DEFENSE FOR MARX

A NEW INTERPRETATION OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE THEME AND SYSTEM OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY: A NEW INTERPRETATION

The foundation of Marxist philosophy is like a splendid sunrise in the human history of thoughts, fundamentally transforming the theme, function and thinking mode of philosophy; however, it has also been facing distortions, criticisms and challenges from different aspects. It is demonstrated by the human history of thoughts that in the development course of any science, besides new issues concerned, such issues as its theme and function that belong to the directional and fundamental theoretical problems for the development of discipline often need re-discussing, so it is for philosophy and Marxist philosophy. “Well knowing does not mean truly knowing”, therefore accurately and comprehensively understanding Marxist philosophy is still a major theoretical subject.
A philosophical system is always named after a philosopher, but it is never exclusive to any individual philosopher. As Hegel ever said, philosophy is “the times concentratedly expressed by thoughts”. Marx took this point of view a further step – “a real philosophy is the essence of the spirit of its own times”. Despite the abstract extent of mode or the “individuality”, the philosophical systems created by philosophers are all associated closely with the times of philosophers. Leaving their own times, the straightforward and fiery character of French enlightenment philosophy and the intricate and obscure feature of classical German philosophy are both incomprehensible.

The occurrence of any philosophical system, fundamentally, is related to the times that it is in, and it is the product of a certain times. The generation of Marxist philosophy was exactly the inevitable outcome of social development in the mid-nineteenth century. The British Industrial Revolution and its consequence, the French political revolution and its consequence, and the formation of world history and its significance were three main fruits of the historic creative activities by the bourgeoisie, and these fruits and the social contradictions of great scale and modern form resulting from them were the primary cause promoting Marx to create the “new materialism”, and it was them that constituted the times background against which Marxist philosophy was generated.

The British Industrial Revolution initiated in the 1760s had won its decisive victory till the 1840s, when the production had been mechanized and socialized. The French Revolution started in 1789 also obtained historic victory after overthrowing the restoration dynasty in 1830, establishing and consolidating the capitalist system. The victory of the British Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution marked the human history had developed from the feudal era into the era of capitalism, meanwhile from the times when “natural connection is dominant” into the times when “factors created by society and history predominate over others”, and from the times of “personal dependence” into the times of “personal independence founded on objective dependence”\(^1\). While winning great victory, the bourgeoisie also brought a huge social

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problem for themselves – the irreconcilable contradiction between pro-
duction socialization and private ownership of the means of production,
resulting in alienations of man and the human world. In other words, the
living condition of men is alienated in capitalist society, and under such
an alienated condition, the individuality of man is dissolved, and people
become “one-dimensional men”.

The characteristics and inner contradictions of times will be reflected
in theories inevitably.

The classical political economics of England reflects the victory of the
bourgeoisie in the economic field. Adam Smith et al. turned the source
of social wealth to the “activity of subject” from object, and formed
the concept of “labor in general” and created the labor theory of value
based on abstraction. The formation of the concept of “labor in gen-
eral” marked human beings entered “modern society”, because only in
modern society, labor “is not a rule associated with individuals on the
basis of a particularity any longer”, and “an individual is prone to shift
from one labor type to another, and certain labor types are occasional
for them, thus being indistinctive”2.

The historiography during the French Restoration period was formed
based upon the summary of the French Revolution and its historical
course. According to Thierry et al., history is being created by the mass-
es of people; European history since the Middle Ages is actually the
history of class struggle, and the class struggle based on different inter-
est forms the power driving historical development; property relation-
ship constitutes the foundation of political system. Engels rated these
views highly, and believed that the historiography during the French
Restoration period shook “the whole conception of history up to the
present”3 and strove to discover the materialistic conception of history.

The “critical-utopian socialism” of England and France reflects the in-
ner contradictions in capitalist society. Among the critiques of capitalist
system, Saint-Simon et al. found that ownership was the “cornerstone
for the edifice of society”, and thought that historical movement had its
inherent laws, that was to say, capitalism would be doomed inevitably
like those social systems in the past, and give place to new type of

2 Ibid., p. 42.
3 Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Beijing: People’s Publishing
society in which everyone was entitled to free and all-around development. Although the critical-utopian socialism belongs to non-scientific form on the whole, it differs from previous utopianism qualitatively—it, generated in new times, reflects the inner contradictions of such times. Despite its failure to solve the problem, the critical-utopian socialism put forward a question, i.e. where the human history should go, which became the subject of times in the mid-nineteenth century. New era was calling for new theory.

