Discussion on labeling: Identity Politics and Ideology

Lucas Zhang

Pioneer Education School, Shenzhen, 518000, China

Abstract. Through analyzing Zizek's theory of ideology, this paper explores the causes and solutions of the labeling phenomenon. This article first explores the relationship between the phenomenon of labeling and identity politics, putting the phenomenon of labeling into the framework of identity politics and ideology for discussion. The paper then explores the mechanisms of identity politics that lead to the labeling phenomenon are internal mechanisms of movement for the self-reproduction of ideologies. This paper finally believes that due to the various mechanisms of ideology, the only way to break through the identity politics and ideological reproduction of labeling phenomena is to look directly at "events" and seek knowledge.

Keywords: Ideology; Identity politics; Dialectcs; Labeling people.

1. Introduction

This essay explores the identity politics problems behind social labeling and its causes by discussing the labeling phenomenon and its issues.Using Zizek's ideology theory, this essay concludes that the identity politics issues behind social labeling originated from the society's ideology structure. Furthermore, by analyzing identity politics through Zizek's ideology theory, we will arrive at a radical resistance method against ideologies.

The labeling phenomenon this essay discusses is a very universal one. It is universal in the synchronic and diachronic sense [1]. However, this essay does not analyze the labeling phenomenon from a historical perspective to analyze this political phenomenon's historical origins. Instead, this essay discusses the labeling phenomenon's way of existence in modern society. It applies Zizek's criticism of capitalism to point out the cause of this phenomenon in modern society's mental structure and what kind of social structure supports this labeled identity politics. There is quite a lot of criticism and research on this labeling phenomenon, such as Beauvoir and Sartre's existentialism theory, Karl Schmidt's political theory, Judith Butler's Foucaultian identity politics theory, etc. This essay will also explore the basis of this problem pointed out by these political thinkers. For example, Beauvoir and Sartre, from their existentialist viewpoint, believe that behind labeling (i.e., essence), the true self exists[2], labeling originates from the social definition, and a rebellion against the social definition allows people to return to their true/free form[3].On the contrary, Carl Schmitt pointed out that politics is just an opposition[4], pointing out that this opposition aims at criticizing the romantic illusion of liberalism. It can be said that Karl Schmidt's theory faces the social reality of identity politics, but Schmidt failed to explain the social structural cause of this opposition. Judith Butler, on the other hand, criticizes Beauvoir and Sartre's theory from a feminist standpoint. She believes that identity politics (she calls it "performativity") does not have a true self behind it[5]. Although Butler pointed out the relationship between identity politics and ideology from a Hegelian standpoint similar to Zizek's, she did not provide the possibility of overcoming ideology[6]. Therefore, this essay chose Zizek's ideology theory, which tries to unveil the ideological causes behind identity politics (i.e., the dialectics of desire of the Other), and on the other hand, attempts to point out the possibility of overcoming ideology.

2. The definition of the labeling phenomenon and its possible social/personal problems

2.1 What is labeling?

In modern society, there are many possibilities for human behavior[7]. However, during socialization, people often assume certain social roles[8].These social roles and their corresponding social norms regulate the behavior of individuals in society. The labeling phenomenon referred to in the essay is, in fact, the naming of social roles. In this sense, naming "human" (subject) is not just a neutral, static naming procedure but also represents some norm. Thus, a question can be raised here: do people know what they are going towards? If rephrased more precisely: are people conscious about these labels and the social regulations behind them? This essay will attempt to answer the questions above to find the reasons for the labeling phenomenon. A prevalent conventional view believes the most important reason for human behavior is not due to the reasons above but due to material factors. This theory includes the "Marxist" materialist theory of the Soviet Union and China. Human behavior is due to the maintenance and promotion of productivity and its corresponding changes in productive relations[9]. This theory can also include nineteenth and twentieth-century social Darwinism[10]. From the viewpoint of the theory above, the cause of human behavior is materialistic, while spiritual motivation, such as the "label," is only a minor factor in the superstructure.

