

On Twofold Dimensions in Marx's Social Criticism

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Abstract—By the ways of critique of religion, politics, philosophy and political economy, Marx makes critical analysis on capitalist society in different levels. These ways of critiques are linked by the twofold dimensions critiques, which are critiques of metaphysics and of capital. The dimension of critique of metaphysics aims at the metaphysical character of modern theory. Through this criticism dimension, Marx discusses a new relationship between theory and reality. The dimension of critique of capital aims at capitalist mode of production, the conditions of production and exchange corresponding to that mode. It is based upon the analysis of the essence and logic of capital. The twofold dimensions interact with each other during Marx's whole life, and just because of the inner connection between them, Marx provides us a special critical perspective on modern society.

Keywords—Social Criticism, Critique of Metaphysics, Critique of Capital, Interaction.

I. PREFACE

AS one of the greatest thinkers, Karl Marx writes a huge number of works and manuscripts. How to interpret them, that is an academic problem, however, it is not only an academic problem in China. Under the influence of Soviet study mode, both of Marx's literatures and theory were divided into three separate parts: Marx's philosophy, political economy and theory of socialism. According to it, Chinese Marxism scholars were also mainly divided into two groups: one did research on Marx's theory of philosophy and socialism, and the other on Marx's political economy. Scholars of the first group seldom read *Capital* and its manuscripts, and their research was based on young Marx's works, such as *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *The German Ideology*, etc. Meanwhile, scholars of the other group just read and analyzed *Capital* and its manuscripts. This was a traditional and classical mode in Chinese Marxism study in the past decades of years. Marx's theory was disintegrated by perspective of different disciplines.

However, as we know, as the most important work of Marx, *Capital* in a sense is an epitome of Marx's social criticism theory, though it is written in political economy language. It is a comprehensive and organic system, which should not be interpreted only in the perspective of political economy. It is

necessary to make new interpretation of Marx's whole works and theory. The twofold dimensions, which mean the critique of capital and the critique of metaphysics, are just the key approach to it, and provide our research a new idea, as well as organic whole vision for Marx's thoughts.

II. WHAT ARE THE TWOFOLD DIMENSIONS

Compared to other scholars, who call them the dimension of critique of philosophy and the dimension of critique of political economy, I prefer to choose the definition of the critiques of metaphysics and of capital. The reasons are as follows: Firstly, the concepts of two different dimensions are not in sense of different disciplines, but of Marx's purpose and objects of critique. Secondly, in Marx's vision, the production of capital forms the foundation of social existence, and metaphysics is essential reflection of social consciousness. Therefore, critiques of metaphysics and of capital means that Marx's analysis is in the perspective of historical materialism. Thirdly, Marx's critique of metaphysics does not only represent in his philosophical works, but also in his discussion of political economy. For example, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in his arguments with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's economic and philosophy, he uses "The Metaphysics of Political Economy" as the title of Chapter Two, and makes a special analysis on the method of political economy. We could see that, the twofold dimensions run through both of Marx's philosophical and economic works.

The dimension of critique of metaphysics aims at early modern philosophy, especially criticizes purely abstract speculative method of German idealism represented by Hegel's philosophy, at the same time criticizes the intrinsically hypostases of all of the early modern theories and ideologies. In other words, according to Marx, essentialism, abstractness and rationalism are the main and common characters of kinds of modern theories, which include whether modern philosophy, or political economy and even other theories. In this sense we could say that Marx's critique of metaphysics aims at the metaphysical character of modern theory. Marx's philosophy is both the result and method of his metaphysics critique. There should be a short explanation about Marx's philosophy theory, because it is hard to make a clear definition of it. One side, it is about whether Marx had a philosophy system which was different from the German classical philosophy, and on the other side, it refers to how to understand the status and significance of Marx's philosophical

¹ This research is supported by Chinese National Social Science Fund Project and Beijing Research Fund Project.

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thoughts in the history of philosophy. It is not the topic of this paper, so here I use the concept of philosophy in a broad meaning, which is about Marx's historical materialism thoughts, and these were shaped in the course of Marx's criticizing Hegel and Young Hegelian's philosophy. If we were familiar with the development of Karl Marx's thought, we would know that Marx changed his understanding of philosophy during his life, and which was just influenced by his economics study.

Through this criticism dimension, Marx discusses a new relationship between philosophy and reality, more exactly, a new relationship between theory (or human being's perception, knowledge, consciousness, etc) and reality. The new relationship means that: reality is the origin and foundation of theory (knowledge, perception, consciousness, etc.), and the practical activity is more important than theory. It is from Marx's famous quotes in *Theses On Feuerbach* (1845): "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." It is clear that, on the relationship between theory and reality, Marx does not agree with the previous philosophers' attitude. Theory is the interpretation of reality, but is not reality. More importantly, various theories (no matter philosophy or economics, and even others) are not priori to reality.