Marxist philosophy does not belong to “academism”, nor it is the product extended from the themes of philosophies before. The foundation of Marxist philosophy was closely associated and integrated with the resolution to the subject of times. At the same time, while solving the subject of times and founding the new materialism, Marx critically studied and philosophically reviewed the classical British political economics, the historiography during the French Restoration period and the critical-utopian socialism of England and France, which, together with the classical German philosophy, constituted the theoretical source of Marxist philosophy. Spiritual production is different from material production of flesh, since human race continuation based on physical heredity is congeneric, whereas philosophical thinking can lead to new philosophical form through absorbing, digesting and recreating the fruits of different disciplines. The new materialism of Marx doubtlessly belongs to philosophy, but its theoretical source was not limited to philosophy. Just like related breeding is prejudicial to species development, a creative philosophical theory will certainly break through the limitation from one philosophy to another.

Marx also attached great importance to philosophical thinking, and critique of philosophy run through his resolution to the subject of times. “Germany is a philosophical nation”, where any social change will be firstly shown by theoretical and philosophical activities. “Even historically, theoretical emancipation has specific practical significance for Germany. For Germany’s revolutionary past is theoretical, it is the Reformation. As the revolution then began in the brain of the monk, so now it begins in the brain of the philosopher.”4 The way Marx had taken was a typical way of German.

I learn through profoundly rethinking the history of Marxism that Marx solved the subject of times not directly starting out from reality, but through critique and transformation of philosophy before returning to reality. Every step forward by Marx, as to speak, was achieved through critiques on philosophy – “critique on Hegel’s philosophy of right”, “critique on Hegel’s dialectics and entire philosophy”, “critique on critical criticism”, “critique on French materialism”, “critique on philosophical forms after Hegel”, etc. This series of critiques strictly armed Marx theoretically, and enabled him to understand modern philosophy, philosophy itself and other various theories more thoroughly and cognize the realistic social contradictions more deeply, thereby creating his new materialism. The creation of new materialism, in turn, made Marx think at a higher position and in a more incisive manner than his contemporaries, and gave him forward-looking profound wisdom to scientifically resolve the subject of times.

Prior to the generation of Marxist philosophy, philosophy was mainly featured by nationality. The philosophies of Confucius, Lao-tse, Kant and Hegel had exerted influence on other nations, but the influence was still confined to cultural exchange and communication, and did not change the nationality of philosophy – the Lao-Zhuang philosophy was still Chinese philosophy, Hegelian philosophy belonged to German philosophy, and so forth. Marxist philosophy is different for it is a world theory. Though Germany is the hometown of Marx, Marxist philosophy is a “world philosophy” instead of being exclusive to Germany. Marx had ever foreseen that such an era would come inevitably: “philosophy then ceases to be a particular system in relation to other particular systems; it becomes philosophy in general in relation to the world, i.e. the philosophy of the contemporary world.” Marxist philosophy itself is such a world philosophy, the product of world history.

The world history mentioned here is not in the ordinary sense of historiography, namely the whole human history, but refers to the history since world “integration” resulting from mutual influence, restriction and penetration of various nations and countries in a comprehensive way. As an experienced fact today, the world history took its form in the nineteenth century. Marx noticed this historical trend depending on his extraordinary insight, and represented such a trend with the

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proposition of “transformation of history into world history”; besides, he also pointed out clearly that the bourgeoisie “produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations.”

As a result of the formation of world history, the previous state of exclusiveness and self-sufficiency is replaced by the interaction and interdependence between various nations in all aspects, continuously eliminating national one-sidedness and limitation. It is true with regard to both material and spiritual productions. There is not only world market but “a kind of world literature”, i.e. a spiritual product of world. Marxist philosophy is such a spiritual product of world, as well as a world philosophy generated against the grand times background of world history. It is because Marxist philosophy is a world philosophy that it “has found representatives far beyond the boundaries of Germany and Europe and in all the literary languages of the world”, thereby being able to take root, grow and bear fruit in different nations and become a part of various national cultures.

