

# *Engels' Contribution to Marxist Philosophy and Its Contemporary Value*

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**Abstract:** Engels' development of Marxism is comprehensive and systematic. He not only provided a logical framework for Marxist critique of political economy and comprehensively discussed the conditions for the emergence of scientific socialism and defended the development of scientific socialism, but also founded historical materialism together with Marx, made a deep and systematic study of dialectical materialism, and put forward a series of original philosophical viewpoints, which made a special and important contribution to the systematization and popularization of Marxist philosophy. Engels' philosophical contributions are of great significance for us to study and apply dialectical materialism and historical materialism today, and to thoroughly study and implement socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and promote the building of a strong socialist modernization country in combination with the actual development of contemporary China and the world.

## **1. Introduction**

Engels and Marx established a profound fighting friendship for 40 years. The humble Engels described himself as the "second fiddler" and repeatedly affirmed that the main achievements of Marxism belong to Marx. However, Engels' contribution to the development and perfection of Marxism and the liberation of all mankind can not be ignored. Engels not only supported Marx economically, but also expounded the rich connotation of Marxist theory and interpreted some major theoretical issues of Marxism by publishing and translating many works, writing prefaces and introductions for these works, and communicating with intellectuals, ordinary workers and political party leaders from all over the world. Engels' contribution can not be ignored because Marxist theory can last forever.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **2. Engels' contribution to the establishment and development of historical materialism**

### **2.1. Engels' great contribution to the materialist view of history**

Engels opened up a new way to investigate history. Engels paid great attention to the role of economic interests in society.

But the direction and path he chose were different from Marx's. Engels witnessed the miserable situation of the working class since childhood, which laid the foundation of revolutionary democracy in Engels' thought.

And Engels also stated in the annotation of the Communist Manifesto: "At that time, my book "The Situation of the British Working Class" is the best illustration of the extent to which I personally reached in this respect." Engels clearly explained the role of historical materialism. The Condition of the British Working Class is Engels' most representative work when historical materialism was founded. The most obvious embodiment is that Engels studied political economy through direct contact with the British working class and the bourgeoisie and investigation, expounded the terrible living conditions of the British working class, exposed the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, and basically formed the main viewpoint of historical materialism.<sup>[2]</sup>

Engels scientifically demonstrated, enriched and developed historical materialism. Marx and Engels pointed out in the Communist Manifesto that "the history of all societies up to now is the history of class struggle", so this requires us to enrich and deepen historical materialism constantly when summing up the class revolutionary struggle in Europe. In *Das Kapital*, Marx and Engels profoundly demonstrated the scientific nature of historical materialism and made outstanding contributions to enriching and developing historical materialism. In Marx's new revolutionary practice and in-depth scientific argumentation research, especially in the struggle against opportunism and erroneous thoughts, historical materialism has been further developed and improved.<sup>[3]</sup>

After Marx's death, Engels independently provoked the important task of leading the workers' movement and defending and developing Marxist theory. For example, Engels' book *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy* in his later years summarized the founding process of historical materialism and its further deepening and development. Therefore, through a large number of letters left over from Engels' struggle with opportunism in his later years, we can know that Engels has also made great contributions to the deepening and development of historical materialism.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2.2. Engels' great contribution to Marxist materialist dialectics

In the process of writing *Das Kapital*, Engels suggested that Marx modify the part of value form in Volume I of *Das Kapital* in the form of historical illustrations or historical dialectical methods, and wrote specific modification schemes. Later, Marx adopted Engels' plan. Secondly, some problems involving actual economy encountered by Marx in the writing of *Capital* were solved with the help of Engels. Marx said in his letter to Engels when refuting Smith's division of labor: "Can you write to me, for example, the various types of work of workers in your factory (except those in warehouses) and point out the quantitative ratio between them?" Engels provided Marx with a lot of information with his rich practical experience. When Marx revised the first volume of *Das Kapital*, he considered Engels' suggestion of adjusting the structure, which made the structure of the first volume perfect. After the publication of the first volume, Engels actively became the disseminator and interpreter of *Capital*.<sup>[5]</sup>

In order to expand the spread and influence of *Das Kapital*, Engels organized a propaganda network, a small writing team and contacted various newspapers and periodicals to review this great work from different angles, and profoundly interpret its great theory to readers in all directions and at multiple levels. Marx once said that without Engels' unconditional support and help, he could not complete *Capital*. In the specific research, Engels extensively dabbled in the field of natural science, constantly updated his natural science theory, brilliantly demonstrated dialectics of nature from many aspects, and made great contributions to enriching and deepening materialist dialectics.