However, just as western Marxist Althusser pointed out, ideology (including labels, social roles, etc.) is not superstructure itself. However, a material force embedded in the structure[11], a grand narrative such as "The economic basis determines the superstructure," is an ideology, a more dangerous idealism[12]. Therefore, if we inspect the narration of the so-called "materialistic" motive from Althusser's perspective. This "materialistic" motive or ideology has been restored to some spiritual motive. If Althusser's view is correct, then ideology is the cause/motive of people's actions and desires[13]. In a way, instead of "doing something because they want to" (acting because of one is free will), people "do something for the sake of doing it" (driven by social norms). Labels seem to become the cause of action.

So, what exactly is the label in this essay? Here are some specific examples to explain. Labels can be tiny things, such as zodiac signs (such as inferring people's personalities based on constellations). Labels can also be vague or broad: for example, Chinese or Americans (national identity); conservatives or liberals (identity determined by the political spectrum); etc. Of course, labels can also be negative: like being Jewish in 1933. Labels give people a sense of belonging or give people a sense of belonging through antagonizing negative labels. As long as one still fits the definition of a label, the label can provide recognition of one's significance and existence. (?) However, it will be revealed later how the Other defines people's significance and existence.

Different labels float within society, sometimes artificially chosen, sometimes given by others. No matter how the labels were obtained, most will bring a projective, stereotypical responsibility/duty upon individuals[14]. This responsibility will be reasonable and unquestionable to the individual. For example, an "elite" who graduated from a good school will have the label and the responsibility of an "elite": higher work quality, broader vision, and deeper insights than others (As Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, social elites are constantly produced by the cultural capital's reproduction[15]). These responsibilities and the discourse about this responsibility (elite label), or according to Bourdieu, a type of cultural capital, constantly reproduce during the subject's social participation through assimilating the subject's conditions (living conditions-field? living habits)[16]. This type of reproduction does not seem to change according to any circumstance of the subject (i.e., the subject's rejection of its will or the subject's repulsion towards the ideology). As some scholars pointed out, the western Marxist theories mentioned above seem to be quite powerful in criticizing the current society but lack a political blueprint for how actually to overcome ideologies. However, this essay will try to point out a possibility through Zizek's ideology criticism theory.

2.2 Social problems caused by labels

2.2.1. self-construction and identity opposition

During people's self-construction process, their self-cognition will always be relative. After all, without any reference (the other), it is difficult for people to ensure their existence and identity[17]. In construction, rather than trying to figure out "what we are," it is more like confirming "what we are not." We remove parts that are "not ourselves," like sculpting. However, doing so makes it effortless to put ourselves on the other side of the dissidents. People who agree with the "progress" label view the label "conservative" as an enemy. However, instead of seeking mutual understanding, they only follow a simple binary opposition — for example, liberalism and Marxism in the McCarthyism period or the Aryans and Jewish people during 1933.

2.2.2. Regulations to the subject

After being given to people, labels also endow specific rules on people. This "additional provision" type of regulation does not come from one's self-consciousness but is attached to the label itself. After accepting a label, people often internalize the responsibilities a label brings, even though the responsibilities might conflict with the subject's self-consciousness. Even though this conflict between the regulations and self-consciousness might not be clearly recognized by individuals[18], it has brought great trouble to people and even led to doubt and opposition to their own self-consciousness.

3. Identity Politics and Ideology

3.1 The formality of "self" must be the base of the premise of "the other"

This section will use Zizek's ideology theory to explore the cause of identity politics.

3.1.1. the other in The Imaginary

Identity, i.e., the cause of some self-awareness, has been pointed out already in Lacan's paper about the Mirror Stage[19]. First of all, Lacan seems to believe that newborns are in a stage of chaos and do not recognize the concept of "self." In some sense, this period is when one is closest to The Real. As the newborn grows, it gradually realizes the existence of "self" and begins to construct its "self" by comparing it with others. However, this essay will not discuss this issue from a cognitive psychology perspective but a political criticism perspective. According to Lacan's Mirror Stage theory, infants first desire to obtain and control the complete "self" out of their own incompetence/powerlessness/emptiness[20]. Infants first realize the existence of "self" by recognizing themselves in the mirror. However, the "self in the mirror" is not the actual "self" of the infants but a more complete, imaginative self[21].

