

# An Overview of the Study of the Materialist Dialectics of Late Engels and the Marxist Dialectical Debate

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**Abstract:** This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of the great proletarian revolutionary mentor Engels, and the theoretical community has once again started a wave of research on his thought. On the basis of Hegel's dialectic, Engels inherited and developed Marx's dialectic, and founded the materialist dialectic, which he called "the best tool and the sharpest weapon". However, the relationship between Engels' materialist dialectics and Marx's dialectics has been debated for more than a hundred years in the theoretical circles both at home and abroad, and it is of great significance to correctly summarize and elaborate the domestic and international views in order to clarify the internal logic and truth of Engels' materialist dialectics.

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The idea of materialist dialectics of late years Engels enriched and developed the theory of Marxism and played an important role in promoting the development of the systematization and theorization of Marxism. The question of the relationship between late Engels materialist dialectics and Marxist dialectics has always been an important issue in the history of Marxist development, and the idea of late Engels materialist dialectics, as an important part of Marxism, has also been debated in the theoretical circles at home and abroad for more than a hundred years<sup>[1]</sup>. As an important issue of Marxism, there have been two different voices in the theoretical circles at home and abroad: Chinese Marxist scholars affirm the inheritance and development of late Engels' materialist dialectic on

Marx's dialectic, and Western Marxist scholars deny the inheritance and development of late Engels' thought on Marx's dialectic and deny Marxism's Continuity.

## 1 Chinese Marxist scholars' views on the Mane dialectic relationship

Chinese Marxist scholars synthesize and analyze the historical context of the materialist dialectics proposed by Engels in his later years, the materialist dialectical ideas embodied in his three works, *Anti-Dühring*, *Dialectics of Nature*, and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, the scholarly exchange between Marx and Engels, and insist on the inheritance and development of Marx's dialectical ideas in his later years and his original contributions to the spread and development of Marxism<sup>[2]</sup>.

On the differences between the materialist dialectic of late Engels and the dialectic of Marx, some scholars believe that the misinterpretation of the materialist dialectic of late Engels over the years is mainly due to the introduction of the dialectic of late Engels into the natural world. Zang Fengyu argues that rethinking the truth of late Engels' thought and the relationship between Marx and Engels' thought requires "understanding the relationship between natural dialectics and natural philosophy, as well as historical dialectics, and an analysis of the final existential form of philosophy as defined by late Engels." Through the examination of the three works of late Engels, Engels' discovery of dialectics in nature did not return to the old materialist system, but rather Engels' development of materialist dialectics based on the development of natural science and in response to the demands of the times<sup>[3]</sup>. Hao Lixin and Zhu Ziyi believe that in his later years Engels introduced dialectics into nature, and

through the exploration and discovery of the objective laws of nature, he "demonstrated the materialist basis of dialectics, and used the materialist dialectic as a tool of thinking to reflect on the age-old problems facing the natural and historical sciences."

Regarding the inheritance and development of Engels' materialist dialectics on Marx's dialectics in his later years, scholars have maintained a positive attitude. Hao Lixin and Zhu Ziyi proposed that "consistent with Marx's emphasis on the revolutionary nature of dialectics, Engels believed that materialist dialectics should be used as a tool and weapon to understand and change reality." Fang Shi Nan proposed that on the basis of inheriting Marx's dialectical ideas, in later years Engels "formulated for the first time the scientific definition and basic characteristics of materialistic dialectics, and put forward the basic ideas of materialistic dialectics. For the first time, the three main laws of dialectics were clearly defined and their interrelationships were brilliantly expounded<sup>[4]</sup>. For the first time, the dialectic of the cognitive process was discussed in detail. For the first time, the dialectic was brilliantly expounded as the unity of the revolutionary and conservative." Le Yanping pointed out that the application of dialectics to nature by Engels in his later years was an important contribution to Marxism, and that Marx and Engels shared the truth of dialectics as a universal law for the development of nature, human society and human thought, as evidenced by the correspondence between Marx and Engels in his later years.

## **2 Western Marx scholars' views on the Marx dialectic relationship**

Western Marxists, relying mainly on the purely textual studies of Marx and Engels as their theoretical source, argue that in later years Engels' exposition of materialist dialectics in his three works, *Anti-Dühring*, *Dialectics of Nature* and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, differed from Marx's dialectics, and that Engels was wrong to introduce dialectics into nature and did not consider the historical context in later years that Engels proposed the theory of the three major works, as well as unilaterally puts forward the theory of "divergence" between Marx and Engels, denies the inheritance and development of Engels' materialist dialectics to Marx's dialectics in his later years, and denies the continuity of Marxism.