*Dialectics of Nature* is not only rich in dialectical principles of nature, but also a portrayal of Engels' research on natural science theory. Starting from the development of natural science and philosophy, Engels systematically expounded the necessity of the emergence of materialist view of nature. Engels thought that the three basic forms of materialism were closely related to the

development of natural science in a specific era. Secondly, Engels comprehensively expounded the whole development process of dialectics of nature with abundant materials of natural science. First of all, Engels discussed the infinite separability of material hierarchy. In *Dialectics of Nature*, it is emphasized that the infinite separability understood by dialectics is not mechanical infinite separability, but related to the hierarchical structure of things and the quality and quantity of things. Engels talked about the basic forms of matter when he conceived the dialectics of natural science. In this regard, Engels systematically expounded five basic forms of material movement based on the level of scientific development at that time, and profoundly revealed that the forms of movement can be transformed and infiltrated with each other.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **2.3. Engels' great contribution to historical dialectics**

In "Anti-Turin Theory", "Feuerbach Theory" and a large number of letters, the dialectical relationship between economic base and superstructure is repeatedly affirmed. Engels in his early years mainly dabbled in economic foundation, and emphasized the decisive role of economic foundation in superstructure. When refuting Turin's idealistic violence determinism, it expounds the decisive role of economic foundation in political violence, and fundamentally denies Turin's violence determinism. Engels pointed out that historical dialectics is the only correct research method of social and historical science. When Engels refuted the dogmatism of Marxism, he discussed that historical dialectics is the correct method to study social history. It can be seen that Engels had the related thought of combining Marxism with the concrete practice of his country in his later years. Easy-to-understand understanding, that is, recitation and mechanized understanding, is unreliable. Only based on the specific national conditions of our country and combined with the actual situation of our country can we solve specific problems. Finally, he also believes that without rich knowledge of economics, it is impossible to understand the foundation of social and historical development. Engels devoted his whole life to studying, interpreting and spreading Marxism. Engels refuted and countered those who maliciously slandered, tampered with and attacked Marx's relevant theories with a clear-cut stand, and resolutely safeguarded and defended the dignity and purity of Marxist theory.<sup>[7]</sup>

## **3. The scientific systematization of Marxism has been initially established**

### **3.1. Engels' systematic contribution to Marxism**

People always think that all these are Marx's credit, but in fact they are not. It should be said that this system was mainly constructed by Engels. Although Engels and Marx founded the new philosophical system mainly from the discovery of historical materialism, their ideological change first started from idealism to materialism. Without such a change, it is impossible to discover the objective laws of social development. Marx once planned to write a book dedicated to expounding new dialectics, but due to various reasons, he failed to realize his long-cherished wish. Thankfully, Engels fulfilled the long-cherished wish that Marx didn't realize, that is, systematically expounded materialist dialectics and filled the gap in the development of Marxist philosophy.<sup>[8]</sup>

Engels' Anti-Turin Theory has laid an important theoretical foundation for the systematization of Marxism and its textbook paradigm. Anti-Turin Theory, written in 1876-1878, is Engels' most important systematic interpretation of Marxist theory. The main structure of Anti-Turin Theory is aimed at Turin's Philosophy Course, National Economics Course and Critique of Socialist Theoretical History. The exposition of dialectical materialism world outlook and its dialectics in Philosophy Course, labor value theory and surplus value theory in National Economics Course, and basic principles of scientific socialism in Critique of Socialist Theoretical History, which are the core propositions of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, have been deepened by Lenin's

Materialism and Empirical Critique, and become the direct basis of "Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism". Finally, combined with the systematic exposition of Marxism in Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of German Classical Philosophy, it has become the theme frame structure of contemporary Chinese textbook paradigm of basic principles of Marxism. Therefore, Engels is the direct promoter of the systematization of Marxism.<sup>[9]</sup>

### 3.2. Engels made up and improved the basic principles

In the later period, many opportunists always thought that Engels was by no means a "Marxist" although he promoted the systematic development of Marxism. In fact, Engels wrote Family, Private Ownership and the Origin of the State and the preface of the Communist Manifesto in 1888 on the basis of studying the anthropological works of Marx and Morgan in his later years. He thought that the judgment of material production mode and class struggle was untenable in primitive society, population production was the foundation and decisive force for the existence and development of primitive society, and there was no class opposition in primitive society. Marxist Baudrillard keenly pointed out that Marxism in the period of Das Kapital had the tendency of only material production paradigm, and material production did not occupy a dominant position in primitive society. Therefore, it is Engels who fundamentally defended the scientific nature of Marxism. Engels insisted on developing Marxism with a scientific and critical attitude, and did not dogmatize and formulate Marxism, but kept Marxism an open character.<sup>[10]</sup>

### 3.3. Engels re-emphasized Marxist dialectics

In the aspect of dialectics of nature, Marx's Das Kapital demonstrates and criticizes the special historical materialism of capitalist society, while Engels expounds the nature with special dialectical materialism in Dialectics of Nature, criticizes the historical view of naturalism, regards nature as the constituent element of human history, and thinks that nature is "dissolved" in history, which fills the natural gap of historical materialism and opens up the dimension of Marxist philosophy of science. Western Marxists Lukacs, Marcuse and Adorno mainly focus on positivism. In fact, Engels' dialectics of nature not only opposes free nature, but also opposes vulgar materialism and social Darwinism. Dialectics of nature ultimately serves historical materialism.<sup>[11]</sup>