About the critique of capital dimension, firstly it needs to make a distinction between the two concepts: the critique of capital and the critique of political economy. Although It is not easy to make the distinction between them. As we know that, "Capital" is the title of Marx's critique of political economy. However, it is also a question worth considering that, why Marx chose "Capital" as the title, and make "critique of political economy" as the subtitle. In perspective of contents, Marx's critique of political economy includes both a theoretical critique of classical economy, and a concrete analysis on capitalist production. One main part of the theoretical critique is against to the metaphysical methods of classical economics, and this part is essentially belongs to Marx's critique of metaphysics dimension. We could see that, there are both dimensions of critiques of metaphysics and of capital in Marx's critique of political economy. Therefore, the definition of "the critique of capital" is more accurate for the dimension.

The dimension of critique of capital aims at capitalist mode of production, the conditions of production and exchange corresponding to that mode. For this study, it is based upon the analysis of the essence and logic of capital. This analysis is not only the core of Marx's critique of political economy, but also the standpoint and foundation of his critique of social existence. In this sense, Marx's critique of capital is a comprehensive combination between his theoretical critique and realistic critique. It should be known, Marx's critique of capital does not only represent in the three volumes of *Capital*, but also in all of the manuscripts and works on political economics during his life, which started in the fall of 1843, and lasted 40 years.

The twofold dimensions criticisms interact with each other. Critique of capital is the realistic base of critique of metaphysics, and critique of metaphysics is the theoretical precondition of critique of capital. How to understand it? Critique of metaphysics opens the theoretical scope which belonging to critique of capital, as well as establishes the methods of critique of capital. Namely, just through metaphysics criticism, Marx's analysis of capital is not only in the vision of economics, but also in the vision of social relationships, and of which just the latter one is the key to understand the essence of capital. The other way round, just on the base of capital criticism, Marx completes his metaphysics criticism, which means that his metaphysics criticism is not only a theoretical internal criticism, but extend to the critique of its realistic foundation. That is just the difference between Marx and classical metaphysical criticism.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TWOFOLD DIMENSIONS

By the ways of critique of religion, politics, philosophy and political economy, Marx makes critical analysis on capitalist society in different levels. These ways of critiques are linked by the twofold dimensions critiques of metaphysics and capital. Although the twofold dimensions did not exist at the beginning of Marx's theory, they were necessary and inevitable in the development of his thoughts. As what Marx had said in his Preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

"My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy."^[1]

There is a progress from "gestation" to "up growth" and "comprehensive combination" in the development of the twofold dimensions:

The gestation period is before the fall of 1843, in which Marx hadn't started his economics study, and his works focused on the philosophy, especially political philosophy. When Marx was a student in university, he was interested in philosophy, and contacted with Young Hegelian frequently. After he got his Doctor's degree, he hadn't found a job in university, and went to be an editor for *Rheinische Zeitung*. In this period, he found Hegel's theory couldn't explain the problems in realistic life, especially the conflict between material benefit and idea of state and law, so he wrote *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In this literature he realized that civil society was more foundational than state in their relation. Then he moved to Paris, in the participating in politics, Marx criticized that Hegel's philosophy was a kind of abstract and mysterious theory, and Hegel confused the relation between state and civil society. In Marx opinion, if we

wanted to understand the form of right or state, we must firstly understand its substantial foundation, which was the civil society, and the political economics was just the key to understand it. So in the fall of 1843, he changed his philosophy foundation from Hegel's to materialism, and started his study of political economy.

The up-growth period is from then to his writing of *Capital*. In this period, Marx's critique of metaphysics and of capital became to cooperate. One hand, Marx kept on criticizing Hegel and Young Hegelian's philosophy (such as *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*); on the other hand, he began to study on classical theories of political economy by reading and noting. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* of 1844 is the first as well as important works in which Marx cooperated his twofold dimensions criticism. In the preface of 1844 manuscript, Marx said that it was one unitive work of his critique of Hegel's thoughts and of classical economy. He used two kinds of languages, economic language and philosophical language, which combined to analyze the alienation of labor and of human beings in the capitalist society. He also pushed these analyses into establishing his fundamental of historical materialism.

