

A Logical Analysis of the Progressive Concept of Historical Materialism of “Chinese Path to Modernization”

Wang Yali

[**Abstract**] Modernization is a progressive cause, but western modernization has increasingly caused hidden dangers and crises of Chinese path to modernization. Marx and Engels criticized the political economy of capitalist countries and revealed the inevitable trend of human society ultimately moving towards communism in the Communist Manifesto, which actually revealed the progressive logic of Western modernization centered on capital. On the contrary, Chinese path to modernization is a progressive way of investigating the substantive content of social and historical reality with “real empirical science” to promote the practice of the principle of historical materialism, which contains a progressive concept based on “historicity” and aimed at creating a new form of Marxism sinicization.

[**Key words**] modernization; criticism; progressive logic; new forms of human civilization

[**About the author**] Wang Yali (1997—), female, lecturer in School of Marxism, Jiangxi Institute of Fashion Technology, master of Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. Research interests: history of the CPC, construction of the CPC.

[**DOI**] <https://doi.org/10.62662/kxwxy0106008>

[**Website**] www.oacj.net

1 Introduction

“Chinese-style modernization” in the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China profoundly revealed inherent and practical requirements of socialist modernization in the new era, and drew a grand blueprint for a new form of human civilization that is different from Western-style modernization. The key to the success of Chinese-style modernization in creating a new form of human civilization in the primary stage of socialism with Chinese characteristics that is different from Western-style modernization lies in its own self-consciousness of the times in its own progressive concept of historical materialism.

2 A logical critique of the “progressivity” of Western modernization

Marx’s analysis and criticism of Western modernization is based on the logic of capital. Capital logic refers to the inherent laws and cutting-edge trends of capitalist society in the process of value appreciation. According to the perspective of state monopoly capitalism, the capitalist state is an institutional tool controlled by the monopoly capitalist class. The law of value caused by the intensification and concentration of capital has prompted the capitalist class to develop complex state regulation and intervention mechanisms. Based on the evolution of complex state regulations and intervention mechanisms in capitalist countries driven by capital accumulation, the understanding of multiple dimensions of Marx’s criticism to capital logic can be deepened. And with capital accumulation and the evolution of its methods as the core, it analyzes and criticizes the logic of capital.

2.1 Historical criticism based on capital logic

From the “development history” of Western capital, capital logic is the logic of progress. Cruel violence is the source of capital proliferation, and the power of the state is the booster of capital operation. The inhumane,

coercive, and decadent characteristics of the primitive accumulation stage of capitalism are the most powerful criticism and ridicule of the progressive logic of capitalism itself. In the discussion on the primitive accumulation of capital in Volume I of *Das Kapital*, it was pointed out that the complicated regulation and intervention mechanisms of Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom caused by different factors of capital accumulation were systematically integrated into colonial system, treasury bond system, modern tax system and protective tariff system at the end of the 17th century. ① The inhuman characteristics of capital logic: Most of the regulations and intervention mechanisms produced in various countries and regions during the period of primitive accumulation of Western capital were based on the most brutal violence, abuse of human rights and human life, and even infringement of the sovereignty and territory of other countries, such as colonialism war, bloody plunder, colonial systems such as opening up overseas colonies, and even making high profits through the criminal triangular trade and slave trade, establishing large-scale military commercial companies, and dumping goods to China and other eastern powers and colonies. As Marcuse said: “The law of capitalist progress is such an equation: technological progress = ever-increasing social wealth (growing GNP) = enslavement to expansion”. Therefore, the origin of Western modernization is the product of the colonial system’s enslavement, oppression, and violation of human rights, that is, the domination and denial of the logic of “people” by inhuman “things”. ② The coercive characteristics of capital logic: The coercive characteristics of the progressive logic of Western modernization are rooted in the coercive mechanism of capital’s self-expansion. The inhuman characteristics of the logic of capital can be extended to the characteristics that capital is not subject to human will. The nature of capital is unlimited proliferation, which leads to “continuous changes in production, constant turmoil in all social conditions, eternal instability and changes”. ③ The decadent nature of capital logic: The decadent nature of Western-style modern capital logic is specifically reflected in the constraints and effects of financial capital. The public credit system, namely the national debt system and the international credit system, which is decorated with the power of the state or the name of an international organization, is generated under the current situation. Public debt is one of the most powerful instruments of primitive accumulation. William Cobbett pointed out in response to this phenomenon that all public institutions in Britain are called “royal”, but “debts” are “national”.