Engels' proposal and application of these basic viewpoints of dialectical materialism provides a basic paradigm for future generations to construct this theoretical system. First, it unifies Marxist view of nature, epistemology, practice and history, thus constructing a relatively complete Marxist philosophical system. Secondly, it makes an in-depth study and systematic exposition of the three sources and components of Marxism, especially the relationship between Marxism and German classical philosophy. Thirdly, it emphasizes that studying Marxist philosophy is the basis of mastering Marxist theory, especially scientific socialism theory. Fourthly, it emphasizes that to learn Marxist philosophy well, we must pay attention to studying the history of philosophy. Fifthly, it advocates scientific evaluation of predecessors' philosophical thoughts, including those of Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach. Sixth, it advocates that Marxist philosophy is an open and developing theory, and opposes dogmatism of Marxist theory. Seventh, it advocates liberating philosophy from philosophers' study and turning it into a powerful ideological weapon for the people to understand and transform the world.<sup>[12]</sup>

Through a large number of letters in Engels' later years, he criticized economic determinism in a targeted way, strictly prohibited the formulation of Marxism, profoundly pointed out that history is the dialectical unity of objective decision and subject choice, and defended the scientific nature of historical materialism. However, in view of the new changes in capitalism in his later years, he thinks that the proletariat no longer has the conditions for violent revolution, and the proletariat should be

good at realizing the dictatorship of the proletariat by peaceful means such as universal suffrage and parliamentary struggle, which breaks the determinism of violent revolution, emphasizes the diversity of social and historical development, and highlights the historical consciousness of the proletariat. Therefore, Engels gradually emphasized the analysis of the new changes of capitalism, the declaration work of proletarian political parties, class consciousness, parliamentary struggle and other theories, which started the development process of Western Marxism.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **4. The contemporary significance of Engels' philosophical contribution**

### **4.1. The essence of Engels' problem**

It is helpful to deeply understand the consistency of Marx and Engels' thoughts, respond to the so-called "Marx-Engels opposition", and deepen the study of the totality of Marxist philosophy. In recent years, there is a view in academic circles at home and abroad that Marx and Engels' thoughts are opposite; Especially in philosophy, we think that Marx's philosophy is historical materialism, dialectical materialism is invented by Engels, and has the nature of mechanical materialism of old philosophy, so it does not belong to Marxist philosophy. This view is completely wrong. In-depth study of the establishment and development history of Marxist philosophy is not difficult to find that although Marx did not leave us special works on materialist dialectics, he insisted on materialism and dialectics. Moreover, Marx and Engels often exchange ideas, and Marx fully agrees with Engels' views. For example, Engels had many exchanges with Marx when he wrote Anti-Turin Theory. Marx not only fully agreed with Engels' point of view, but also personally participated in writing the tenth chapter of the book. It is true to say that Marx and Engels have relative independence and different division of labor in the field of theoretical research, so their ideological achievements are different to some extent, but exaggerating this difference and thinking that their philosophical thoughts are fundamentally opposite is groundless, so it is completely wrong.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **4.2. Help us study and apply the basic viewpoints of dialectical materialism in depth**

Engels has repeatedly stressed that we should learn to analyze and solve problems from reality, learn dialectical thinking, and pay attention to looking at problems from a comprehensive, moving, developing and changing and historical perspective. Especially in the current complicated situation at home and abroad, only by consciously applying dialectical materialism can we stand high and see far, and truly be like "adhering to systematic thinking, dialectical thinking and bottom line thinking", "establishing a world vision and grasping the pulse of the times, we must see, see and see through the changes in today's world, and discover the essence from various appearances, especially recognize the long-term trend". Only by mastering the housekeeping skill of dialectical materialism can we always adhere to the Marxist stand, viewpoint and method, analyze problems, innovate theories and guide practice.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **4.3. Help us cultivate the great communist spirit and character**

Because in order to support Marx's theoretical and practical activities, Engels made great sacrifices, including sacrificing his genius, and had to engage in business work that he hated very much. Engels made outstanding contributions to the establishment and development of Marxist theory, but he was always modest and prudent, attributed all this to Marx, and was willing to be the "second violinist". Engels' great communist spirit, broad mind and lofty character are always worth learning from every Communist Party member and progressives. But through these, we not only know that Marx and Engels are fundamentally an academic community, but also they jointly created Marxism. Therefore,



we can't obscure the "Engels" behind "Marxism" because of the slogan of "Marxism". Just as Derrida said, we can't live without Marx. In any case, we must have a Marx. We must have a memory of Engels. Without Engels, Marx can't justify himself, and Marxism can't show the whole picture of his thoughts. In a word, we can't ignore Engels' ideological talent and historical position, and he has made unique historical contributions to the development and innovation of Marxism.<sup>[16]</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

In the 21st century, Marxism continues to release vigorous vitality and far-reaching influence. The concrete content of scientific socialism, after experiencing many criticisms and tests, increasingly reveals Engels' keen insight as a revolutionary teacher. In order to refute this false censure, and to clarify the continuity of historical materialism in the development vein and the consistency of basic principles, we must deeply analyze and grasp the scientific socialism thought and its basic core in Engels' letters in his later years on the basis of thorough study of the original work,

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