

Revisiting Class: Precarious Groups under Globalization and the Myth of the "New Class"

HUANG Miaosen 1155243306

Introduction

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels observed that modern laborers "live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital." They further asserted that these laborers "are not only slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself" (Marx and Engels, 1848). This classic exposition reveals the vulnerable position of the working class under capitalist relations of production and provides significant inspiration for reflecting on labor relations in the contemporary era of globalization.

Globalization is not a homogeneous process; rather, it is a global movement driven by global financial hegemony and based on free markets. Standing points out that as the global market economy has evolved, labor markets have become more integrated, and new social divisions have quietly emerged (Standing, 2012). The global power operations of the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC), the transmission mechanisms of buyer-driven commodity chains, and the forms of control in the digital gig economy have spawned a large population of platform-dependent gig workers. Faced with multiple predicaments such as income instability, a lack of social security, and ambiguous occupational identities, this phenomenon has triggered a debate regarding whether an "emerging precariat" has been created.

Therefore, the central question of this paper is: Do global precarious groups truly constitute an independent "precariat class"? To answer this accurately, it is necessary to re-examine the core criteria of Marxist class theory in conjunction with the

concrete realities of the globalized era.

Global Precarious Groups and the Proposal of "Precariat"

Theory

The global hegemony of the Transnational Capitalist Class constitutes the macro-background for the emergence of precarious groups. According to Sklair's analysis of global capitalism, the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) consists of four fractions that act in concert through Elite Social Movement Organizations (ESMOs) to construct a global capitalist hegemony (Sklair, 1997). These organizations shape consumerism as a core social value, thereby weakening the legitimacy of trade unions and the consciousness of resistance, creating an ideological environment conducive to the production of precarious groups.

On this basis, the global transmission of buyer-driven commodity chains serves as the meso-mechanism for creating precarious groups. Transnational retailers, represented by Walmart, transfer cost pressures to the ends of the global supply chain through "Every Day Low Price" strategies and global sourcing. This powerful market drive forces suppliers into a "race to the bottom," ultimately transmitting instability to the workers at the periphery of global production networks (Gereffi and Christian, 2009).

Furthermore, the new type of precarity bred by the digital gig economy represents the latest morphology of contemporary precarious groups. Research by Wood et al. indicates that digital platforms achieve the commodification of labor through "demand-driven" and fragmented task allocation. This results in a large number of laborers lacking social security and labor rights, revealing the "double embeddedness" of digital labor. This new form of instability, governed by algorithmic control, has further expanded the scale of global precarious groups (Wood et al., 2019).

These three mechanisms collectively constitute the basic logic behind the generation of contemporary precarious groups. The ideological hegemony constructed by transnational capital drives the expansion of the global free market; buyer-driven

commodity chains transmit production pressure to the periphery; and the digital gig economy deepens unstable employment statuses. Together, they systematically erode institutional protections for laborers, spawning a massive global precarious population.

It is against this globalized backdrop that Standing proposed the concept of the precariat, arguing that this group possesses similar economic status and social conditions, thus constituting an independent new class (Standing, 2012). While proponents believe this theory reveals new changes in contemporary capitalism, critics question its weak theoretical foundations.

Theoretical Context and Core Criteria of Class Theory

To explore whether global precarious groups constitute a new class, we must return to the historical context of class theory. Traversing the wisdom of the sages, Marx's class theory, with its profound insight and practicality, provides the most powerful theoretical support for understanding class transitions in the era of globalization.

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx proposed the transformation of class from a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself," revealing that the formation of class consciousness requires shared historical experiences, similar interest demands, and systematic theoretical guidance. This is the critical link in the transition of a class from objective existence to subjective self-consciousness (Marx, 2008). In other words, class is not merely a theoretical concept but a realistic force that drives historical progress through collective action. Only a group capable of forming unified class action can be considered a class in the true sense.

Marxism explicitly states that class is the "product of specific production relations," formed under concrete historical conditions and modes of production, rather than merely a state of living (Marx, 2012). This criterion of division possesses both objectivity and historicity and serves as the cornerstone of Marxist class theory. Although production relations have undergone new changes such as financialization and digitalization in the era of globalization, ownership of the means of production

remains the basis of class analysis.

Compared to Weber's three-dimensional stratification theory and Bourdieu's capital theory, Marxist class theory forms a complete theoretical system based on the fundamental standpoint of historical materialism. It has been continuously verified and developed in the process of guiding class struggle and social movements, possessing explanatory power, practical relevance, and historical contextuality.

