

# Theoretical Research on Social Development from a Multidimensional Perspective: From Marxism to Chinese-style Modernization

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**Abstract:** This article aims to explore a multidimensional theoretical framework for social development. The core elements of Marxist social development theory are first outlined, including historical materialism, the theoretical logic of scientific socialism, and the theory of the “three forms” of social development. Subsequently, the article examines the application and evolution of these theories in the process of Chinese-style modernization, especially in the theoretical guidance and practical application of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Through comparative analysis, this article reveals the adaptability and transformative nature of social development theory in different historical stages, providing theoretical support for understanding contemporary social development.

**Keywords:** Social development theory; Marxism; Historical materialism; Scientific socialism; Chinese-style modernization

**Online publication:** December 27, 2023

## 1. The foundation of Marxist social development theory

Marxism, as a social theory, provides profound insights to analyze and interpret the dynamics and pathways of social development. Its core, historical materialism, is not merely a theoretical concept but a reflection of actual social transformation. The following content will explore how Marxist theory intersects with historical and contemporary social development.

## 2. The practical perspective of historical materialism

The core idea of historical materialism, a fundamental component of Marxist theory, asserts that the material mode of production in society determines the entire social structure and ideology. Its central principle is that “social being determines social consciousness,” meaning that the economic base shapes the social systems, political-legal structures, and cultural ideas (superstructure). Historical materialism contends that social

development and change are driven by contradictions between the development of productive forces and the relations of production, emphasizing the decisive role of economic factors in historical processes<sup>[1]</sup>. The theory of historical materialism holds that material production conditions form the foundation of social structure and ideology. For example, the feudal society's landownership and hierarchical system were based on the specific mode of production of that era, gradually being replaced by the capitalist mode of production after the Industrial Revolution.

### **3. The challenges of scientific socialism in modern society**

The principle of "Scientific Socialism" is an important component of Marxist theory, providing a profound critique of capitalist society and a theoretical framework for constructing a socialist society. This logic is based on historical materialism, which posits that the inherent contradictions within capitalism will ultimately lead to its demise, to be replaced by socialism. It is grounded in practicality and emphasizes the integration of theory with real-world circumstances. The theoretical framework of scientific socialism remains relevant in analyzing the inherent contradictions of modern capitalist society. For example, periodic crises in capitalist economies, growing inequality, and environmental degradation can all be explained using the theory of scientific socialism. These contradictions reflect the limitations of the capitalist system and inspire exploration of socialist and communist alternatives<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **4. The contemporary manifestation of the "Three Stages" theory**

Marx's "Three Stages" theory describes three stages of social development: pre-capitalism, capitalism, and communism. This theory views social development as a process that evolves from a reliance on nature to a reliance on material wealth and capital, ultimately leading to human freedom and comprehensive development. In the pre-capitalist stage, people share resources, and society has a simple structure. The capitalist stage is dominated by capital and market forces, leading to the creation of significant material wealth but exacerbating social inequality. The communist stage envisions the public ownership of the means of production, achieving comprehensive liberation and development for individuals. This theory emphasizes the profound impact of economic and social structural changes on individual liberation and development. We can observe that different countries and regions are at different stages of this development trajectory. For example, developing countries are still striving to overcome economic backwardness, while some developed countries face social issues brought about by capitalism, such as environmental problems and distributional issues. Reinterpreting Marx's "Three Stages" theory from the perspective of the simultaneity of the threefold relationship not only aligns with Marx's deeply concerned value position regarding the fate of humanity but also contributes to our scientific understanding of the main thread of social development<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **5. The practice and evolution of the Marxist theory in China**

The practice and evolution of Marxist theory in China is a profound and complex process. Since its introduction to China in the early 20th century, the Communist Party of China has combined Marxism with the specific conditions of China, forming a theoretical and practical system that suits the national context. The Communist Party of China has led the Chinese people onto the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

#### **(1) New Democratic Revolution**

In the mid-20th century, under the guidance of Marxism, China completed the transition from a

feudal society to a socialist society through the New Democratic Revolution. This stage was mainly characterized by fundamental changes in the country and society achieved through land reform and the recovery of the national economy.

(2) Socialist construction and reform and opening up

In 1950, China began socialist construction, with a focus on industrialization and collectivization. After 1978, the policy of reform and opening up marked a new stage of socialism with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing the role of the market economy, which in turn drove rapid economic development and comprehensive social progress.

(3) Theoretical innovation

With time, as a result of the sinicization of Marxism, the Communist Party of China has put forward a series of progressive new viewpoints and theories, such as the Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Important Thoughts of Three Representatives, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

## **6. Theoretical exploration of the development path of socialism with Chinese characteristics**

(1) Integration with China's reality

The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics recognizes that while Marxism provides the fundamental principles of social development, the actual conditions in each country are unique. Therefore, China, while adhering to Marxism, has adapted its development to its own history, culture, and social conditions.

(2) Transformation of economic development model

At the outset of reform and opening-up, there was an emphasis on economic development as a top priority. Later, it was stressed that development must be people-centered, comprehensive, and sustainable. This means that economic development is not solely focused on GDP growth but also includes environmental protection, social equity, and the improvement of people's quality of life.

(3) Social governance

Socialism with Chinese characteristics emphasizes strong social governance to ensure social stability and sustained development. This includes advancing the rule of law, anti-corruption efforts, and the improvement of the social security system, among other aspects.

