

The McDonaldization of Society: Irrational Rationality

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Abstract—The paper explains the McDonaldization as a special type of rationality on the Modern and Postmodern era. According to the literature review, the theoretical basis for understanding the phenomenon of McDonaldization is provided. The study shows how this type of rationality is functioning in the field of higher education. The features of pervasion the McDonaldization elements into the public space of Russia and China are also considered.

Keywords—rationality of being, McDonaldization, efficiency, calculability, controllability

I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of human civilizations there were different types of rationality. McDonaldization is a new paradigm of rationality [1]. It presupposes all-round development of purposeful rational activities, forms controlled and predictable behavioral acts. At the same time, all forms of McDonaldization tend to reduce people to the impersonal factor of social activity, and this contributes to the dehumanization of the human personality and the release of destructive irrational desires and actions in it.

In the present article it is shown that the process of McDonaldization is increasingly penetrating into the sphere of higher education. We carry out the criterion analysis of manifestation of elements of rationalization of the given type in sphere of education of Russia and estimate possible consequences of realization of this process in China.

In our research we use theoretical and methodological resources that allow revealing dialectical interaction of rational and irrational in a person and society. Using the method of sociological imagination, we try to predict the consequences of people's irrational reactions to the McDonaldization of society, depending on traditional types of thinking. Our working hypothesis contains an assumption that the developed rigid rational system has tendencies of replacement of a person with a nonhuman (in fact) technology and minimization of the human mind factor. This threatens the emergence of a potential possibility of dehumanization of society, the emergence of various forms of alienation of personality, the loss of its identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Comprehension of the phenomenological rationality

was carried out in the works of several groups of researchers. The first group includes texts of classical sociologists such as E. Durkheim, G. Zimmel, M. Weber [2-4]. In their works, especially in the book of M. Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the understanding was established that there were four types of rationality: practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal. Practical rationality involves the actions of the individual aimed at meeting pragmatic, egoistic interests. In everyday life, this is manifested in the choice of adequate means for these purposes. Theoretical rationality suggests that individuals seek to know reality using such cognitive techniques as deduction, induction, and detection of correlations between phenomena. Substantive rationality is based on a certain set of traditional values. There are differences in different cultures, and sometimes opposite value systems which implies pluralism the types of substantial reality. For Weber, formal rationality was significant, implying a clear calculation of means to goals achievement. Traditional societies are characterized by the idea of substantial rationality based on certain norms and values. These values define the basis of religions such as Christianity in the West or moral and ethical systems such as Confucianism and Taoism, as in China.

The second group of authors believed that irrationalism as a kind of response to the dominance of rationalism in the modern industrial consumer society [1,5-7]. In these theories, irrationalism (in the strict sense) is a reaction to the rigid positivistic rationalism. It is claimed that any rational system has hidden tendencies in the form of irrational elements. The above works serve as a theoretical basis for understanding the phenomenon of McDonaldization.

III. MCDONALDIZATION AS A PHENOMENON OF MODERNITY

The theory of McDonaldization was developed by the American sociologist G. Ritzer [1]. McDonaldization is a phenomenon of modern globalization, which is established and reproduced due to the communication links of different parts of the world, although in different socio-cultural contexts it has its own peculiarities. Ritzer wrote that "this is a process in which the principles of fast-food restaurant operations are beginning to define a growing number of areas of life, not only in the restaurant business, but also in education, labor, health care, tourism, recreation, food,

politics, and virtually every segment of society". Ritzer, in particular, described higher education in the Western world as already quite mcdonaldized, thanks to the emergence of macro-universities, where textbooks and teaching aids are increasingly reminiscent of macro-texts, which can quickly achieve the desired result. The direct interaction between teachers and students is minimized.

American sociologist F. Jameson noted in his paper [8] that some factors indicated that McDonaldization transformation as a rational paradigm was the characteristic of post-modern society. First, macrodonaldized institutions and adequate micro-social practices become global in nature. Second, mcdonaldized products and services represent a good example of simulacres and create a kind of hyper-reality through the atmosphere of euphoria.

The creator of the theory, G. Ritzer, argued that although McDonaldization offered some impressive advantages, however, by removing the human factor, in particular the educational and human factor, from social practices, it generated irrational rationality that manifested itself in the alienation of the human mind.

We will understand this statement better if we look at the reasoning of a number of sociologists (E. Fromm [6], J. Habermas [9]) about the difference between reason and intellect. Mind is understood to mean the actual human capacity to comprehend and transform the world, and reason is the capacity to manipulate realities to meet the needs of the subject, who thinks at the level of reason alone, the potential victim of a mcdonaldized society. Strictly speaking, this subject does not need the mind, because it is enough practically oriented intellect, where the intellectual component is minimized. Following Ritzer, we argue that where this type of rationality prevailed, society dehumanizes. We have already written about the dehumanization of education, but the same can be said of health care. Patients feel like they are elements of a medical conveyor belt. Time for tests and tests is increased, and the time spent on communication between doctor and patient is minimized. Many types of treatment use conveyor technology. McDonaldization even occurs when the natural human factor is replaced by tube manipulation. McDonaldization even takes place at funerals. In all of these cases, signs of efficacy, predictability and control are clearly visible, and human relationships are dehumanized.