Critical Defects of the "Precariat" Concept

Based on the analytical framework of Marxist class theory, we argue that the concept of the "precariat" contains critical defects across three levels: the historical contextuality of its theoretical roots, the global divergence of empirical evidence, and the core criteria for determining class attributes.

First, a critique of historical contextuality reveals the temporal limitations of the "precariat" concept. From a Marxist perspective, the definition of "class" must be anchored in its historical position within production relations. As Munck critiques, "precarity" in the Global South has never been a "new product" of globalization but rather a long-term norm of colonial capitalism and post-colonial modes of production. For instance, the informal economy accounts for 60%–80% of total employment in Africa, and informal employment among the urban "marginal masses" in Latin America dates back to the era of "marginality theory" in the 1960s (Munck, 2013). The Eurocentric "new class" theory abstracts the "precarious state" under globalization into a "new class," essentially tailoring the historical reality of the South with the historical standards of the North. This clearly ignores the historical inevitability of the formation of the proletariat and neglects the historical processes of the primitive accumulation of capital and the exploitation of laborers.

Second, a critique of the global difference in empirical evidence exposes the limitations of the applicability of the "precariat" concept. Marxist class theory emphasizes not only historical context but also the requirement of a "common position in production relations" as an empirical basis. In his critique of the

"precariat" concept, Wright argues that the precariat as defined by Standing contains profound internal divisions: pre-working class segments, immigrants and minority groups, and highly educated youth. These three groups have distinct survival strategies and core demands, which may even conflict (Wright, 2016). Therefore, starting from the empirical basis of the "precariat" itself, it is evident that while it is aggregated by the negative characteristic of "instability," it lacks positive unified interests or the possibility of unified action. It is essentially a "fragmented group" rather than an "independent class."

Finally, a critique of the core criteria for determining class attributes fundamentally shakes the theoretical foundation of the "precariat" concept. Munck points out that informal workers in the South provide "flexibly exploited labor" for transnational capital, while workers in the North provide "stably exploited labor" for industrial capital; both are "tools of global capital accumulation" (Munck, 2013). Wright's analysis further indicates that between precarious groups and the traditional working class, opinions are unified regarding opposition to capital's labor flexibility strategies, welfare cuts, privatization, algorithmic control, and managerial despotism; their core interests essentially overlap (Wright, 2016). Furthermore, the actions of precarious groups are merely aimed at ameliorating their "precarious state" rather than pursuing "class emancipation," making them essentially "group struggles" rather than "class actions." Thus, precarious groups do not meet the Marxist criteria for an "independent class" in terms of position in production relations, material interests, or the possibility of collective action; they are, in reality, a fragmented branch of the working class under globalization.

Therefore, we believe that whether for traditional workers or precarious groups, the core demand is "resistance against capital exploitation and oppression." This is the fundamental basis for the union of global laborers. Confronting the historical facts of exploitation and oppression, and uniting the power of the world proletariat to guide class struggle, remains the contemporary value of Marxist class theory.

Conclusion

Marxist class theory remains evergreen and serves as a vital tool for understanding social change in the era of globalization. Marxism supports the development and innovation of theory by combining the characteristics of the times with specific national conditions, but this must be established on the basis of adhering to its fundamental principles. Consequently, this paper has revisited the core framework of Marxist class theory, concluding that despite the emergence of new features in contemporary capitalism, Marx's analysis of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat retains its explanatory power.

The analysis in this paper demonstrates that the precarious groups emerging within globalization do not constitute a nascent class. We must remember that capital accumulation is a continuous process long established on exploitation. The Transnational Capitalist Class, multinational corporations, and the digital gig economy have indeed collectively shaped contemporary labor-capital relations. Therefore, paying attention to the expansion of precarious groups is necessary; the unstable employment status of the vast majority of laborers calls for fairer institutional construction and policy adjustments. However, we must also recognize the differences in historical experiences and specific grievances across different regions and groups. Only by avoiding "one-size-fits-all" theoretical generalizations and policy designs can we truly organize the collective action of the working class to resist the bourgeoisie.

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Appendix

I acknowledge the use of Gemini2.5Pro(<https://gemini.google.com/>) to analyze this topic, break down requirements, and guide keyword searches on Google Scholar.

