

# The Scientific Connotation of Historical Materialism and Its Practice and Development in the Context of the New Era

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the important thought proposed by Marx at the watershed of the history of human philosophical thought in the 19th century by studying the materiality, regularity, and developmental nature of the materialist view of history. At the same time, based on several main laws of historical materialism, the essence of the historical development of human society under the basis of material production practice activities was explored. While fully demonstrating the important position of materialism as a Marxist scientific worldview and methodology, it also briefly discusses its innovation and development in the current context of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, providing important reference for scholars to grasp the objective factors and the regularity issues presented in the development of human social history.

## 1.Introduction

Unlike the idealistic view of history that dominated the history of world philosophy before the 19th century, Marx proposed a materialistic view of history based on the reality of material production practice as the foundation of human survival and development. Through the study of numerous previous ideological theories, he gradually gained recognition from the world due to the reality and objectivity that it exhibited in terms of materiality, which was different from the idealistic view of history. Marx's "Outline of Feuerbach" published in 1845 was praised as "the first document containing the sprouts of genius in the new worldview" and "the origin of historical materialism". Since then, historical materialism has completely distinguished itself from many schools of thought before its birth, such as old materialism and idealistic philosophy. Under the exploration of Marx, a new materialist view of history with practice as its main feature gradually emerged. Regarding this, Marx once explained his new worldview in this way: "Always standing on the basis of real history, not explaining practice from the perspective of ideas, but explaining the formation of ideas from the perspective of material practice ." [1] Lenin once pointed out in his book "On the Attitude of Workers' Political Parties towards Religion": "Marx and Engels' dialectical materialism goes further than the Encyclopedia and Feuerbach, applying materialist philosophy to the field of history and social sciences." [2] Emphasizing the significant influence of Marx and Engels' creation of the materialist view of history.

## 2.The Background of the Emergence of Historical Materialism

### 2.1The Founding Process of Historical Materialism

The establishment of the materialist view of history by Marx and Engels first underwent two ideological transformations: the transformation from idealism to materialist worldview, and the transformation from revolutionary democracy to communism. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844, Marx deeply criticized bourgeois political economy, Hegelian philosophy, and utopian socialist theory, and expounded a series of basic principles of historical materialism. Especially by combining alienation with the analysis of labor, it is pointed out that "alienated labor" is the root cause of oppression, inequality, and class struggle in society. He said, "Communism is a positive sublation of private property, that is, human self alienation, and therefore a true possession of human essence through and for the sake of human beings; therefore, it is a complete, self-awareness, and preservation of all the wealth that has been developed in the past." [3] Although Marx was in the stage of natural materialism at that time, the establishment of his alienated labor theory, the materialist view of history, laid a scientific foundation. It can be said that the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844" is not only Marx and Engels' exploration of the new worldview, but also the starting point for the establishment of

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historical materialism. In early 1844, Marx published the article "Introduction to the Critique of Hegelian Philosophy of Law", Marx pointed out: "The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, material power can only be destroyed by material power; but once theory grasps the masses, it will also become material power. Philosophy regards the proletariat as its own material weapon, and the proletariat also regards philosophy as its own spiritual weapon." [4] This discourse can be said to be his further criticism of Hegelian philosophy and a transformation of his own thoughts.

From September to November 1844, Marx and Engels co authored "The Holy Family" to clarify the idealistic historical views of the young Hegelian school, marking a significant step forward in the establishment of the materialistic historical view. In the work 'The Holy Family', Marx and Engels exposed the secrets of speculative philosophy and dialectically solved the problem of the relationship between thinking and existence under the premise of historical materialism, Pointing out that "it is nothing but a critical and comic completion of Hegel's view of history, and Hegel's view of history is nothing more than a speculative expression of Christian German dogma about the opposition between spirit and material, God and the world." [5] criticizes the idealistic historical view of the young Hegelian school and reveals the decisive role of material production in the historical development of human society, At the same time, Marx criticized the heroic historical view of the young Hegelian school, especially Powell's idealistic historical view. From this, Marx came to the conclusion that "historical activities are the cause of the masses, and with the deepening of historical activities, it will inevitably be the expansion of the masses." [5], proposed that the people are the subject and creator of history.