Moreover, infants can only know their "complete" selves through an imagined illusion[22]. The self-construction process of people afterward also follows this pattern: the "self" that people recognize or try to construct is often inconsistent with their actual self, and they consistently pursue the mirage created by the illusion of the other. In the process of people's growth, they encounter The Symbolic, a dimension of signs/language/law much broader than the imagined subject. The Symbolic assimilates The Imaginary and constructs the modern political and psychological structure of ideologies and identity politics[23].

In conclusion, The Imaginary has the following characteristics and functions: It satisfies the essential requirement for identity politics, i.e., the construction of the self, but it has two aspects. First is that this "self" is created as an "other"; Second is that this "self" will always be imaginative instead of realistic. These traits also fulfill the conditions for The Imaginary to be assimilated into The Symbolic.

3.1.2. The Other as The Symbolic

Although it is only the "self" from the reflection in The Imaginary that act as "the other" for people and form one's subject, it has already revealed some of the properties of identity politics: that is, the construction of the self is forever in need of an "other," maybe even from the beginning. However, this is not enough to explain the complexity of identity politics in the real world (that is, identity politics might be expressed in terms of nationalism/environmentalism/feminism, etc.). With the development of humans, Lacan, including Zizek, found that the formation of the self is not purely the result of personal influence. In addition to The Imaginary, which is relatively independent of the subject, there is also The Symbolic, an entity that Lacan and Zizek call the Other(Autre)[24]. But, before arguing that the Other is an entity. First of all, the Symbolic is symbolic for the sake of itself. Just as the symbolic interaction theory in sociology pointed out, humans are symbolic animals, and the essence of society is a type of symbolic interaction[25]. In Lacan and Zizek's theory, this symbol is the language order. However, in contrast with the symbolic interactionists from sociology, Zizek believes that The Symbolic, as a symbolic order, is filled with concepts that have been imposed definitions and laws to individuals[26].

In other words, The Symbolic is an objective phenomenon and a symbolic order containing power. According to Zizek's theory, The Symbolic has the following characteristics: First, although it is a symbolic order, it can only function through some specific agents/proxies. For example, national sovereignty can only be manifested through specific material objects, such as congress/national flag/national emblem/currency. This type of material object is what Lacan calls the "objet petit a" or what Zizek calls the "Sublime Object of Ideology" as this type of object was occasionally selected, and became the agent/proxy of the ideology, thus separated itself from other ordinary objects[27]. The worship of this type of object is what Marx and Zizek call fetishism[28]. Secondly, this symbolic order can only be manifested through the interpellation of the subject. That is to say, Zizek believes that although The Symbolic is symbolic in terms of its form, it is not purely conceptual but materialistic as an entity. Well, in what sense is The Symbolic an entity? It is an entity in the sense of people's practice of symbolic order. In conclusion, according to Zizek's criticism, real ideology is not some illusion afloat in the air (such as nationalism as a common illusion pointed out by Benedict Anderson in the Imaginary Communities), but an act that people practice even though they might not believe it. The reason The Symbolic can assimilate The Imaginary and become a symbolic order that constantly produces meaning[29] is its production mechanism, but that argument will be demonstrated later.

3.1.3. Sum up

In conclusion, identity politics originates from the formation mechanism of self

To sum up Zizek's narrative, first of all, the subject requires others' recognition and the cognition and control of the self because of its emptiness, but the outcome is not as expected. The subject can only form its self-identity from false imagination. Then, after the subject encounters the symbolic order, the construction method of self-identity is absorbed by The Symbolic. In other words, not only does the subject seek approval from the "self" created in The Imaginary within The Symbolic, but it also seeks approval from the ideology. As these two approvals combined, identity politics was born.