Some Western Marxists argue that there are

differences between late Engels' materialist dialectical thought and Marx's dialectical thought, and that late Engels' thought deviated from the direction of Marx's thought<sup>[5]</sup>. Terrell Carver insists that Engels invented the dialectic and imposed it on Marxism. Carver concludes from an examination of the writings and correspondence between Engels and Marx that in later years the Engels materialist dialectic "shows no sign of Marx's own approval of Engels' work, nor is there any indication that it was regarded as an aspect of their shared 'world view'". Marx has clearly contributed to Engels' project, while at the same time apparently neglecting to indicate in any sense that it was their common study<sup>[6]</sup>. In later years Engels' "relationship between the 'dialectical' changes in the 'worldview' and Marx's own views was deliberately reinforced." Marcos Miriam Lubber argues that in his later years, Engels tried to make "Marxism" an understandable and definable concept, and to inherit and develop Marx's dialectical thought, but in the process established a system of thought that had nothing in common with Marx's own wishes<sup>[7]</sup>. For Marxism, Marx "was considered the 'real founder'", while Engels was only a 'pseudo-dialectic."

Some scholars of Western Marxists advocate the complete divergence between Engels and Marx in their later years, arguing that the materialist dialectic of Engels in his later years has no inheritance and development relationship with the dialectic of Marx. Norman Levine is the founder and representative of the "Marx-Engels divergence", he took Marx and Engels as two independent theoretical research objects, arguing that the materialist dialectic of late Engels is a direct development of Hegel, that "Marx and Engels created two mutual Contradictory schools of thought, the first known as Marxism and the second as Engelsism", made Marx and Engels thought completely independent.

## **3 Conclusion**

As for the relationship between the materialist dialectic of late Engels and the dialectic of Marx, I believe that the materialist dialectic of late Engels is the inheritance and development of Marx's dialectic<sup>[8]</sup>.

The "Marx-Engels divergence" advocated by Western Marxists is a misinterpretation of late Engels' thought and a denial of the inheritance and development of Marxism. Western Marxists compare the textual differences between Marx and Engels on the basis of the texts of Engels and Marx in their later years, and believe that the development of the dialectical method

by Engels in his later years was a distortion of Marx's dialectical method, while ignoring the division of labour between Marx and Engels in their later years and not studying the historical context in which Engels posed his questions<sup>[9]</sup>.

The analysis and study of the historical context of the materialist dialectic proposed by Engels in his later years is a strong evidence to refute the "Marx-Engels divergence" of Western Marxists. The correspondence between Marx and Engels shows that Marx fully supported Engels' work and approved of Engels' development of the dialectic. Marx encouraged and supported Engels' work, and Engels pointed out in his Anti-Dühring Essay that "the great majority of the world view set forth in this book was established and developed by Marx, and only a very small part of it belongs to me". "Secondly, natural science has achieved unprecedented development, but in the process of development there are many problems, and scientists adhere to a metaphysical worldview, for which it is necessary to introduce materialistic dialectics into nature in order to explain the natural and material worlds. Thirdly, the petty-bourgeois utopian socialism theory represented by Durin denied Marxism, confused intellectuals and university students in the party, caused ideological confusion in the party and harmed the German workers' movement, and urgently needed Engels to criticize it. Finally, Engels on the development of materialist dialectics, abandoning the Marxist college style of writing, "to save the conscious dialectic from the German idealist philosophy and apply it to the materialist view of nature and history", its easy-to-understand text not only better guide the development of the international workers' movement, at the same time the "Anti-Dühring Theory" advocated have penetrated deeply into the scientific community and the public consciousness of the working class, and in all civilized countries of the world", fully contributing to

the development and spread of Marxism<sup>[10]</sup>.

The correct analysis and study of the relationship between the materialist dialectics of late Engels and the Marxist dialectics is a powerful evidence to counter the "Marxist-Engels divergence" and to prove the truth of late Engels' ideas and the unity of Marxism, as well as an inevitable requirement for promoting the development of Marxism.

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