

A New Interpretation of the Main Social Contradictions from the Perspective of Marx's "Great Materialism"

Huanghua Huang^{1,2}

¹School of Marxism, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China

²Guangzhou Civil Aviation College, Guangzhou, China

32451222@qq.com

Keywords: Great Historical Materialism, Labor Practice Dialectics, Major Social Contradictions

Abstract: Marx's view of materialism is a view of the history of nature, human society, and man. Its value refers to the liberation of people, and the theoretical basis is the dialectics of labor practice. The new contradiction of major social contradictions adheres to the development ideology centered on the people, highlights the subjectivity of human beings, and conforms to the value orientation of the great historical materialism. The transformation of the main contradictions of society is rooted in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The self-construction of practice promotes the continuous development of socialist practice with Chinese characteristics, prompts the changing needs of the people, and demonstrates the era significance of the dialectics of labor practice.

1. Introduction

Social existence determines social consciousness, and productivity determines production relations is considered to be a classic expression of Marx's historical materialism. Professor Anqi Nian believes that Marx's complete historical materialism is a history of the relationship between man, nature and society using labor practice materialism, that is, "great historical materialism". The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China puts forward: the transformation of major contradictions in Chinese society in the new era, pointing out that the main contradictions in society have been transformed into contradictions between the people's growing needs for a better life and the development of inadequate imbalances. This new assertion reflects the Marxist world outlook and methodology, and it is also the inheritance and development of Marx's "big historical materialism".

2. Marx's Great Historical Materialism is the Scientific Basis for Judging the Major Contradictions in Society

Historical materialism is an important part of Marxist philosophy and reveals the laws governing the development of human society. It is an important scientific basis for China to judge the changes and development of national conditions and changes in social contradictions. Marx's words in the "Preface of 'Critical Economics Critique'" on the relationship between productivity, production relations, economic base and superstructure is recognized as the "classical expression" of historical materialism. This "classical expression" believes that the main idea of historical materialism is that "social existence determines social consciousness", that is, that productivity determines the relationship of production and economic foundation determines the superstructure is the core of Marx's historical materialism. In fact, the idea of "classical expression" only reveals that Marx's research at that time was the relationship between civil society and the state and the law, and did not address the development mechanism of social history.

Regarding the view that social existence determines social consciousness, Professor An Qinian of Renmin University of China believes that "the reason why productivity must determine the production relationship and economic foundation must determine the superstructure and social existence must determine social consciousness. In the final analysis, it is because people are animals,

and animals seek to avoid the instinct to pursue material living materials and to breed as many offspring as possible.”^{[1]155} According to this line of thinking, the “classical expression” of social existence that determines social consciousness does not apply to communist society, that is, it cannot reveal the universal law of human social history. Marx divides human society into three social forms: the first form is human dependence; the second form is human dependence on things; the third form is human comprehensive freedom, that is, in communist society, people are not subject to material production needs. Professor An Qinian believes that Marx’s complete historical materialism is “it uses labor practice activities to materially explain all history, explain productivity, production relations, nature, and finally explain people through social environment and natural environment.”^{[2]132} Compared with the core content in the “classical expression”, this complete historical materialism is called Marx’s great materialistic historical thought. He believes that Marx’s thought of great historical materialism can be summarized in three sentences. “It believes that history is the coordinated development of the interaction of nature, human society and human beings. Its value refers to human liberation, and its theoretical basis is the dialectic of labor practice.”^{[1]188} The historical materialism of the great historical materialism reveals the value of Marx’s exploration of human liberation through research. This kind of historical materialism based on the dialectics of labor practice is of great significance to the judgment of social contradictions and the development of social situation in China today.