2.2 Realistic criticism based on capital logic

From the “development history” of Western capital, the modernization process promoted by Western civilization, especially the logic of hegemonism and power politics prevalent in today’s capitalism, has subtly followed the logic of capitalist progress. The zero-sum game mentality has plunged all mankind into competition and struggle thinking, and the “protectionism”, “small courtyards and high walls”, “decoupling and chain breaking”, and “risk - removing” ideological trends, arguments and actions are contrary to the process of globalization, seriously weakening the credibility of the new type of international relations and curbing the coordinated and sustainable development of global momentum. Western-style modernization has increasingly become exclusive, extreme, and unsustainable.

The capital logic is exclusive: The refusal of capitalist countries to reform and update the existing international economic governance system and power structure clearly reflects the exclusive characteristics of Western-style modernization. The global economic governance system established after World War II complies with the process of the United States gradually becoming the leader of the international economic order, and realizing major changes in the international economic system from the Bretton Woods system to the Jamaican system. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, especially after entering the 21st century, the global economic structure and balance of power have changed. With the rise of emerging economies, the international economic system has been forced to reform and

update. However, a few developed economies have rejected the diversification of the international monetary system and refused to support the International Monetary Fund and the world. The bank has made major reforms, even rejecting the ideas of developing countries in the WTO reform, rejecting different economic systems, and provoking confrontation in the dispute settlement mechanism, which vividly reflects the exclusivity and narrow-mindedness of capital logic.

The capital logic is extreme: With the rise of anti-globalization thoughts, the intensification of extreme political tendencies in capitalist countries reflects the extreme nature of capital logic. For example, some countries blame economic globalization for internal governance problems, frequently adopt hegemonism and unilateralism, and disrupt the global economic chain, thus causing disorders to the existing international trade order. The International Monetary Fund stated that economic fragmentation caused by geopolitical factors will seriously damage world economic development and may cause a loss of 7% of global GDP, which is roughly equivalent to the combined annual GDP of France and Germany.

The capital logic is unsustainable: The inhumanity, coercion, decadence, exclusivity, and extreme nature of capital logic create the unsustainable nature of the capitalist economy. In addition, the industrialized production model under the capitalist economic system takes high efficiency as its ultimate goal and is oriented toward competitiveness. However, this production method has exacerbated the over-exploitation, waste and environmental pollution of resources, the most obvious of which is the emission of carbon dioxide, leading to global warming. Under the background of global warming, extreme weather such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, and thunderstorms occur frequently, and even natural disasters such as melting glaciers, melting permafrost, and rising sea levels are caused. It is obvious that capitalism will uncontrollably break its connection with sustainable development due to its coercion and extreme nature in terms of ecological security, energy conservation and environmental protection, which are the survival of mankind.

3 Clarification of the essence of the “concept of progress” contained in historical materialism

The three volumes of “Das Kapital” closely follow capital, from the production of capital, to the circulation process of capital and the distribution of capitalism, revealing the essence of capital and the economic operation of capitalism. They aim to reveal the essence of the surplus value of capital’s exploitation of workers, revealing the future trend of the inevitable demise of capitalism and the inevitable victory of socialism. Marx’s analysis and criticism of the capital logic reveal the progressive logic of Western modernization. However, did Marx find a new path for mankind and explore another completely different form of progress? Does historical materialism contain a multi-dimensional examination of “progressivity”?

3.1 Substantive nature of the “concept of progress” integrated into social-historical reality

Although Marx did not specifically study the theoretical context of the concept of progress, he once emphasized: “The concept of progress must not be understood in the usual abstract sense”. As we all know, historical materialism is the theoretical crystallization of Marxist positions, viewpoints, and methods. It is a concept and method with universal truth that has been tested in practice during the formation and development of Marxism. Therefore, the progressive concept of historical materialism can be examined and analyzed from three dimensions of historical materialism’s basic stance, viewpoint, and method. Marxism takes the liberation of the proletariat and all mankind as its own mission, which embodies the basic position of historical materialism—the position of the people. “The people are subjects and creators of history” is the basic view of “The German Ideology”, and the

basic concept of historical materialism, reflecting the people's position in historical materialism. On the other hand, regarding the methodology of historical materialism, the starting point for Marx and Engels to establish a new historical perspective was from the premise and foundation of studying social history. Marx and Engels clearly pointed out in "The German Ideology" that the premise of the historical view is real individuals, their activities, and their material living conditions. Therefore, the progressive concept of historical materialism is based on a profound understanding of the people's nature, history, and practicality. It requires grasping the historical conditions required for the establishment of a communist society, in-depth concrete practice, grasping social development trends, and discovering new trends. In this way, society's predictability and scientificity can be formed, and then "principled and high-level practice" can be achieved. Therefore, what the "concept of progress" integrates into the entity of social-historical reality is the concept of progress that carries out empirical scientific criticism, and aims to lead and surpass the critical concept of progress of Western capitalist civilization.