2 FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE THEME OF PHILOSOPHY

It is undoubted that Marxist philosophy is a kind of materialistic philosophy, but the theme of materialistic philosophy changes along with the development of times. Marxist philosophy, as new materialism, is by no means the extension and solution to the original theme of the old materialism and even the whole traditional philosophy. Contrarily, it realized the theme transformation and object change of philosophy, and constructed a new philosophical field based on that. Engels even described the characteristics of new materialism in such a way, “It is no longer a philosophy at all, but simply a world outlook.” This, of course, does not mean that the new materialism does not belong to philosophy, but that it is not the philosophy in traditional sense. Fundamentally speaking, Marxist philosophy falls under in the category of modern philosophy and belongs to modern materialism.

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7 Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, p. 212.
To really comprehend this viewpoint of Engels, it needs to understand fully the nature of traditional philosophy and Marx’s concept of world.

Relative to “modern philosophy”, “traditional philosophy” refers to the philosophical form during the historical period from ancient Greece to the mid-nineteenth century, including ancient philosophy and early modern philosophy. The traditional philosophy aims to trace the principle or essentials of the whole world and constitutes a common theme for different schools it covers. It basically belongs to “metaphysics”, namely a theory concerning the nature of transcendent being, which tries to understand and grasp the nature of things, as well as the essence and behavior basis of man, based on “ultimate being” or “prime principle”.

Early modern materialism had a tendency of rejecting “metaphysics” at the very beginning. According to Bacon, materialism “holds back within itself in a naive way the germs of a many-sided development”. However, “in its further evolution, materialism becomes one-sided” and “takes to misanthropy”. That “abstract substance” and “abstract entity” became the subject of all changes and formed “the causa efficiens of the natures and existences of things.” In Descartes’ opinion, what philosophy pursues is to grasp this “primary cause and true principle” and deduce the natures and causes of all things accordingly. The early modern materialism started from the critique on “metaphysics” but returned to “metaphysics” in the end.

By combining “metaphysics” with German idealistic dialectics, Hegel built a realm of “metaphysics”, thereby realizing “the victorious and substantial restoration” of “metaphysics” in the classical German philosophy. The problem is that Hegel restored everything into “absolute reason”, which had become a new superstitious belief towering overhead and receiving the worship of men; men themselves become the tool for self-realization of such “absolute reason”. Hegelian philosophy recognizes human initiative merely in form, and actually, it deprives man of initiative, creativity and subjectivity thoroughly for it only takes man as a “tool”. Thus, a large cycle of “metaphysics” had been completed till Hegel since Aristotle specified “the Beings of beings” as the theme of “the first philosophy”.

This means that no matter whether in the philosophical system of early modern materialism or early modern idealism, not only the “thing-in-itself” but “mankind” is taken as an abstract being, and human beings and human subjectivity are lost. As a result, after its tragic “restoration” in the classical German philosophy, “metaphysics” “lost all credit in the domain of theory” and “in practice”. Marx had ever asserted, “Metaphysics will be defeated forever by materialism, which has now been perfected by the work of speculation itself and coincides with humanism.”

It was Marx who fulfilled such a task of times. In other words, making materialism “coincident with” human subjectivity is what Marxist philosophy focuses on, and opposing or rejecting “metaphysics” is its basic principle.

In the history of philosophy, Marx and Comte raised the banner of “rejecting metaphysics” at the same time. Marx even believed that the new philosophy he founded was the “real positive science”. Marx’s “rejection of metaphysics” is consistent with that of Comte with respect to the times, but the two are essentially different in the aspect of directionality. Comte just limited “the rejection of metaphysics” to the scope of experience, knowledge and “verifiability”; Marx, however, brought forward another train of thought – after “the rejection of metaphysics”, philosophy should pay attention to “the real world of its times”, “existing world”, “sensuous world”, and “human world”, as well as “making real beings and earthly things the center of all interest”.

The “existing world” referred to by Marx certainly includes nature, but this nature is not the untouched ecological nature but “the natural world of anthropology”. According to Marx, there is a “priority” of nature, but “nature that preceded human history”, or nature beyond the range of human activity, means “nothing” or “non-existent nature” to human beings. The reason is that only through exploration and discovery of human beings can the untouched ecological nature acquire the realistic feature for man; only after the practice and transformation by human beings can it constitute the “sensuous world” where men live; through practice, men do not only transform natural beings, but fuse with them and give a new dimension to them – sociality. It is apparent that the “existing world” mentioned by Marx does not refer to the universe embracing nature, society and thought, namely “the whole world”, but means

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11 Ibid., pp. 161 – 162.
human world. Natural history and human history are closely linked with each other; as long as men exist, the both are dependent on each other. In this existing world, due to interaction and inter-infiltration, what appears before men is social nature and natural society, or “historical nature and natural history”. Human world is a “two-in-one” world of nature and society.