重访阶级：全球化下的不稳定群体与“新阶级”迷思

HUANG Miaosen 1155243306

引言

马克思和恩格斯在《共产党宣言》中指出，现代的工人只有当他们找到工作的时候才能生存，而且只有当他们的劳动增殖资本的时候才能找到工作。他们不仅仅是资产阶级的、资产阶级国家的奴隶，他们每日每时都受机器、受监工、首先是受各个经营工厂的资产者本人的奴役(Marx and Engels 1848)。这段经典论述揭示了资本主义生产关系下工人阶级的脆弱处境，也为我们思考当代全球化时代的劳动关系提供了重要启示。

全球化并非一个均质化的过程，而是由全球金融霸权推动，以自由市场为基础的全球运动。斯坦丁指出，随着全球市场经济的演进，劳动力市场更加一体化，新的群体划分已悄然兴起(Standing 2012)。跨国资产阶级的全球权力运作、买方驱动商品链的传导机制和数字零工经济的控制形式，催生了大量依赖平台的零工群体。他们面临着收入不稳定、社会保障缺乏、职业身份模糊等多重困境，引发关于“新兴的不稳定阶级是否被创造”的争论。

因此，本文的核心问题是：全球不稳定群体是否真的构成了一个独立的“不稳定阶级”？我们需要重新审视马克思主义阶级理论的核心标准，并结合全球化时代的具体现实，才能准确回答这一问题。

全球不稳定群体与“不稳定阶级”理论的提出

跨国资产阶级的全球霸权构成了不稳定群体产生的宏观背景。根据斯克莱尔的全球资本主义分析，跨国资产阶级(TTC)由四个分支构成，通过精英社会运动组织(ESMOs)协同行动，构建了全球资本主义霸权(Sklair 1997)。这些组织将消费主义塑造为社会的核心价值，从而弱化了工会的合法性和反抗意识，为不稳定群体的产生创造了意识形态环境。

在此基础上，买方驱动商品链的全球传导成为创造不稳定群体的中观机制。

以沃尔玛为代表的跨国零售通过“每日低价”策略和全球采购，将成本压力转嫁到全球供应链末端。这种强大的市场驱动迫使供应商进行“逐底竞争”，最终将不稳定性传导至全球生产网络末端的工人群体(Gereffi and Christian 2009)。

另一方面，数字零工经济孕育的新型不稳定代表了当代不稳定群体的最新形态。伍德等人的研究指出，数字平台通过“需求导向”和碎片化的任务分配实现劳动商品化，导致大量劳工缺乏社会保障和劳动权益，揭示出数字劳工的双重嵌入性。这种算法控制的新型不稳定形式，进一步扩大了全球不稳定群体的规模(Wood et al. 2019)。

这三种机制共同构成了当代不稳定群体产生的基本逻辑。跨国资本构建的意识形态霸权推动全球自由市场扩张，买方驱动商品链向末端传导生产压力，数字零工经济深化不稳定的就业状态。三者共同作用，系统性地削弱了劳动者的制度性保护，催生了规模庞大的全球不稳定群体。

正是在这样全球化背景下，斯坦丁提出了不稳定阶级(*precarariat*)概念，认为这一群体具有相似的经济地位和社会处境，构成了独立的新阶级(Standing 2012)。这一理论的既有支持者认为其揭示了当代资本主义的新变化，但其批评者质疑其薄弱的理论基础。

阶级理论的理论脉络与核心标准

在探讨全球不稳定群体是否构成新阶级的问题上，我们需要回到阶级理论的历史脉络中。遍历先贤智慧，马克思阶级理论凭借其深刻的洞察力和实践性，为理解当代全球化时代的阶级变迁提供了最有力的理论支撑。

在《哲学的贫困》中，马克思提出了阶级从“自在阶级”向“自为阶级”转变的观点，揭示出阶级意识的形成需要具备共同的历史经历、相似的利益诉求和系统的理论指导，是阶级从客观存在转向主观自觉的关键环节(Marx 2008)。也就是说，阶级不仅是理论概念，更是用集体行动推动历史进程的现实力量。只有能够形成统一的阶级行动能力的群体，才能成为真正意义上的阶级。

马克思主义中明确指出，阶级是“特定生产关系的产物”，形成于具体的历史条件与生产方式，而非生活状态(Marx 2012)。这一划分标准具有客观性和历史性，是马克思阶级理论的基石。虽然生产关系在全球化时代出现了金融化、数字化等