3.2 "Concept of progress" must be subject to empirical scientific criticism, practice and testing

Marxism's critical approach to "self" requires that the "progressive" concept of historical materialism must be subject to empirical scientific criticism, practice and testing. First of all, the emergence of historical materialism has profound social roots, class foundation and ideological origins. The concept of "progress" of historical materialism emerged based on the urgent needs, criticism and practice of empirical science. Historical materialism emerged from the background of the era when the industrial revolution and scientific and technological progress greatly improved labor productivity but caused serious social disasters. Social polarization and the frequent outbreak of periodic economic crises, such as the British economic crisis in 1825 and the economic crises that hit major European capitalist countries in 1836 and 1837, made the proletariat urgently need to resist the exploitation and oppression of the bourgeoisie and find "progressivity" and "scientific" theoretical guidance. The workers' uprising in Lyon, France in 1831, the Chartist Movement in England in 1836, and the textile workers' uprising in Silesia, Germany in 1844 gave birth to the modern proletariat's urgent need for "progressive" and "scientific" revolutionary theories through empirical science and historical criticism. From 1845 to 1846, "The German Ideology" co-authored by Marx and Engels came into being, marking the creation of historical materialism and the formation of Marxist philosophy. Secondly, the "progressive" concept of historical materialism generates logical inheritance and contains the blood and genes of "scientific" and "critical". The concept of "progress" in historical materialism takes as its direct theoretical source the three major advanced ideological trends in Western Europe in the 19th century, the formation of the cell theory from 1838 to 1839, the discovery of the law of energy conservation and transformation from 1842 to 1847, and the maturity of the theory of biological evolution in 1859. The premise of natural science, therefore, is to implant the scientific nature, critical gene and traditional academic rationality of the concept of "progress" in historical materialism according to the current conditions. Finally, returning to the origin, the critical principle contained in Marxism's "own" dialectical materialism and historical materialism requires that it must be criticized, practiced and tested by empirical science.

3.3 Essential characteristics of the "concept of progress": "historicity"

Historical materialism arises from established history, develops from today's history, and is tested from future history. In the final analysis, the concept of progress in historical materialism is a newborn under the direct collision, and established and past historical conditions. Marx and Engels revealed in their classic work "The German Ideology" that the essential characteristic of the concept of progress is "historicity". Heidegger attached great importance to Marx's "historicity" thought. He pointed out: "Human behavior is historical only as a fateful behavior". Therefore, people's understanding and transformation activities of the world at each historical stage are

based on the social and historical conditions created by the previous generation.

Through the analysis of the inherent objective laws of the movement of basic social contradictions, Marx scientifically demonstrated that the inevitable realization of socialism is determined by the basic contradictions of human society. We should objectively examine the objective laws of the development of human society from the long history. The development of human society proves that the development of productive forces is unstoppable. The original production method always adapts to its development at the beginning, but then lags behind and restricts its development. The impact of productivity will surely break through the original production methods and promote the creation of new production methods. The capitalist mode of production destroyed the feudal system that restricted the development of productive forces. It used large industry to eliminate the old factory handicraft industry, established a kingdom of free competition, free migration, and equality of commodity owners, and brought about the development of productivity at an unprecedented speed and scale. However, the productive forces released by capitalism conflict and contradict the capitalist mode of production. Only by resolving this contradiction can capitalist society be maintained, but the problem is that this is the prerequisite for the operation of the capitalist mode of production. There is only one way to truly resolve this contradiction, and that is to destroy this mode of production itself. Destroy this mode of production, a new mode of production will emerge, and a new social form will come. That is the socialist mode of production and the socialist social form. This is a historical picture and a presentation of historical development trends. The historical inevitability of realizing communism and the prerequisites required for the establishment of a communist society, and the inherent contradictions and manifestations of the capitalist mode of production under certain historical conditions constitute the preemptive conditions for the realization of the great historical progress of socialism. It was precisely based on his understanding of the “historicity” of historical materialism that Marx regarded socialist society as a historical necessity.

4 Consciousness of the times in the concept of Chinese-style modernization and progress

The exposure and criticism of the capitalist mode of production in works such as “The Communist Manifesto”, “Das Kapital” and “The German Ideology” are actually a denial of today’s Western-style modernization. At the same time, Marx’s theory of scientific socialism also proposed new progress, ideas and insights. In modern China, under the guidance of Marxism, the Chinese Communists and the Chinese people have gone through many obstacles, and finally formed a new form of human civilization with “Chinese-style modernization”. Therefore, Chinese-style modernization is a product of the times that understands and applies the “concept of progress” of Marxist historical materialism.

