real life is happy. Pop songs, movie stars and soap operas are rigid and unchanging in this industry, introducing audiences into a mechanical reaction system, in Adorno's evaluations (Shen, 2018, p. 18). As the public's aesthetic outlook remains constrained in a state of "childlike innocence", art quickly entered a

state of extreme poverty, entirely dominated by the cultural industry. In the cultural industry, particularly in media technology, which was originally an expansion of human self-power, there is now a loss of human self-power. The Enlightenment is not an indication of progress, but rather a means of bringing people into a mythological world, a mythological state that poses a threat to language itself.

According to Adorno, cultural and industrial forms, such as commercial advertising, have rendered words, such as slogans, meaningless, and the carnival abuse of these languages has intensified their ambiguity (Robinson, 2017, p. 171). This phenomenon demonstrates that the contemporary cultural industry is building a false world. During the Enlightenment, intellectual discourse was a powerful force, and the cultural industry's representation of it was apparent. The intermingling of cultural and entertainment discourse led to the emergence of entertainment intellectualization in the cultural industry. However, language, as the carrier of knowledge, is leading people towards a chaotic, murky and uncertain state of being. Adorno posited that the cultural industry's emergence leads to the decline of Enlightenment thought. He critically examined the concept of entertainment in the cultural industry, which in the ordinary people's eyes, is an entertainment industry closely related to its commercial nature. However, Adorno rethought the concept of entertainment and its seriousness in art. If entertainment can break away from various constraints, it can create great art. In his research on the cultural industry, Adorno found that due to the industry's involvement, its commercial nature has entirely overshadowed the free role of entertainment, causing the masses to seek solace in meaningless associations. The cultural industry, according to Adorno, is responsible for destroying the true meaning of entertainment, which should have the seriousness of life.

Adorno argued that the Enlightenment eventually leads to Anti-enlightenment, which not only disintegrates myths but also humans themselves. According to Adorno, expressions in artistic works are not only a direct representation of the material level but also a complex medium for it. Various elements of art can mobilize through dedicated observation, thereby enabling the mutual expression of the elements of art. These elements can communicate a residual shock in art in a cognitive way, which Adorno regarded as a shock to history. It imparts the authenticity of art itself and enables people to break free of the cultural industry's shackles in an instant. Such a sense of shock, conveyed through art, can help individuals to question their beliefs and break free of the constraints of entrenched ideology.

Adorno's criticism of cultural industry has great theoretical value, which enriches the perspective of popular culture and expands the plane of cultural research. However, Adorno's denial of the cultural industry in a general way is biased. We cannot completely stifle and deny mass culture, because the culture of any period ultimately belongs to the period when it came into being, and we should constantly treat it dialectically from the perspective of

development during the historical changes. Only in this way can the real value of Adorno's critical theory of cultural industry be fully reflected.

## 2 MAIN CONTENT OF CULTURAL INDUSTRY CRITICISM

Horkheimer and Adorno shared a critique of the cultural industry, emphasizing that “[...] the most fundamental characteristic of genuine culture is freedom” (Jones, 2016, p. 768). Both scholars argued that culture should embody human aesthetics and independence. In a capitalist society, the hope is that people will rediscover their art, find the meaning of art from the works itself and exercise their individual judgement, rather than succumbing to instilled ideas imposed on them by others. Adorno saw the Enlightenment result of the cultural industry as transforming people into ignorant beings who willingly lose their capacity to resist mediocrity. Therefore, Horkheimer and Adorno's critical theory approach underscores the significance of individual freedom, which culture must embody. With the further victory of technology and market economy, the efficiency of production and dissemination of cultural industries has been improved, and cultural industrial products have entered thousands of households and become cultural goods in the family.

The cultural industry is a means by which capitalists control people in advanced capitalist societies (Ling, 2003, p. 83). It has a clear commodity nature, as Horkheimer points out in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, where anything that has utility value can be replaced by exchange value in the production of cultural products. Thus, it is easy to see that, in the late capitalist period, the cultural industry is positioned as a commodity. It is a fake artistic creation aimed at making profits and using advertising as a means. Its production is no longer to meet people's spiritual needs, but to meet the capitalists' profit needs. As science and technology progress, communication efficiency improves, packaging technology innovates, product style changes and the consumers' purchasing desires are stimulated, making the commodification of cultural products increasingly strong. At this point, both products, consumers, and even the creators of works are trapped in the illusion created by capital. The cultural industry is a key driver of this commodification, which shapes and constrains people's lives towards a solely capital-driven consumption.

Adorno is too pessimistic about mass culture, while the populist view of mass culture, represented by Fiske, is too optimistic. Therefore, for the construction and development of popular culture in China, we cannot completely favor one side and abandon the other one. The correct way should be to use Adorno's popular culture theory and popular pessimism to examine and criticize Chinese popular culture, and to use Fisk's optimistic popular culture theory to actively develop popular culture.

## 2.1 CRITIQUE OF STANDARDIZATION

Horkheimer and Adorno were highly critical of the cultural industry's standardization, as expressed in their book *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (Jamie, 2016, p. 1). They argued that cultural industry's all components are produced by the same organization using the same terminology, resulting in a mass-produced sameness in the cultural products. (Jones, 2016, p. 752)

The production of cultural goods is primarily driven by the pursuit of profit, and a standardized assembly line production model significantly reduces production costs. Consequently, creators tend to follow the market direction dictated by capital, rather than creating according to their own artistic vision, leading to an influx of similar art or cultural products that inundate the market. As a result, art loses its intrinsic value. Although various cultural goods are available, their essence is uniform, leading people to gradually become dull and forced to accept a formal and empty aesthetics. In such a cultural bubble, creativity and innovation are suppressed, and individuals are constrained by a standardized perception of culture, leading to an impoverishment of society's cultural landscape.