First of all, the historical materialism is a view of the history of nature, human society and people themselves. This suggests that we must base ourselves on the relationship between nature, human society and the human being when judging social contradictions and changes in the social situation. During the period of the new-democratic revolution, the main contradiction in our society was the contradiction between the broad masses of the people and imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. Now, it has converted into “the contradiction between the people’s need for rapid economic and cultural development and the current economic and cultural conditions that cannot meet the needs of the people” proposed at the 8th National Congress^{[2]341} and “China has to solve is the contradiction between the people’s growing material and cultural needs and the backward social production after the socialist transformation is basically completed.” proposed at the 6th plenary session of the Party’s 11th Congress^{[3]345} and then the contradiction between the people’s growing need for a better life and the uneven development proposed at the 19th National Congress. The changes in this series of social contradictions are based on the historical conditions and historical difficulties faced by the whole society. This is what Marx called “environment”. Through labor practice, natural and interpersonal interactions have been changed, and new demands have arisen in this kind of labor practice, thus promoting new labor practices. From the history of national liberation in our country, we can see that we are aware of the importance of material productivity in backward beatings, and thus the need to develop material production. However, while material production is developing vigorously, problems such as depletion of resources, environmental pollution, and disparity between the rich and the poor are accompanied. According to the great historical materialism, nature, society and humanity should be a whole, and the three are closely connected. The development of the three constitutes a unified historical process. Therefore, the great historical materialism provides us with an important perspective in judging the changes in social contradictions. We must pay full attention to the relationship between ecological environment, social development and human development. People’s need for a better life belongs to the development needs of human beings, and the degree of satisfaction of such needs is closely related to the development of the whole society and natural ecology. The imbalance between natural resources and social resources today does not fully affect the realization of the needs of a better life for mankind. Secondly, the great historical materialism breaks the narrow perspective of the production determinism, and reveals that we should pay attention to the relationship between the human environment and social development in judging social contradictions. At present, while the society has made tremendous development and progress in the economy, it has experienced problems such as moral decline, spiritual emptiness, and historical and traditional culture. These problems directly affect the realization of people’s good life. A good life is not only material wealth,

but also spiritual wealth. Therefore, based on solving these problems, the new thesis of the main contradictions proposed by the 19th National Congress emphasizes people's need for a better life. This judgment is in line with the view of the materialistic view of history.

3. The Conversion of the Main Contradictions in Society is in Line with the Value Orientation of the Great Historical Materialism

The value of the great historical materialism is the liberation of human beings. It is a history that covers the natural world, human society and human beings. But in the final analysis, man is the core of Marx's great historical materialism. Regardless of whether Marx studies history or studies political economy, its purpose is to study human development and human liberation. The new contradiction of major social contradictions is in line with the value orientation of the great historical materialism. First, the new contradiction of major social contradictions adheres to the developmental dimension of the people contained in the historical materialism. In Marx's view, the actual individual material production practice is the starting point of history. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx advocated the elimination of human alienation by eliminating communism by private property, thereby gaining human freedom and liberation. Marx's research is the free and comprehensive development of human beings, both in terms of starting point and ending point. The new contradiction of major social contradictions in the report of the 19th National Congress indicates that the Chinese Communist Party has always regarded the development of the people as the basis for formulating various guidelines and policies. The expression of the main contradictions of society from the focus on "the people's growing material and cultural needs" to the "people's need for a better life" reflects the developmental dimension of the people contained in the historical materialism. In the stage of very backward productivity, developing productivity and solving people's food and clothing problems have become the top priority, so meeting material needs is the center. However, Marx's great historical materialism tells us that the development of material production and the freedom of human liberation are not linear positive correlations. "The historical materialism we have understood in the past only emphasizes the positive role of the development of material productivity. It seems that its development is linear with human happiness and liberation. This is not the case. The natural world that has been changed may in turn harm people's health or further development. Certain forms of labor practice and social relations determined by it may lead to alienation of human beings and lead to social injustice."^[4] In the process of social development, after the material survival needs are met, the relationship between people and the relationship between man and nature begins to affect the level and breadth of people's needs. After the problem of food and clothing is solved, people's need for a better life begins to rise from the individual level to the social level, such as democracy, rule of law, fairness, justice, security, and environment in the whole society. It can be seen that the pursuit of human happiness and development is the trigger point for the transformation of the main contradictions of society.

Second, the new main contradiction of the society insists on the subjective orientation of the human beings contained in the historical materialism. In the report of the 19th National Congress, the word "people" appeared 203 times. The arguments for major social contradictions have changed despite the specific conditions of the times. However, the people-centered thinking has always run through it, fully embodying the subjectivity of human beings. The great historical materialism holds that history is formed by the interaction of man, nature and society on the basis of labor practice, and man is the main body of these three. The needs of human beings are reflected in the transformation of human beings into nature and society. The changes in nature and society are also the external manifestations of human needs. People's need for a better life is a sense of transforming the outside world based on the social reality of inadequate development imbalance. The small historical materialism emphasizes the constraints of productivity and production relations on people. The great historical materialism is based on labor practice, pointing out that the existing productive forces and production relations are the subjective initiative of human beings through practical effects. The newly generated productivity and production relations have imposed constraints on

people. In the new contradiction of major social contradictions, people's demand for a better life is the embodiment of human subjective initiative. On the other hand, changes in the main contradictions of society reflect people's understanding of objective changes. It reflects people's desire for social and natural reality transformation, and it is still the expression of adhering to the subjective orientation of human beings.