## **7. The dynamics of Marx's social development theory expression in China**

(1) Class struggle and social transformation

Marxism posits that class struggle is the primary driving force of social development. In China, this theory is reflected in the New Democratic Revolution and the Socialist Revolution. Through these revolutions, China broke free from the shackles of the semi-feudal and semi-colonial old society, achieving a fundamental transformation of society.

(2) Development of productive forces and relations of production

The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics emphasizes the decisive role of economic infrastructure, namely, the development of productive forces, in shaping the superstructure. Since the beginning of reform and opening-up, China's economic development has demonstrated that the liberation and development of productive forces are key drivers of social progress.

### (3) Integration of practice and theory

Marxism emphasizes the combination of theory and practice. Throughout its development, China has continuously integrated Marxist theory with its specific realities, formulating a series of policies and strategies that align with its national conditions.

### (4) Transition from a planned economy to a market economy

Marxism points out that changes in the mode of production are central to social development. Since the onset of reform and opening-up, China has transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy, promoting the transformation of economic structures and the enhancement of social productive forces.

### (5) Socialist modernization

Marx's theory of social development dynamics emphasizes the comprehensive development of social productive forces. China's modernization efforts, particularly in the fields of technology, education, healthcare, and infrastructure, reflect the role of enhanced productive forces in promoting social development<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **8. Application of social development theory in the context of globalization and technological revolution**

### (1) Technological revolution and social transformation

Classical works of Marxism point out that science and technology, especially technological revolutions, are “revolutionary forces that have a driving role in history.” Marx, in his “Critique of Political Economy (1857-1858 Manuscripts),” regarded science and technology as “powerful levers in history” and saw them as “revolutionary forces in the highest sense,” considering science and technology as the unique spiritual force for transforming the world<sup>[5]</sup>. Technological progress, especially the development of information technology, has changed work patterns, social interactions, and information dissemination, profoundly impacting social structures and individual lives. The widespread adoption of new technologies has given rise to new social stratification and inequality issues, such as the digital divide and technological unemployment, necessitating the inclusion of technological factors in social development theory.

### (2) New challenges in social theory

In the face of global environmental crises, international migration waves, cultural conflicts, and other issues, social development theory needs to adopt a global perspective and consider how to achieve sustainable development and protect cultural diversity. This requires social theory to focus not only on traditional economic growth and political systems but also on new issues such as ecological environmental protection, cultural identity, and social inclusivity.

In the context of globalization and technological revolution, social development theory faces new challenges and opportunities. This requires theory to adapt to the new global and technological environment while addressing new problems and conflicts arising within this environment.

## **9. Historical materialist analysis of contemporary social issues**

### (1) Social classes and class struggle

Historical materialism views class struggle as a driving force of social development. Contemporary issues of wealth inequality, labor-capital conflicts, and more can be analyzed from the perspective of class struggle. Marx noted that the state is a tool of the ruling class. In the context of globalization,

conflicts of economic interests and trade disputes between developed and developing countries also reflect characteristics of international class struggle.

(2) Transformation of modes of production

Contemporary society has undergone a transition from industrialization to informatization, and this shift in modes of production has had profound effects on social structure and people's lifestyles. Issues related to changes in employment structures and shifts in skill requirements resulting from the new modes of production are important subjects of analysis from a historical materialist perspective.

(3) Global environmental problems

Historical materialism emphasizes the relationship between humans and nature. Current global environmental issues, such as climate change and resource depletion, can be analyzed from the perspective of the interaction between human activities and the natural environment. The impact of modes of production on the environment and the constraints posed by environmental crises on future modes of production constitute important topics from a historical materialist perspective.

(4) Culture and ideology

The collision of diverse cultures and ideologies in contemporary society is also a significant focus of historical materialist analysis. Cultural exchanges and conflicts brought about by globalization reflect cultural differences arising from different economic bases and social structures. The rise of internet culture and consumer culture also reflects the influence of modern modes of production on people's ideologies and lifestyles.

Historical materialism provides a macroscopic and deep-seated perspective for analyzing and understanding contemporary social issues. It can reveal the economic, social, and cultural factors behind these problems, as well as their interactions and influences.

## 10. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored social development within the framework of Marxist theory, particularly in the context of contemporary society's diversity, complexity, and practical applications. By analyzing the core ideas of historical materialism, the theoretical logic of scientific socialism, Marx's theory of the "Three Stages," and their application and evolution in China, several conclusions can be drawn.

Historical materialism provides a powerful tool for explaining how the economic base shapes the superstructure and how class struggle propels social change. Against the backdrop of globalization and technological revolution, this theory helps us understand the impact of economic globalization on social structures and how technological advancements transform societal life and cultural forms.

Scientific socialism's critique of capitalist society and its vision for a future socialist society remain relevant in addressing contemporary issues such as social inequality and environmental crises.

Marx's theory of the "Three Stages" provides a historical development framework, tracing the progression from human dependence on nature to dependence on material wealth and capital, and ultimately to the realization of human freedom and comprehensive development. This theory offers profound insights into understanding contemporary economic and social structural changes.

The development path of socialism with Chinese characteristics represents a concrete practice and innovation of Marxist theory. It demonstrates how the universal principles of Marxism can be combined with China's specific conditions to achieve rapid social development and profound transformation.

Through the lens of historical materialism, we can gain a deeper understanding of the various challenges

faced by contemporary society, including the economic and cultural influences of globalization, the societal impacts of the technological revolution, and environmental issues and resource crises.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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