It is necessary to recognize that McDonaldization contributes to the development of rational actions, discipline, and the formation of predictable behavioral acts. It provides an average standard of knowledge, reduces the risk of unskilled training, but dramatically reduces the critical potential for perception of information. As a consequence, the creative potential of a person decreases. It reduces to a greater or lesser extent the interpretation of people as mere economic resources. This contributes to the irrationalization of the individual with all the unpredictable consequences that follow. Irrationalism in the strict sense of the term is a reaction to a rigid rationalism of a scintillant nature. Varieties of irrationalism are voluntarism (A.

Schopenhauer [10]), existentialism (M. Heidegger [11]), and philosophy of life. In the case of moderate irrationalism, the concepts look quite reasonable, because the irrational and rational layers of being intersect in a person. Modern nonclassical sociology (G. Ritzer [1], J. Bordriyar [12]) uses phenomenology as the main method of cognition of social reality. The general sociological conclusion of this phenomenon is disappointing: the irrational person speaks in one person and rationalizes himself. This does not require any faith, no love, no hope, exposing all these realities as the vanity of existence, powerlessness before the irrational power of nothing.

IV. ARE THERE ATTRIBUTES OF MCDONALDIZATION IN A HIGHER SCHOOL PRACTICE?

Modern social practices are evaluated by key criteria such as efficiency, calculability, controllability and predictability. These criteria are generated by market thinking, which subjected higher education to commercialization and attributed it to the service sector. Let's take a close look at what these criteria look like in the sphere of higher education.

First of all, managers strive to efficiently manage financial flows and merge universities into large conglomerates. There is an enlargement of the departments in the universities themselves. The heads try to reduce the number of teachers to serve more students. Increasingly, new technologies are introduced that do not require direct communication between teachers and students. Numerous formal plans and reports become of excessive importance, which dehumanizes the sphere of university staff communications. Of course, the above lead to higher efficiency but it damages the quality of education.

In mcdonaldized system, quantity has become synonymous with quality. The indicator of calculability focuses attention on the quantitative parameters of services. Here we see the desire to make numeral as the universal measure without the qualitative indices taking into account. What matters is not the quality of student's learning, but the quantitative assessments of the teacher's work such as a number of hours, publications, the amount of programs developed and the money earned for a university wealth. As for the students, the scores on exams are the main indicators of their knowledge. This ultimately leads to a decrease in the level of training.

Predictability implies that goods and services appear the same regardless of the time and place where they are offered. Here we find ourselves in the sphere of educational standards strictly defined by levels of competence. Rigid requirements for regulating the scientific activity, the strictest observance of standing orders for the documents preparation and submission lead to a decrease in the level of creative work the teacher.

The criterion of controllability in the mcdonaldized environment requires the implementation of technologies in which the human factor itself is missing. In the system,

every pedagogical step of a teacher must be witnessed by a document and sent through a local university website to a certain “sacral” center. These data are somehow (often not understandable) used to assess the quality of an employee. This once again testifies to the process of dehumanization of human relationships at the university.

V. CONSEQUENCES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENTAL PROJECT BREAKDOWN

We'll consider what the consequences are, associated with the pressure of a market ideology to an Enlightenment project. This type of ideology dominates in a consumer society. The market is a simplified system designed to reject all products that are highly complex, highly intelligent and difficult to standardize, all of which fail to guarantee fast profits and returns. The copybook maxim of social progress is the following: applied knowledge is converted into the technology of the next generation and only the fundamental concepts serves as the basis for qualitative shifts for future generations. From this point of view, the market, with its mcdonaldized entity for immediate profitability, behaves like an individual mind, conflicting with the specific, strategically-reasoning mind that can defend long-term interests.

According to the criteria of progress, accumulation of general knowledge of universal application is namely the key to a long-term strategy of a scientific and technological breakthrough. Humanity will have big problems if you break this rule. As an example we can denote negative result of study rationalization i.e. premature specialization in teaching a student, as well as of the early entry of young people into working life. It means reducing the time of professional intellect accumulation. The vector of life, given by the new system of rationality, is increasingly leaning from the universal to the partial, from the perspective to the short-term, from the genuine to the simulative.