新变化，但生产资料的所有权仍然是阶级分析的基础。

相较于韦伯的三维分层理论和布迪厄的资本理论，马克思阶级理论在历史唯物主义的基本立场上，形成了完备的理论体系，并且在指导阶级斗争和社会运动的过程中不断得到验证和发展，具备解释性、实践性和历史语境性。

“不稳定阶级”概念的关键缺陷

基于马克思阶级理论的分析框架，我们提出“不稳定阶级”概念在理论根基的历史语境性、经验证据的全球差异性以及阶级属性的核心判定标准三个层面都存在关键缺陷。

首先，理论根基的历史语境性批判揭示了“不稳定阶级”概念的时代性局限。从马克思主义视角看，“阶级”的界定必须锚定其在生产关系中的历史位置。正如蒙克所批判的，南方的“不稳定”从来不是全球化的“新产物”，而是殖民资本主义与后殖民生产方式的长期常态。比如，非洲非正规经济占就业总量的 60%-80%，而拉丁美洲城市“边缘群体”的非正规就业可追溯至 20 世纪 60 年代“边缘性理论”时期(Munck 2013)。欧洲中心主义的新兴阶级论将全球化背景下的“不稳定状态”抽象为“新阶级”，本质是用北方的历史阶段标准裁剪南方的历史现实，显然忽视了无产阶级形成的历史必然性，忽视了资本主义原始积累与劳动者被剥削的历史过程。

其次，经验证据的全球差异性批判暴露了“不稳定阶级”概念的适用性局限。马克思阶级理论不仅强调历史语境，更要求以“生产关系中的共同位置”为实证基础。赖特在批判“不稳定阶级”概念的论文中提出，斯坦丁所定义的不稳定阶级内部存在前工人阶级、移民与少数群体、高学历青年这三重分化，然而这三类群体的生存策略与核心诉求差异明显，甚至存在冲突(Wright 2016)。因此，从“不稳定阶级”的经验依据本身出发，就不难看出其以“不稳定”这一消极特征聚合，却无积极的统一利益与行动可能，本质是“碎片化群体”而非“独立阶级”。

最后，阶级属性的核心判定标准批判从根本上动摇了“不稳定阶级”概念的理论基础。蒙克指出，南方非正规工人为跨国资本提供“灵活剥削的劳动”，北方工人为工业资本提供“稳定剥削的劳动”，二者均是“全球资本积累的工具”(Munck 2013)。赖特的分析则表明，不稳定群体与传统工人阶级，他们在反对资本的劳

动弹性化策略、福利削减与私有化、算法控制与管理专制等方面意见统一，二者的核心利益基本重叠(Wright 2016)。此外，不稳定群体的行动仅仅是为了改善“不稳定状态”，而非追求“阶级解放”，本质是“群体抗争”而非“阶级行动”。因此，不稳定群体在生产关系位置、物质利益、集体行动可能性上均不满足马克思主义“独立阶级”的标准，实则是工人阶级在全球化下的碎片化分支。

所以我们认为，无论是传统工人还是不稳定群体，其核心诉求都是“反抗资本的剥削与压迫”，这才是全球劳动者联合的根本依据。直面剥削压迫的历史事实，团结世界无产阶级力量指导阶级斗争，才是马克思阶级理论的当代价值所在。

结论

马克思阶级理论历久弥新，仍然是理解全球化时代社会变迁的工具。马克思主义支持结合时代特征和特定的国情发展和创新理论，但这必须建立在坚持其基本原理的基础上。因此，本文重访了马克思主义阶级理论的核心框架，认为尽管当代资本主义出现了新特征，但马克思的资产阶级与无产阶级分析仍然具有解释力。

本文的分析表明，在全球化中涌现的不稳定群体并不能构成一个新兴阶级。我们必须牢记，资本积累是长期以来建立在剥削之上的持续过程。跨国资产阶级、跨国公司与数字零工经济的确共同塑造了当代的劳资关系。因此，关注不稳定群体的扩张是必要的，广大劳动者的不稳定就业现状正在呼唤更加公平的制度建设与政策调整。但我们同时也要认识到不同地区、不同群体的在历史经历和具体困扰上的差异性，避免“一刀切”的理论概括和政策设计，才能真正组织起工人阶级反抗资产阶级的集体行动。

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附录

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