4. The Argument of the Transformation of the Main Contradictions in Society Highlights the Contemporary Significance of the Dialectics of Labor Practice

The theoretical basis of Marx's great historical materialism is the dialectics of labor practice. "The change of the environment is consistent with human activities or self-change, and can only be seen and reasonably understood as a revolutionary practice."^{[5]500} Marx believes that environmental change and human self-change are consistent and are the product of practical activities. The dialectical mechanism of labor practice dialectics is manifested in the fact that people make changes in nature and society through labor practices according to their own needs, and people regain new information and generate new demands from the changed nature and society; at the same time, the changing nature and human society provide new production tools; the use of new production tools and changing human society will lead to the creation of new production relations. This is a cyclical activity, and this kind of activity is the theoretical basis of Marx's great historical materialism.

The transformation of the main contradictions of society is rooted in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the period of new democracy, the main contradiction in our society is the contradiction between the masses of the people and imperialism and feudalism. After the completion of the three major reforms in 1956, the main contradiction in our country has been the contradiction between the people's demands for the establishment of advanced industrial countries and the reality of the backward agricultural countries. It is already the people's rapid development of economic culture. There is a need for a contradiction between the current economic culture and the situation that cannot meet the needs of the people. The essence of this contradiction, when China's socialist system has been established, is the contradiction between the advanced socialist system and the backward social productive forces."^{[2]341} At the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, "The main contradiction that China has to solve is the contradiction between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backward social production."^{[3]345} The main contradiction of the new era society proposed in the report of the 19th National Congress in 2017 has been transformed into a contradiction between the people's growing needs for a better life and the development of inadequate imbalances. By combing the historical evolution of the main contradictions in our society, we can see that the changes in the main contradictions of society are closely related to the practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. During the old democratic revolution, patriotic benevolent people tried to save the country, but they failed. During the period of the new-democratic revolution, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the three great mountains that oppressed the Chinese people were overthrown, and after three major reforms, the socialist system was established. After that, what was socialism and how to build a practical exploration of socialism with Chinese characteristics was opened. In the past few decades, liberating productive forces and developing productive forces have been the focus, and socialist construction practices have centered on economic development. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the people's subjective initiative and the problem of backward social production have been resolved. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Communists with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core have made tremendous progress in the practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and have achieved historic changes in the fields of economy, politics, culture, and society. The fact that Cheng is produced in practice and the imbalance of development is not sufficient is also a problem that China has in the practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and it is a problem that the party must focus on in building a well-off society in an all-round way. The existence of these problems has pushed the Communists to exert their subjective initiative and create new needs. The new contradiction of the main contradiction of the society adheres to and develops the labor

dialectics of the great historical materialism, and once again demonstrates the era significance of the labor dialectics. first of all, the new contradiction of major social contradictions adheres to the development thinking of the people as the center, which is consistent with the development thoughts of human beings revealed by the dialectics of labor practice; the historical evolution of the main contradictions of society reveals that the dynamics of the dialectical movement of labor practice are in human beings, and the subjective needs of human beings promote practical activities. Second, labor practice activities can develop themselves because of the self-construction of practice. The historical evolution of the main contradictions in society is providing strong evidence for this. The new contradiction of major social contradictions shows that the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics is based on the self-constructed interaction of human activities with the natural environment and social environment. This once again provides a strong proof of the “presence” of Marx’s material historical view.

References

- [1] An Qinian, the Road to Freedom-A Study of Marx’s Philosophical Thoughts [M].Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2016
- [2] Selected Important Documents since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China, Volume 9 [M]. Beijing: Central Literature Publishing House, 1994
- [3] Selected Readings of Important Documents since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee (I) [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1987
- [4] An Qi Nian, Marx’s Criticism of Feuerbach and the Formation of Great Historical Materialism [J], Journal of Nanjing Institute of Political Science, 2017(1)
- [5] Marx and Engels’ Anthology: Volume 1 [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009