There is one more aspect from the field of “unpredictable consequences” which is an artificial order of things and events created by rationally organized technical environment. Despite the seeming rationality, this process is constantly fraught with disorder. The spontaneity that has gone over to the side of frightening chaos is the result of the dichotomous disruption of living and inanimate, nature and culture, culture and civilization, rational and irrational being. It is therefore not surprising that the mcdonaldized and, accordingly, dehumanized man thirsts for destructiveness, envy, destructiveness. He undergoes “panic attacks”, creates idols for himself, and believes psychics, aliens, and fraudsters of all stripes - from “monetary” to religious. In the virtual world, he behaves like an anonymous barbarian, enjoys gaming practices dangerous to his mental health and even to his life.

When predicting the latent and unforeseen consequences of McDonaldization, it is necessary to understand the peculiarities of the social and national character of people. This process has a double factuality.

On the one hand, mcdonaldized institutions streamline and support the role-playing consumer behavior of people through the production of their values. On the other hand, a sufficient number of individuals with their life worlds are maintained, where substantial rationality operates, based on traditional norms and values. G. Ritzer especially emphasized that McDonaldization was not equally manifested in various spheres of public life: something was more covered by the fast-food principles, something less. The highest level is observed in the catering services, the average in the field of education and the lowest in the retail trade. Business focused on fairly wealthy clients did not fall into the sphere of McDonaldization. These consumers prefer unique products and high-quality personalized services. In this regard, sociologists are wondering: does this type of rationality cover only the time frame of modernity, or does it also extend to the postmodern? In our opinion, excessive rationalization is a necessary attribute of the postmodern society.

Despite numerous external similar manifestations, McDonaldization as a new paradigm is specific to various socio-cultural contexts. In our opinion, in the socio-cultural context of modern China, it has its own peculiarities. To make an informed conclusion, you need to consider that there is an internal and external side of thinking. Western, European thinking is characterized by the direction of thought outside regarding the objectiveness of experience. In contrast, the Eastern thinker focuses attention on the very fact of entity existent conscious. This circumstance is exact associated with the priority of “nothing” in the worldview of the East. Everyday thinking of the Chinese person, the main feature of the Chinese language and thinking is based on the fact that the word is a deed. This is a realization of the principle of non-objectivity. In Western philosophy, there is an even more radical solution to the problem of the dialectical resolution on the opposition of both thought sides. This approach affirms the non-dual nature of consciousness in the East. The principle of non-dualism, known as Yin-Yang, is basic to the structure of thinking in the East. The radicalism of the opposite’s unity is manifested in the non-duality of mind and heart state.

Based on this understanding, we can conclude that McDonaldization results in “alienation of the mind”. But in the East it is not an external or internal component. There is a unity (non-duality), and therefore McDonaldization of Eastern man is fraught with devastating consequences for his personality, for his civilizational identity.

In the logic of Chinese thinking, relationships generate things and their properties. This literally corresponds to the interpretation of the Tao as a space containing emptiness in itself, and that sphere, which gives rise to an array of things. Macdonaldized world distorts these spheres, dehumanizes relations between people, between people and things. It imposes unnecessary speed on people. It takes time and space, and it comes into sharp contradiction with all the archetypes of Confucianism and Taoism. In our opinion, the Chinese civilization more than others should

be wary of the intensification of the McDonaldization process.

The described characteristic of Eastern thinking determines the specifics of educational processes in China. As is known, the symbolic status of knowledge in the East is very high. This is due to the traditional respect for education and the intellectual elite that are common to all Confucian countries. It should be noted that China took the influence of western pragmatism without destroying traditional values. The national elite succeeded in extending the symbolic capital of Confucian education to business, industry, medicine, and agriculture, that is, to professions that Confucianists despised and did not consider the "noble husband" worthy of attention. At the same time, pragmatic education acquires a special symbolic importance under the influence of traditional respect for education as a moral and partly religious value. This circumstance allows us to hope that the rationalization of education, which is overwhelming the Western world, will manifest itself in China in a smoothed form. At the same time, it will be possible to avoid too negative consequences for the younger generation.

VI. CONCLUSION

McDonaldization as a global phenomenon may conflict with those relationships within society, where the rationalization process is clearly destructive. These areas include education, medicine, family relationships, etc. However, one cannot deny the ability of McDonaldization to streamline and support the structured behavior of individuals, which has a beneficial effect on the course of economic processes. Consequently, the rational behavior of this type can enter into synergy with a limited range of micro-social practices. Then society acquires sustainable development.

In Russia, micro-social practices being basically paternalistic, painted warmly by the soulful human social color, are alien to the new rationality. Therefore,

periodically in society there is anomie, a split in the public consciousness with all the ensuing consequences. The way to overcome this difficulty lies in removing education, culture, and health care from the direct influence of McDonaldization. As for China, one needs to be aware of the risks of implementing Western values of the consumer society, which destroy national and cultural traditions. Cultivating traditional education, family and social upbringing helps mitigate the effects of these negative influences such as McDonaldization and total rationalization.

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