4.1 From “surrounding cities from countryside” to “the big exam”

The beginning of the Chinese-style modernization process is subordinate to the process of European pioneering modernization and forcibly implanting modern genes into China. Heidegger understood it as “the complete Europeanization of the earth and humanity”. When internal and external troubles and attempts to save the nation have become the main theme of the times, China’s advanced intellectuals have begun to compare the backwardness of China’s real society, ideological culture, science, and technology and industrialization level with Western civilization, the concept of progress has gradually become a universal recognition of the Chinese people. From the pursuit of advanced equipment and technology, to the pursuit of advanced systems and superstructures, to the advancement of ideological and cultural concepts, human rights and freedoms, and social democracy, the concept of pursuing progress has been implanted in the genetic attributes of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and has evolved for the theoretical consciousness and action consciousness in China’s modernization process.

From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, Chinese Communists represented by Mao Zedong deeply realized that the particularity of Chinese society and historical reasons meant that the path of the Chinese revolution could not blindly copy Marxist theory and the city-centered revolutionary experience, model, and path of armed seizure of power of other countries. The concept of progress leads to the era of Chinese-style modernization, and the consciousness of the times has driven the older generation of Chinese Communists to begin to explore a Chinese-style revolutionary path that suits China's reality. In the process of active exploration, although Chinese-style revolutionary path was inevitably influenced to a certain extent by the revolutionary theories and experiences of the Comintern and other countries, from the Nanchang Uprising on August 1, 1927 to the establishment of 10 large and small organizations nationwide in the summer of 1930, multiple rural revolutionary base areas and 13 relatively large Soviet areas have been established across the country. The Communist Party of China established and consolidated rural revolutionary base areas, expanded rural revolutionary forces, and gradually surrounded cities. Finally, it realized Chinese-style revolutionary path of surrounding cities from rural areas and seizing power with armed force, and consciously eradicated hidden dangers and obstacles that constrained Chinese people's concept of progress in the era of Chinese-style modernization and progress.

On March 19, 1944, Guo Moruo's "Three Centenary Commemorations of Jiashen" ignited the historical consciousness of the progressive concept of the first generation of leadership headed by Mao Zedong. On March 23, 1949, Mao Zedong led the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to "the big exam". "The big exam" became the historical consciousness of Chinese Communists in the early days of New China to always implement the concept of historical materialism and progress, and the behavioral consciousness of New China to always maintain its original mission of seeking rejuvenation for the Chinese nation and happiness for the Chinese people.

4.2 From "drawing lessons from the Soviet Union" to "opening up exploration"

In the process of actively catching up from "the big exam" to "two transformations", the historical consciousness of Chinese-style modernization and progress concept led by the Chinese Communists has mainly gone through the transformation from "drawing lessons from the Soviet Union" to "opening up exploration". The concepts and models of Chinese-style modernization and progress in the early days of New China were inevitably influenced by the logic of Western modernization and progress. For example, the "GDP only theory" and others that regard Western capitalist developed countries as the goal of catching up, the logic behind it is to passively place the progress model of China and other countries in the world on the linear progress chain, and measure progress solely with certain quantitative standards for gains and losses. It is inevitable that the concept of linear progress is closely related to the historical conditions and absolute power of the current stage. However, in fact, in the first half of the 20th century, the socialist movement took root in Russia and China, which had backward productivity. As Marxist philosophy points out, "Consciousness [das Bewußtsein] can only be realized existence [das bewußte Sein] at any time", therefore, in the final analysis, the idea of progress depends on socio-historical reality.

The progressive concept and consciousness of the times from "drawing lessons from the Soviet Union" to "opening up exploration" are mainly reflected in the fact that the Communist Party of China led the Chinese people to begin to explore how to carry out the "second combination" of Marxism and China's national conditions. The historical origins were attributed to Khrushchev's secret report at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which aroused the great attention of the Chinese Communists, with Mao Zedong as the main representative. In "On Ten Major Relations", Mao Zedong emphasized "drawing lessons from the Soviet Union" and independently exploring a socialist construction path suitable for China's conditions. During the ten-

year period of socialist construction from 1956 to 1966, on the basis of “156” key projects, the material and technological foundation, industrial system and national economic system on which the Chinese people depended were built. Moreover, the successful atomic bomb explosion in 1964 broke the nuclear monopoly and blackmail. In 1965, the first artificial synthesis of bovine insulin crystallization in the world was achieved. In particular, it realized the consciousness of the times in terms of economic structure, industrial level, and national defense science and technology in this historical period. Not only that, this historical period cultivated the specialized talents and party member team required for the cause of socialist construction. During this period, the fundamental system of socialism and the fundamental political system of the People’s Congress were further consolidated, and the “Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference” was formulated in the form of legislation, and the “Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China” and the “People’s Land Reform Law of the People’s Republic of China” were passed, which laid institutional and constitutional foundation for the consciousness of the times of Chinese-style modernization and progress concept.