3.2 Not only as an entity but also as the subject

3.2.1 Is "I" really my master?

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the subject is not its own master, the subject is always subordinate to the other, or in Lacan's words, the subject is always the function of the other. Therefore, in this sense, we must understand the mechanism of the desire and how the big other discipline and institutionalize the subject. This desire mechanism is precisely the mode of ideology's production and reproduction mentioned above. As discussed above, to Zizek, the subject is forever in need of the other's recognition/approval, and precisely because of the recognition/approval from the other can the subject becomes itself: that is, in The Imaginary's dimension, the subject obtained a

false self-identity because it created a self-image (illusion) as the other; in The Symbolic, the subject seeks the recognition/approval from The Other (e.g., the concept of state/nationality/feminism/democracy/freedom, etc.), and constructs its own identity in the process of seeking that recognition/approval. The desire is the motivation that drives the subject to pursue the other's recognition/approval; the desire is the desire to seek the other's recognition/approval. Althusser arrived at the same conclusion. In Althusser's assertion, the subject can only be defined as the subject after receiving the ideology's interpellation, and the desire is the drive for the subject to obtain self-identity (whether in The Imaginary or The Symbolic). The critical concept of "label" explored in this essay is precisely the self-identity that the ideology gives to the subject. The relationship between the label and the subject is as follows: to construct the self-identity, the subject must participate in the ideology's production and reproduction of labels. Furthermore, desire, or what we usually call the subject's desire, does not belong to the subject and is not an ability of the subject.

The subject's desire is the movement of the Other itself; it does not originate from the subject itself but from the Other's interpellation phenomenon.

The purpose of the Other's interpellation of the subject and the demand for desire is the production and reproduction of the Other itself. In Zizek's words: "Law is law." For example, China's epidemic prevention system was initially installed to eliminate COVID. Still, it gradually became a reliance on the system itself: whether the virus is eliminated became secondary, and maintaining the system became the primary concern. The desire to keep the system intact created labels such as "close contact" or "high-risk area resident". The subject then becomes the agent of the "label" and naturally enforces the integration of labels, which is ideology itself - a collection of signifiers, the master signifier. The next question must be asked is, where does the desire originate from, or to say, based on what circumstances can this desire be formed? By digging into this question, we can gradually go deep into the origin of the "label: identity politics" problem.

3.2.2. About master: the signifier as the master

Lacan and Zizek's theory of The Imaginary and the Symbolic order has already been mentioned before, so we must analyze their theory about The Real. As we all know, Lacan's complete theory is composed of all three of these dimensions together]. In Zizek's definition, the Real is the unexpected events that cannot be symbolized by The Symbolic, e.g., ding an sich (thing in itself) in Kant's sense. In other words, it is the world itself that is not encoded by language. Because this type of unprecedented event cannot be symbolized, the existence of its own is a kind of invasion and tear to the Symbolic. It causes fractures and blankness in The Symbolic and reveals The Symbolic's hollow nature. Combined with the discussion above on desire, ideology's production and reproduction's cause is precise because of this hollowness and the need to fill in this hollow. However, the subjects living within ideologies are usually unwilling to face this hollow nature, even though this hollowness exists constantly. Therefore, this hollowness is subconscious to the subject. Furthermore, combined with the statement on the meaning of signifiers mentioned above, if considered the meaning of the ideology's law to be the meaning of all kinds of "labels." For instance., the meaning of the signifiers, then the production and reproduction of this kind of meaning, also originate from the attempt to fill in the "primal" void. This "primal" void is what Lacan and Zizek call the "master signifier". Behind different ideologies, the master signifier is used to unify their proxies under a "reasonable" but essentially hollow starting point.