The traditional philosophy concentrates its attention on the universe noumenon and the “absolute” or “abstract substance” of God, but just forgets to pay attention to human world; Marx, on the contrary, attached importance to human world and mankind in reality and their development. For Marxist philosophy, “all the issues are for the purpose of revolutionizing the existing world”, i.e. remolding the world in coordination with human development, thereby returning “human world and human relation to men themselves”\(^\text{12}\). In this way, Marx shifted the focus of philosophy from the whole world to the existing world, from the universe noumenon to human world, thus accomplishing the fundamental transformation of the theme of philosophy.

The fundamental transformation of the theme of philosophy was completed along with the object change.

Historically, philosophies at different times and even different philosophical schools of the same epoch have their particular study objects. Fichte pointed out, “We want to call the foundation put forward by every philosophy for experience interpretation the object of such philosophy, because this object seems to exist only through and for such philosophy.”\(^\text{13}\) This is a quite insightful opinion. Throughout the entire span of the history of philosophy, the basis used by every philosophy to interpret the world and build its theoretical system is its object. Feuerbach’s philosophy has tried to interpret the world and construct its system in the basic principle of “real man”, taking “man, together with nature as the basis of man, the exclusive, universal, and highest object of philosophy”\(^\text{14}\). Hegelian philosophy interprets the world and builds its system on the basis of abstract human rationality – absolute rationality; as a matter of fact, it regards human rationality as study object,

\(^\text{13}\) German Philosophy during Late 1700s – Early 1800s, compiled by the Department of Philosophy, Peking University. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1975: p. 187.
so he thought that “philosophy is to explore rational things”\textsuperscript{15}. It was based on such cognition that Hegel built a philosophical system of “a science of sciences”. “In the sense that philosophy was regarded as a special science standing above the other sciences, Hegel’s system was the final thorough form of philosophy. The entire philosophy declined along with this system.”\textsuperscript{16}

As soon as Marx turned his eyes to human world, he started to seek the basis for comprehending, interpreting and grasping such a world and take it as the study object of new philosophy. At last, this basis was discovered, that is, practical activity of human beings.

As far as Marx is concerned, nature and society in human world integrate with each other in human practice, which plays the role as a converter. Through practice, society infuses its objective into nature, making it the social nature; meanwhile, nature enters society and converts into a constant factor in society, making society the natural society. Human world, of course, cannot be resolved into the consciousness of man, nor should it be restored to the untouched ecological nature. The practical activity of human beings is the foundation and base for the existence of human world or existing world, and plays a guiding role in the movement of human world, that is to say, men “set the mind for Heaven and Earth” by means of their practical activity, and rebuild the world on the basis of their material practice activities. In other words, practice is the real noumenon of human world, a dynamic noumenon in continuous evolution and generation; the human world is therefore made an open system with larger and larger scale and more and more tiers.

For this reason, Marx set the practical activity of human beings as the object of philosophy, and the resolutions to the relationships between man and world, subject and object, and subjectivity and objectivity as the task of philosophy, thereby providing methodology for changing the world. Marxist philosophy was founded aiming to change the practical activity in the existing world, and the contents of practice are its theoretical contents. Marxist philosophy itself is a kind of theoretical reflection on all kinds of contradictory relations in the practical activity of human beings; that’s why Marx believed that the new materialism is “the real positive science, the representation of the practical activity,”


of the practical process of development of men”\(^\text{17}\), and its basic content is from “the study of the actual life-process and the activity of the individuals of each epoch”\(^\text{18}\). In this way, Marx found the point directly bonding philosophy with the change of world.

The theme transformation and object change of philosophy realized by Marxist philosophy are coincident with the development of modern science. “As soon as each special science is bound to make clear its position in the great totality of things and of our knowledge of things, a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous.”\(^\text{19}\) Marx did not grant the new materialism, at anytime and anywhere, such a privilege, i.e. constructing a comprehensive prospect of whole world relying on the achievements in natural science and social science. As Engels accurately pointed out, along with the generation of modern science, “that which still survives, independently, of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws – formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history”\(^\text{20}\). By the twentieth century, the study on thought had been split from philosophy, and become an independent science. It can be said that up to now, nature, society and even thought itself haven’t belong to the study domain of philosophy any longer. It has been demonstrated by modern science that any attempt to reconstruct a world outlook concerning the “universal relation” of the whole world upon science is really “superfluous”, and its essence is nothing but the “restoration” of “metaphysics” under modern conditions.