In 1845, Marx wrote the article "Outline of Feuerbach", At the beginning of the article, Marx pointed out: "All previous materialism (including Feuerbach's materialism) The main drawback is that understanding objects, reality, and emotions is only based on the form of objects or intuition, rather than treating them as emotional human activities and practices, rather than from the perspective of the subject. Therefore, contrary to materialism, the active aspect has been abstractly developed by idealism, of course, idealism is unaware of the perceptual activity itself of reality." [6] In this year, Marx and Engels further criticized the Young Hegelianism in their "German Ideology" and provided an overall critique of the ideological system of the German bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie at that time. Marx believed that the premise that constitutes all human history is "the existence of a living individual" [6]. He criticized Hegel's idealistic historical view of understanding the world from the perspective of "absolute spirit", clarified that material production is the foundation of the existence and development of human society, revealed the role of division of labor in social history, and elaborated on the relationship between productivity and production The dialectical relationship between civil society (economic foundation) and superstructure and the laws of their contradictory movements. Marx and Engels deeply

analyzed and criticized the various idealistic historical ideas represented by Feuerbach, Powell, and Steiner, and on this basis, elaborated on the basic content of the materialist historical view, which also marked the formation of the foundation of Marx and Engels' materialist historical view.

The 18th Day of the Mist Moon of Louis Bonaparte, published in 1852, is Marx's main work summarizing the experience of the French Revolution and commenting on the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte. Marx used historical materialism to analyze the social structure and class struggle of France at that time, and to explore the reasons, processes, and results of Louis Bonaparte's coup. This work has revealed the laws of historical movement, changes, and development, and proposed scientific methods for evaluating historical events and figures. Therefore, it is also known as a "model of using historical materialism analysis methods". Marx believed that "people create their own history, but they do not create it as they please, not under the conditions they choose, but under the conditions they directly encounter, established, and inherited from the past." This passage indicates that Marx believed that history was not created by God, nor by Hegel's "absolute spirit," but by people themselves, It emphasizes the subjectivity and subjective initiative of history, but people do not create history as they please, but engage in creative activities under established conditions. On the one hand, it adheres to the materialism of historical views, and on the other hand, it indicates that human creative activities are constrained by old ideological concepts. The evaluation of historical events and figures must be based on the changing socio-economic conditions and class struggle conditions.

## **2.2 Developed in the struggle against idealism in history**

In the struggle between materialist and idealistic historical views, whether to recognize the existence of class struggle is an important difference between them. The viewpoint of idealistic historical views on this issue is based on the basic point that "social consciousness determines social existence" and denies the laws of class struggle. In human history before the 19th century, idealism had long held a dominant position in the field of thought. This was mainly because for a long period of time before this, due to the underdevelopment of human social productivity, the people could not fundamentally understand the true laws of historical development. Therefore, their understanding of social history was limited to isolated, one-sided, and static understanding, And we cannot see the classes that society divides based on different economic status. It is in the struggle against the idealistic concept of history that materialist thinkers, represented by Marx and Engels, comprehensively and systematically elaborated on the basic principles of materialism through their criticism of the idealistic concept of history. They demonstrated to the world the objectivity and scientificity of historical materialism in the development of human society through classic works such as "German Ideology," "Communist Manifesto," "The Origin of the Family, Private Ownership,

and the State," "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," "The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science," "Introduction to the 1892 English Version," and "Anti Daringism, As a result, it has been widely accepted by the proletariat and the people.

Firstly, the materialist view of history has proposed different understandings of individuals in reality in the struggle against the idealistic view of history. German classical idealist philosophy regards humans as the subject of self creation and self achievement in the issue of human essence, believing that human essence is the purpose rather than practice. Therefore, after abstracting the concept of human essence, humans, as historical products, are regarded as prerequisites for history. In this regard, materialism defines individuals who engage in material production practices or life activities as "real individuals", who are "individuals who operate within certain material boundaries, premises, and conditions that are not arbitrarily controlled by them" [6]. In the "German Ideology", Marx and Engels believed that the philosophy of the Young Hegelian School always relied on the existence of the "unconditional" "me", positioning people as "abstract people" and "isolated people", redefining the essential strength of human beings as the prerequisite for the development of human society and history, which is of great significance for the transformation of Marxist philosophical thought.

Secondly, the materialist view of history elucidates the contradiction between productive forces and forms of communication in its struggle with the idealistic view of history. Marx and Engels pointed out in "German Ideology" that the basic form of individual social practice activities is of course material activities, and all other activities, such as spiritual activities, political activities, religious activities, etc., depend on it. "[6] By redefining the concept of" human essence ", The materialist view of history analyzes the inevitable relationship between individuals and society from the perspective of actual individuals, that is, the production of material means of life as the basic form of personal social practice activities makes the issue of unity between individuals and society can only be solved on the basis of material production methods, and the contradictions within production methods have thus become fundamental contradictions in the development of human history, Thus, for the first time in the history of philosophical development, the dialectical contradiction between productive forces and forms of communication was clearly analyzed.