The comprehensive combination period is the whole process of his writing of *Capital* and other works on critique of political economy. *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857) is the starting point of this period. From the writing purpose and contents we could see that, it is Marx's special and systemic summary for his study on political economy in the past nearly 15 years, and he would begin to write his political economy works. In this period, except for some newsletters and papers for Communist Party, Marx nearly had no special academic works on philosophy or politics. In critique of political economy, Marx described and analyzed the whole process of production, exchange, distribution and consumption by professional economic language. Under the visible language of economics, there are also full of Marx's philosophical methods and political demands, which present in the structure of *Capital*, the method of "from abstract to concrete", theory on commodity fetishism, and so on. As Francis Wheen' discussion that, just in *Capital* Marx's philosophical and economic dimensions were combined into a unity, and before *Capital*, they were two individual disciplines in Marx's theory.[2] These are not two separate critiques, but as a unity in Marx's works.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENCE AND LOGIC OF CAPITAL

There are many good examples to represent the combination of the twofold dimensions in Marx's critique of political economy, such as the discussion of alienation of labor in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* in 1844, the argument of the method of political economy in *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857), *Labor theory of value* and the theory on *Commodity Fetishism*

in the first volume of *Capital*, etc.

It is impossible to discuss these specific examples one by one in this short paper, but I try to do it through a more general point: Marx's analysis of capital's essence and logic, which is both the core content of Marx critique of political economy, and also a typical example for the comprehensive combination of the twofold dimensions.

Firstly, it needs to make a short discussion on why the analysis of the essence and logic of capital is the core contents of Marx's critique of political economy. Meanwhile, this discussion would also show us the importance and significance of the perspective of twofold dimensions in understanding of Marx's thought. In Marx's own words, his critique of political economy commits to "examine the capitalist mode of production, and the conditions of production and exchange corresponding to that mode".[3] For this study purpose and object, Marx chooses "the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete", and emphasizes that is the only right method of political economy, because it is "the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind." [4] Based on this method, Marx chooses the analysis of a commodity as the beginning of his investigation, just because "the commodity-form of the product of labor — or value-form of the commodity — is the economic cell-form".[5] It means that, commodity is the most abstract form of capitalist production. From commodity to money and capital, and even the whole discussions on the process of production and circulation of capital, and the process of Capitalist Production as a Whole, this is the process from the abstract to the concrete. In this sense we could say that, Marx's *Capital* commits to show us the whole life process of capital by theoretical language, and it is the key to understand capital's life process through the essence and logic of capital. (And Marx's also discusses his method in other place of his political economy many times, which says that this method is just a historical method. It is clear that, according to Marx, the logic method should also be the historical method, the unity of method and history is based on the real history, but not the prior logic).

What are the essence and logic of capital? In Marx's view, playing as production factor and as social relations are two dimensions of capital, of which the latter one is the essence of capital. The logic means the characters, ways and inner rules of capital's expansion, which includes as follows:

- (1) Capital's expansion is just the presentation of capital's nature, which is to get maximum surplus value (profit);
- (2) The personality and subjectivity of capital, which means capital not only acts as a substance in the economic activities, but also turns into a subject of the modern society. At the same time, human beings, both of the capitalists and labors, become to be passive to the capital. It is a reversed and alienated relation between human beings and capital.
- (3) Capital runs as the dominate principle in modern society and history. Its power does not only present in economic side, but also seeps into the political, ideological and cultural sides.

As Marx says, "Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colors and modifies their particularity. It is particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it." [6]

In the first meaning of the logic of capital, capital is an element of social existence (appears as money, means of production, etc.). In the second meaning, capital joins in the construction of social relations and it plays as a subjective role with human beings (in perspective of subjectivity). In the third meaning, capital seeps into metaphysics field (in perspective of social consciousness), from social existence side to social consciousness side, capitalism shows as an organic whole. It is clear that, the metaphysical character is original in the logic of capital, thus we couldn't catch capital's logic only in the one-dimension of critique of political economy. Marx's Capital is a total and integrative critique with multidimensional perspectives. This is the presentation of the comprehensive combination of metaphysics criticism and capital criticism.

V. CONCLUSION

There are twofold dimensions of critique in Marx's social criticism, which are critique of metaphysics and critique of capital. The contents and interaction of the twofold dimensions are important clue for us to interpret on Marx's theory.

As I have stated in last part, capital plays a subjective role and joins in the construction of Social Consciousness in modern society. The other side, the modern philosophy especially the metaphysics also represents an essence of capitalization. In other words, modern metaphysics and modern capital have an inner and essential connection: modern metaphysics acts as the capital's intellective element and power of ideology, which defends capital's rationality and validity, and the capital is the social foundation and impetus of modern metaphysics. Just based on the inner relations between modern capital and metaphysics, it is necessary and inevitable that there are twofold dimensions in Marx's critique and goes deep into the essence of capital and the essential constitution of modern metaphysics. Through the analysis of twofold dimensions and the interaction mode between them, we could study Marx's theory in comprehensive and organic version.

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