The theme transformation of philosophy realized by Marxist philosophy marks the transition of philosophy – from traditional to modern. What the modern philosophy emphasizes, in general, is the living world and existence of human beings. In Jaspers’ words, “the objective of philosophy is striving to comprehend the reality of man in the practical situation”. Even the “linguistic turn” achieved by analytic philosophy essentially reflects the search for the connecting point or intermediate link between man and world, and shows the general understanding of modern philosophy on the relationships between thought, language and world, that is, the world is beyond the thought of men, but men can understand the world and express their understanding of the world

\(^{17}\) Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 73.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 74.
\(^{19}\) Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, p. 364.
only through language, so “the boundary of language is the boundary of world”, and we can only talk about “my world”.

This opinion of analytic philosophy is quite reasonable. “Language is the immediate actuality of thought”, “the manifestation of real life” and “the language of actual world”. The fruits of human cognition of world are accumulated in and expressed by language. Studying the significance of world in the sense of language is actually to understand and grasp the world based on the relationship with man. Of course, the analytic philosophy goes too far after all, where language becomes an independent realm. It seemed that Marx had foreseen such a “linguistic turn”, because he pointed out that “just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, they were bound to make language into an independent realm.”21 As far as I am concerned, the analytic philosophy, in effect, boosts the study on the relationship between man and world in a regressive way.

In respect of content but not manifestation mode, the operation of entire modern western philosophy takes, generally but not individually, the theme transformation realized by Marxist philosophy as its fundamental content. No matter whether other schools of modern western philosophy have realized or acknowledged, Marx is, indeed, the pathfinder and founder of modern western philosophy. Thus, Marxist philosophy falls under “modern materialism”.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

As “modern materialism”, Marxist philosophy achieved its development through critique of traditional philosophy; therefore, in order to really understand the substantive characteristics of Marxist philosophy, we need to know the major defects of old materialism and idealism first of all.

The old materialism consists of natural materialism and humanistic materialism.

With origin traced back to ancient philosophy, natural materialism becomes systematic in the theory of Hobbes, and extends to the mechanical materialism in French materialism. It restores the whole world to a natural substance in the principle of “time priority”, and makes man

a kind of manifestation of natural substance. In natural materialism, substance is considered as “the subject of all changes”, and “both man and nature follow the same rules”. It acknowledges material unity of the world, but totally negates the initiative, creativity and subjectivity of man; it studies “the whole world”, but does not find a practical standing point for man – the real subject. To put it another way, there is “a vacant land of humanism” in natural materialism. It is because of this that Marx thinks natural materialism is a kind of “pure materialism”, and Hobbes had made “materialism become misanthropy”.

Humanistic materialism originated from the other school of French materialism, namely “real humanism”, and obtained its typical form from Feuerbach. “Feuerbach has a great advantage over the ‘pure’ materialists in that he realizes how man too is an ‘object of the senses’.” Concretely speaking, Feuerbach regarded man as the foundation for the unity of thought and nature, and tried to comprehend the world in the basic principle of “real man”. He, however, did not realize that practice is the mode of being of man, and could “never manage to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it”. Feuerbach, for this reason, stopped at abstract man, and still ignored the initiative, creativity and subjectivity of man. The same as natural materialism, humanistic materialism also understands “thing, reality and sensuousness” “only in the form of the object”, but not “subjectively”. It is in this sense that Marx “included” the materialism of Feuerbach into the category of “old materialism”, and held that the chief defect of old materialism was that it did not acknowledge practical activity and its significance.

On the contrary, idealism acknowledges the initiative of subject consciousness, and demonstrates that in the cognitive activity, men grasp external objects relying on their own properties and conditions. The results of such cognition are embodied largely in critical philosophy of Kant and negative dialectics of Hegel. The problem is that both Kant’s critical philosophy and Hegel’s negative dialectics repudiated the materialistic foundation of active conscious activity, but only “abstractly developed” the “active side” of man. The primary cause for this is that idealism also does not know practical activity and its significance.