Thirdly, the materialist view of history has verified the objectivity of the existence of communism in the struggle against the idealistic view of history. Marx, through scientific analysis of the laws of the historical development of human society, especially the basic contradictions and movements of capitalist society, concluded: "Communism is not a condition that should be established for us, nor an ideal that reality should adapt to. What we call communism is the movement of reality that eliminates existing conditions. The conditions for this movement are generated by existing premises." [6] In the view of historical materialism, communism requires certain material conditions. Without the material factors to

achieve communism, it is impossible to achieve it, because communism is not an illusion existing in consciousness, but a realistic movement of modern capital to eliminate existing conditions in the process of movement.

### **3.The Scientific Connotation of Historical Materialism**

#### **3.1 Revealing the Materiality of Human Historical Development**

Essentially, the materialist view of history mainly reflects the most direct and realistic survival activities of human society, and its most important connotation is reflected in the new application of materialist views such as "the origin of the world is material" and "material determines consciousness" in the view of history. On this issue, Marx specifically criticized the one-sidedness of old materialism and idealism in the relationship between subject and object in his "Outline of Feuerbach", and pointed out that practice is a material activity that humans subjectively and actively transform the objective world. It was precisely Marx's approach of unifying the subject and object through practice that innovatively discovered the theoretical breakthrough of the scientific concept of practice as the basis for the formation of historical materialism. Regarding this, Engels clearly stated: "The major fundamental issue of all philosophy, especially modern philosophy, is the relationship between thinking and existence." [7] The materialist view of history was the first important discovery in the field of social history that revealed social existence as a decisive prerequisite for the development of human society. Because in the basic principles of historical materialism, people must first use necessary material behaviors such as food, drink, shelter, and clothing as the basis for understanding human history, thus fundamentally distinguishing it from the idealistic historical view based on the objectivity and materiality of human social historical development, making historical materialism a significant theoretical breakthrough for humans in correctly understanding history.

In terms of the materiality of historical materialism, it is mainly reflected in the way human existence is based on practice, that is, the people are both the "playwrights" of history and the "playwrights" of history. Based on Marxist materialism theory, it is known that the basic mode of human existence is practice, and therefore, for a society composed of countless individuals, The entire content of its existence and development is continuous practical activities. Among the three components that constitute social existence - the production and mode of production of material means, geographical environment, and population - only the mode of production is the determining force of social development, while geographical environment and population are a part of the practical object. So, while material means and their production methods collectively reflect the materiality of human society, they also validate the materiality of human existence based on practice from another perspective. At the same time, in the process of human evolution from the

social apes that Engels referred to as "socialized animals", humans, as the "most socialized animal" among all animals, cannot directly develop from the group relationships of the "social instincts" of ape ancestors. Because the development of group relationships needs to be adapted to the development of labor, simple group relationships will become increasingly extensive and close in the long-term labor process, thereby playing a huge promoting role in the later formation of true social relationships in human society. In this process, the subjective initiative contained in labor practice transforms the objective world, which is the highest manifestation of materiality in the development of human society in the materialist view of history.

### **3.2 Revealing the Regularity of Human Historical Development**

The regularity of historical materialism is an important theoretical component of Marxist philosophy regarding the general laws of human social development, reflecting the unique laws of movement in the process of human historical development as an objective existence. It is Marx's most scientific understanding of the regularity of human historical development, which corresponds to many previous thinkers.

Firstly, historical materialism reveals that productivity and production relations are the most fundamental laws for human survival and existence. Because the development process of human society is the history of continuous development of productive forces and production relations, at any historical stage, productive forces are the main aspect of contradictions in production methods, referring to people's ability to transform nature, including workers, labor relations, and labor objects. For people of an era, "any productive force is an acquired force", and the productive forces possessed by people are first and foremost the products of their entire inheritance from the development of past human history, "serving as the foundation of their entire history". So people in an era cannot freely choose their own productivity, and the development level of their productivity varies greatly due to various reasons such as different countries and ethnic groups. The development level of a society's productive forces determines its economic foundation and corresponding superstructure. Therefore, although the development level of human society varies at different stages, its importance in the process of human survival and existence is unquestionable. At the same time, the production relationship corresponding to productivity in each stage of human society is also another important aspect of the production method, representing the social relationships between people formed in the production of material resources. And with the development of human society, in the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption relationships formed based on the level of social productivity at each stage, the production relationship often occupies a decisive position, and even determines the nature of a social ownership. According to Marx's discourse in the materialist view of history, the internal contradictory movement between productive

forces and production relations exists in any social form and restricts the development of society in different periods. Only when the contradictory movement law between productive forces and production relations adapts to the changes in social form, can human society be in a stable or progressive state.