Take nationalism as an example. Nationalism was founded as a movement based on the interests of one's race and used other signifiers such as patriotism, exclusion, and discrimination to support the concept of nationalism. As Anderson pointed out in Imaginary Communities, nationalism originated from a shared illusion. This modernized imagination originates from Liang Qichao's reflection on the western colonial movement in China. If an unprecedented event like colonialism did not happen during the Qing Dynasty, then there would not be a modernized nationalist reflection in the beginning. Nationalism opposes the other states against China and uses this reshaping of history as a symbolic resistance to this unprecedented Western invasion. The "reshaping of history" mentioned above refers

to tracing the history of the Chinese race back to 5000 years ago and defines the people of the Xia and Shang period as the Chinese race.

However, there was no concept of race or nationality back in Xia and Shang periods. Therefore, this concept of race/nationality is only a historical invention born out of nothing. In Zizek's opinion, the cause of this concept originates fundamentally from the subconscious disbelief of the self, i.e., the self's hollowness. However, it must be noted that according to Zizek, "nothingness" is not just an imagination, as Anderson said but a kind of "being," i.e., an entity/substance. To put it simply, "nothingness" is not nonexistent, but our reality, including all the ideologies (e.g., nationalism), is hollow. Even though this hollowness is only subconscious, from the level of consciousness and behavior, people still practice these ideologies, although they do not believe in them.

Moreover, the substantiality of ideologies that Zizek states is precisely people's behavior in the real world. Thus, it can be concluded that the master signifier is an infinitely recurring hollowness; To fill in this hollowness, all kinds of ideologies were created to remain the master signifier in the subject's subconsciousness and keep it away from surfacing in the subject's consciousness. However, this endeavor is as pointless as the ouroboros devouring its tail.

3.2.3. Label as a signifier

As concluded above, the conflict between all labels is actually about the master signifier. Therefore, from Zizek's perspective, we can discover the origin of the labeled culture and the dynamic of its movement:

The tear from the unprecedented events of The Real revealed the hollow nature of ideologies.

Out of the need to fill this hollow nature, meanings must be produced.

The production of meaning must rely on the interpellation of the subject.

In the end, the self-identity created by the interpellation will be in the form of labels.

4. The overcome of ideologies

4.1 Ideology and "event."

As implied above, ideology is only part of the whole. The cause of the ideology and its meaning's constant reproduction; or combined with the assimilation of The Imaginary to The Real, the cause of people's self-identity and the reproduction of identity politics - is the unprecedented events that cannot be idealized with itself. As Althusser pointed out, this type of event causes ruptures in history.A rupture in history is also a rupture in ideology, and because of this rupture caused by events, ideology needs to reproduce. However, this reproduction cannot erase the unprecedented nature of the event. Moreover, because of the event's nature and the repair mechanism of the ideology, we can see the trauma caused by events, thus concluding that ideology is not the whole.

4.2 Ideology and "the pursuit of knowledge."

From ideology to the subject, as far as subject and label are concerned, the interpellation of ideology creates the subject's self-identity and makes it a label. In other words, the desire of the subject to seek labels is the desire for recognition from ideology. However, as Zizek pointed out, the subject within ideology, i.e., the labeled subject, is cynical. The characteristic of said subject is their inability to live an authentic life, i.e., to demonstrate the truth of ideology through their behavior (just as people can still live in a nationalist system although they do not believe it). Moreover, those who can demonstrate the truth through their behavior, such as Socrates and Diogenes mentioned in Foucault's Le courage de la vérité, are individuals entirely contradictory to the system of ideology. As a philosophical life, this kind of "real" life is not completely included within the realm of ideologies (in Plato's words, The Cave). However, philosophers still choose to return to the cave for various reasons.

5. Conclusion: "the pursuit of knowledge" and "event" as a method to overcome the label

Based on the discussion above, the birth of the label originates from identity politics, and the birth of identity politics originates from ideology, i.e., the effect of the Other. However, the Other does not have an identity. It can only construct its identity through its disagreement, and the cause of its disagreement is the event. The pursuit of knowledge is the exploration of events. When the pursuit of knowledge becomes one's life, or to say, the philosophical life exists, then philosophers can exit the cave. However, according to Zizek's theory, unfortunately, the possibility of exiting the cave is still obscure to normal people.

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