23 Ibid., pp. 167 – 168.
25 Ibid., p. 78.
Thus, it is clear that the common chief defect of old materialism and idealism is that both do not understand the practical activity of man and its significance. It was this chief defect that resulted in the separation of materialism and dialectics in early modern philosophy, and the condition that “materialism and history diverged completely” in old materialistic philosophy, viz., forming materialistic view of nature and idealistic conception of history.

On account of the astonishingly consistent major defect of old materialism and idealism, Marx was impelled to investigate the practical activity of human beings and its significance in a deep and comprehensive manner, and defined Marxist philosophy as “practical materialism”. In my opinion, this is a global fundamental definition, and what it intends to manifest is not only a philosophical attitude of putting theory into action, but more importantly, that the view of practice is the primary and fundamental view in Marxist philosophy, and the principle of practice is the principle for construction of Marxist philosophy. Practical materialism constitutes the substantive characteristic of Marxist philosophy, in other words.

In the view of Marx, practice, above all, is the process in which men cause, regulate and control the material exchange between man and nature through their own activity; in this process, it is necessary for individuals to establish definite relations with each other for the exchange of their activities. At the same time, the result that will be obtained at the completion of practice already exists there at the commencement of the process, as the purpose, in the mind of the practitioner in the form of idea, and such purpose is realized, which gives the law to modus operandi” of the practitioner. This means that practice inherently encompasses those relationships between man and nature, man and society, and man and his consciousness, and the integration of these relationships constitutes the fundamental relation in the existing world. Practice, implying all secrets of the existing world, can be described as an epitome reflecting the existing world, as well as the total origin of all real contractions confronting human beings. That’s why Marxist philosophy rethinks, probes into and comprehends the existing world based on practice, and “conceives thing, reality and sensuousness” “as practice”.

The basic point for understanding the existing world based on practice is to grasp the existing world from the starting point of material practice, and regard the material exchange between man and nature caused by material production as the foundation of existing world. According to Marx, the integration of existing world is realized through the normalization of various relations and structures of the existing world by the material exchange between man and nature, which always is the deep structure in the existing world, fundamentally determining social structure, political structure, conceptual structure, etc. “Definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production.”

This means the “priority” of natural substance is recognized; this, however, is merely the common character of new materialism and old materialism, and is not the exclusive characteristic of new materialism. The material exchange between man and nature caused by human practical activity forms the foundation of existing world, which is the “novelty” of new materialism, or the “materialistic character” of Marx’s materialism.

Practice is the mode of being and the essential activity of man. The existing world is “conceived as practice”, or “subjectively” in fact, in Marxist philosophy. It is also in Marxist philosophy that both practice principle and subjectivity principle are inherently consistent, thereby providing a new way of thinking for understanding the human essence and the relationship between man and world.

As far as Marx is concerned, man comes from nature originally; and “in the same way the existence of the human race is the result of an earlier process which organic life passed through. Man comes into existence only when a certain point is reached. But once man has emerged, he becomes the permanent pre-condition of human history, likewise its permanent product and result, and he is pre-condition only as his own product and result.” That is to say, man is the result of self-creation and self-shaping through his own activity.

This is exactly true. Animals realize unity with nature and maintain their survival depending on their negative adaption to surroundings, so they are only a part of nature. Men, differently, achieve unity with nature, maintain their survival and continuously develop themselves through transformation and creation of circumstances by themselves; that’s why men are sui generis as the unique human beings. Human evolution is not only biological heredity and variation but also historiographical continuation and innovation, and the unification of the two is accomplished exactly in the practical activity. Practice is the mode of being and the essential activity of man. According to Marx, the substantive characteristics of man are formed in his survival activity, and the secrets of man are also hidden in his practical activity. “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce.”

As a result, to judge what mankind is, the first thing is to know how man exists and acts. This doubtlessly provides a way of thinking for comprehending and grasping the human essence based on man’s own activity.

Man performs activity and enters into relation with nature in the mode of substance during practice, and what he obtains is the existence of nature or substance in the mode of human being, thereby making man the subject and nature the object. “The entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labor, nothing but the emergence of nature for man.” It indicates that practice makes the relationship between man and nature a relationship that “exists for me”, which is a negative contradictory relation. Marx believed that with the aim to maintain his existence – affirming himself, man must take negative actions towards nature, i.e. changing the original ecology of nature, and making it “humanized nature” and “thing-for-me”.