Horkheimer argued that, in the cultural industry, personality is fake, not only because of the standardization of production methods, but also because individuals can only tolerate the illusion of personality when they are fully consistent with the general society. Commodities produced, using standardization as their raw materials and forms under a fixed framework, have abandoned the uniqueness of culture and are ostensibly designed to meet the people's diverse cultural needs. However, in reality, they deprive people of their ability to think critically about their living conditions and social realities, and their thought patterns begin to conform to standardized ideas enforced by the ruling elite. Adorno adds that interest is the primary driver for the standardization of cultural products, and imitation is at its root. People are encouraged to seek familiarity in cultural products, leading to a self-propagating cycle that stifles creativity and perpetuates conformity.

## 2.2 CONTROLLING CRITICISM

Horkheimer and Adorno realized that the cultural industry's emergence was not an accident but an inevitable result of the development of capitalism to a degree of monopoly. The ruling elite were no longer satisfied with exercising political and economic control over people, but were now attempting to use capital to enforce restrictions on people's spirit and culture. To achieve this goal, they injected political consciousness into art and culture in an invisible way. They control the market through capital, use the market to guide production and consumption, and finally, inject pre-determined information into the public's minds. In this way, they used the cultural industry to control people at the ideological level, setting a

standard for all cultural goods, limiting people's choices and using this to dominate people's thinking, thus consolidating and maintaining the dominant position of capitalism. Overall, Horkheimer and Adorno highlighted the critical importance of recognizing the cultural industry's role and tactics in shaping and controlling society and individuals.

Throughout history, the cultural industry has made promises to the public, while simultaneously lying to them. By offering recreational functions, the cultural industry deceives the public, using entertainment to spread ideas and cheating the public under the guise of happiness. During the cultural industrial revolution, Enlightenment became an ideological tool for deceiving the people. Mass culture, in order to meet people's needs, provides false promises and entertainment, deconstructing the human beings' internal transcendence and resistance dimensions as subjects. This not only coerces people into recognizing reality but also compels them to submit to the existing rule. At the same time, the cultural industry presents an escape from reality, leading to the loss of the ability to criticize and deny. Essentially, the advanced capitalist society has been creating false demands and imposing them on the masses, causing people to be dominated by these fictitious demands and thus raising doubts about the existing society.

### 2.3 ENTERTAINMENT CRITICISM

Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledged that the cultural industry provides pleasure to the public, but they did not deny the fact that it is primarily driven by entertainment. They emphasized that the cultural industry has turned entertainment into a well-known deception. Furthermore, with the increasing stability of the cultural industry's position, it exercises greater control over the products that customers need, even stripping away any genuine sense of entertainment. This reveals that the cultural industry is built on a false premise of happiness, which is grounded in deceit.

Much like women's luxury bags, what was originally a dispensable demand, capitalists have stimulated its consumption through the market while barring the public from participating in the creation of capital. Though such consumption may bring temporary happiness, it ultimately constrains individuals. Horkheimer and Adorno assert that the cultural industry is a negative force, but this critique highlights the loss of popularity in cultural development. Now, the production goal of the cultural industry has shifted from meeting people's cultural needs to satisfying the profits of capitalism. The cultural industry has become closely linked to the bourgeoisie's political and economic pursuits, a means of ideological control that depletes the cultural spirit as the cultural market thrives. This raises an alarm for the construction of socialist cultural endeavors.

Promoting cultural development: any cultural and creative products and activities should be carried out in a certain cultural context, and culture will be passed on in the process. The cultural industry has a certain entertainment function. Through cultural products and cultural activities, people can relax, exercise, exchange emotions, and promote social and economic development.

## CONCLUSIONS

The cultural industry is an entertainment industry that employs modern technology to reproduce and distribute commercialized cultural works on a large scale. Culture is no longer just an art, but rather a means of survival for modern capitalism. Therefore, the cultural industry, which is mainly characterized by standardization, commercialization and technicalization, should be the subject of criticism. It is a pseudo-art and a means of accumulating wealth within the capitalist system. Adorno's critical thinking can assist individuals in avoiding the cultural industry's negative impacts while also leveraging its positive role in promoting the prosperity of multiculturalism. Adorno's criticism of the cultural industry and Enlightenment thinking are not antagonistic but are instead a rational assessment of the cultural industry's nature. However, with regards to China's cultural development, it is vital to refrain from focusing solely on the cultural industry's criticism and to not disregard the industry's enthusiasm. Adorno's criticism of the cultural industry not only serves as an extension of Enlightenment ideology but also reflects a practical requirement for China's real-life situation, which holds substantial significance for the reconstruction and development of China's cultural industry. In terms of developing culture, adhering to the correct theoretical direction, correctly understanding the people's creative subject status and respecting the inherent laws of cultural development are inevitable requirements for the development of Chinese culture in the new era. It aims to protect the artistic independence of culture and effectively utilize modern technological means for cultural construction. Taking the road of cultural development in Socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only way to build a new generation of cultural power.

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