4.3 From “reform and opening up” to “Chinese-style modernization”

In terms of the inherent requirements of the progressive concept of historical materialism, it is to extend the social-historical reality conditions as a basis and form a new form of human civilization that liberates the proletariat and all mankind. Therefore, based on different socio-historical conditions in different countries, modernization models of different forms, characteristics and paths will be nurtured and produced. Criticism and examination of social and historical conditions, and principled and high-level practice guided by the progressive concept of historical materialism with “historicity” as the fundamental attribute, are ultimately aimed at resolving the essential contradictions of social reality. In the process, a solution to capitalism is nurtured and generated. The inherent contradictions in the mode of production break the new form of human civilization that uses the capital logic as the logic of progress.

The reason why Chinese-style modernization is the offspring of the progressive concept of historical materialism is that it is based on the socio-historical reality of the huge population in the primary stage of socialism, and points to the construction practice of a new form of human civilization that surpasses Western civilization. From “reform and opening up” to “Chinese-style modernization”, the contemporary awareness of the concept of progress is different from the linear pursuit of Western-style modernization. It is not a repair and rectification of certain components and aspects of the free market economy, but the abandonment of the operating mode of the free market economy. Under the macro-control of the state and government, people are liberated from capital proliferation. From the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the 14th National Congress, this is the exploratory stage of re-understanding and adjusting the planned economy and market economy in the practice of reform and opening up centered on economic construction. The Deng Xiaoping Theory formed at this stage profoundly revealed the difference between “social” and “capital” and the essence of socialism, laying a theoretical and ideological foundation for the era of Chinese-style modernization and progress concept to consciously determine the essence and extension of socialism; from the 14th National Congress to the 18th National Congress, this is an important stage for the initial establishment and continuous improvement of the goal model and framework of the socialist market economy. It is also a stage that paves the way for the era-consciousness of the Chinese-style modernization and progress concept; since the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping has successfully created a new era based on the actual situation of China with a huge population, and achieved the common prosperity of all people, the coordination of material and spiritual civilization, the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, and the path of peaceful development. A new form of human civilization in the

primary stage of socialism that is “a highly principled practice of the progressive concept of historical materialism” emerges. Additionally, China’s transcendence of the capitalist civilization form will create new heights in the concept of progress in historical materialism, and shine more dazzlingly in the treasure house of scientific socialist theory.

References:

- [1] Collected Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 1 [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009: 525.
- [2] Collected Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 2 [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009: 34.
- [3] Collected Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 8 [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009: 34.
- [4] H. Marcuse. Counterrevolution and Revolt [M]. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.
- [5] Theodor Adorno. Progress, Critical Models Interventions and Catchwords [M]. New York: Columbia Press, 2005.
- [6] Michael Joseph Roberto. Paradox and Practice: Karl Marx’s Concept of Progress [D]. Boston: Boston College, 2001.
- [7] Sun Zhouxing. Selected Works of Heidegger: Volume 2 [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing Company, 1996.
- [8] Xi Jinping. Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Unite and Strive to Comprehensively Build a Modern Socialist Country—Report at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China [M]. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2022.
- [9] Xi Jinping. The Governance of China: Volume 3 [M]. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2020.
- [10] Xi Jinping. Speech at the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party of China [N]. People’s Daily, 2021-7-2(2).
- [11] Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping Met with United Nations Secretary—General Guterres [N]. People’s Daily, 2022-11-17(1).
- [12] F. Fedier, Ding Yun. Minutes of the Three-day Seminar of Late Heidegger [J]. Philosophy Translation Series, 2001(3): 52-59.
- [13] Tan Tian. The Appearance Logic, Presence Representation and Return Theory of Digital Labor Alienation—Taking the “1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” as a Clue [J]. Theoretical Guide, 2022(7): 91-97.
- [14] Wang Zanzin. The Impact of Digital Economy on Common Prosperity: Theoretical Mechanism and Practical Evolution—Analysis Based on Labor Process and Value Appreciation Process [J]. Zhongzhou Academic Journal, 2023(3): 27-35.