Unlike animals, men are always realizing the unification with nature by constantly establishing opposite relations with nature – negation against nature as object is just the affirmation of subject. The dialectical relationship between affirmation and negation puts subject and object into a bidirectional movement. While continuously transforming and creating the existing world, practice is also transforming and creating mankind constantly. “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances

with human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”\(^{31}\) As the mode of being and the essential activity of man, practice certainly embodies the inherent measure of man and the criticalness on the existing world, and also involves self-development of man.

It can be observed that the negative relationship that “exists for me” between man and nature is the most profound and complicated contradictory relation, which is like the “Waterloo” for many master philosophers before Marx, making materialism “powerless and frustrated” with respect to the subjectivity of man, and separating materialism far from dialectics. The wisdom of Marx lies in his unity of materialism and human subjectivity, and his integration of materialism and dialectics consequently, through deep and comprehensive analysis on the practical activity of man and its significance. In other words, dialectical materialism is another important characteristic of Marxist philosophy.

When materialism and human subjectivity, as well as materialism and dialectics, is organically integrated by Marx on the basis of scientific view of practice, the unity of materialistic view of nature and conception of history is realized, which are the two aspects of a same process.

It is generally thought that the materialistic conception of history is the extension or application of general materialism to social history, but this is not true. Helvetius had long since “envisaged materialism in relation to social life”\(^ {32}\), but he arrived at historical idealism. The particularity of social life is like a “drop leaf” between nature and society. Prior to Marx, even when the firm materialists turned their eyes from nature to society, and started to study social history, almost all of them were pushed to the abyss of idealism by this drop leaf. From the angle of epistemology, the fundamental cause of such a condition is still that previous philosophers did not realize practical activity and its significance, and did not perceive that social life was practical in essence. The genius of Marx is that he comprehended society and the relationship between society and nature based on practice, and thereby founded the materialistic conception of history. The view of practice serves as the primary and fundamental view both of Marxist epistemology and Marxist philosophy.

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31 Ibid., p. 55.
In the opinion of Marx, men must be able to live for creating history, and must conduct material practice and accomplish the material exchange between man and nature for living; with the purpose of accomplishing the said material exchange, men must exchange their activities, and enter into definite social relations necessarily. Such social relations “are nothing but the necessary forms in which man’s material and individual activity is realized”\(^{33}\), and even social productivity is, in essence, formed in the human practical activity of nature transformation. Practice really is the cradle of all social relations and the essence of all social life. Fundamentally speaking, it is during the material exchange between man and nature that society takes its shape and receives its development. The material exchange between man and nature becomes the “eternal natural necessity” for the existence and development of society.

It is because of this that previous philosophers, including old materialists, could do nothing but stepped towards historical idealism after excluding the practical relationship of man to nature from history; but Marx interpreted idea, historical process and its rules based on “material practice” – “the foundation of real history”, and created the materialistic conception of history, thereby shattering the myth of the opposition between material nature and spiritual history, and accomplishing the unity of materialistic view of nature and conception of history. “After history was also subjected to materialistic treatment, a new avenue of development had opened.”\(^{34}\) It is true that the creation of the materialistic conception of history had opened up a new path for the development of philosophy, and without it, the generation of Marxist dialectical materialism was impossible. Historical materialism, therefore, also constitutes another important characteristic of Marxist philosophy.

Hence, we can see that the view of practice is exactly the primary and fundamental view of Marxist philosophy, and its two important characteristics – historical materialism and dialectical materialism – are derived from the substantive characteristic of practical materialism as the inherent logic and theoretical representation necessarily developed by the substantive characteristic.

\(^{33}\) *Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*. 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, p. 532.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 228.
By promoting practice to the fundamental principle for the first time in the history of philosophy, and transforming the philosophical way of thinking, Marx founded a kind of practical, dialectical and historical materialism. Thus, the traditional philosophy was ended by Marxist philosophy, and modern philosophy was initiated, which is superior to other schools of modern western philosophy on the whole. According to my understanding, other schools of modern western philosophy all view the human world based on a certain aspect, link or relation, and reduce the human world to such an aspect, link or relation, thus failing to grasp the human world generally and the human being fundamentally; Marxist philosophy, on the contrary, grasps the foundation of human being and human world – practice, and radiates this foundation to all the aspects, links and relations in the human world, thus forming a “holistic vision of society”. I have a deeper understanding on the well-known saying of Sartre than Sartre himself – Marxist philosophy is the sole unsurpassable philosophy of our times, in that I have grasped the substantive characteristic of Marxist philosophy, that is, practical materialism.
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