Secondly, historical materialism reveals the fundamental laws that the economic foundation and superstructure are the foundation of human survival and existence. The economic foundation is an important aspect of the production mode that occupies a fundamental position, referring to the sum of the ruling relationships that constitute a society. The economic foundation represents the certain, inevitable, and non transferable relationships that occur in the social production of people's lives, that is, the production relationships that are suitable for a certain stage of their material productivity development, and these production relationships together constitute the economic foundation of this society. The materialist view of history holds that the economic foundation determines the superstructure, which reacts on the economic foundation. The economic foundation is the foundation on which the superstructure arises, exists, and develops, while the superstructure is an extension built on the economic foundation and must adapt to the development requirements of the economic foundation. The development of human society is accompanied by the continuous improvement of productivity from low to high. The development of productivity determines that the economic foundation will also constantly change, ultimately affecting the superstructure and promoting the long-term development of human society. However, whether the transformation from the economic foundation to the superstructure will choose a drastic revolutionary form or a gradual improvement form depends on the specific historical characteristics and processes of each ethnic group and country, as well as the interest orientation and strength comparison of different social and political forces in each historical stage.

Thirdly, historical materialism reveals the fundamental laws that social existence and social consciousness are the foundation of human existence and existence. The relationship between social existence and social consciousness is a question that any historical view must first answer. In this regard, the idealistic view of history insists on "social consciousness determines social existence", because idealist scholars believe that people's ideological motivation is the fundamental reason for social development. But Marx and Engels stated that "people's existence is their real life process," so it is not "consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness, The materialist view of history proposed by Marx "does not explain practice from the perspective of ideas, but from the perspective of material practice to explain the formation of ideas." [6] Compared to the idealistic view of history, the materialist view of history is mainly based on thinking about the ultimate reasons for all changes in human history from the premise of material practice in social existence, Instead of simply denying the decisive power of the vast masses of people in promoting historical development, we seek to explain the ultimate reason for the development of human history

through the eternal erroneous thinking of morality, truth, and justice in people's consciousness, spirit, and concepts. The materialist view of history adheres to the search for objective laws of social development through the production of material resources and the exchange of exchange based on the premise of social existence, and ultimately concludes that "social existence determines social consciousness", which has a dynamic and counterproductive effect on social existence.

Fourthly, The historical materialism reveals that class struggle is the driving force behind the development of human society. Marx once clearly pointed out that "since the dissolution of the original public ownership of land, all history has been the history of class struggle." [8] He believed that in all societies, there is a struggle between two basic levels, which is the fundamental reason for promoting social and historical change. In Marx's theory, class refers to the economic groups that hold a dominant position in a society. Therefore, the materialist view of history holds that the development of human history is driven by class struggle, which is the basic means to solve contradictions between opposing classes and drives the continuous development of class society through successive changes. In this process, class struggle, as a direct driving force for the development of class society, plays a role in promoting social development not only in the qualitative change of social forms from primitive society, slave society, feudal society to capitalist society, but also in the quantitative change of rulers constantly adjusting the superstructure and optimizing their governance methods within the same social form. At present, "our study of world history needs to be more widely linked with historical materialism." [9] Ultimately, based on the updating and restarting of society after each class struggle, it drives human society to continuously move forward and develop in the long river of history.

### **3.3 Revealing the subjectivity of the people in the process of historical development**

Whether to respect the subject status of the people and recognize the subject role of the people in creating history is the fundamental symbol that distinguishes between materialist and idealistic historical views. The materialist view of history holds that it is not history that creates people, but people that create history. Therefore, the people are the subject and creator of social history, and the overall actions and wishes of the people represent the direction of social progress. In this regard, Marx found in his research that the creation of history by productive forces and the creation of history by the people are fundamentally unified, because the people are the creators of social material and spiritual wealth. Only when the material production capacity of human society is combined with the power of the people is the fundamental reason for the development of social history. If there were no human existence and their social activities for survival, there would be no history. So, it's not history that created people, on the contrary, history is created by people. This point can be found by the CPC's "foundation in the people, blood in the people, strength in the people" [10] for many

years: only by unifying respect for the law of social development and respect for the people's historical dominant position, and relying closely on the people, can the people's great power in social development be gathered. Therefore, in order to study the significant changes in human social history, it is necessary to explore the answer from the labor development history of the people, based on the fact that the people are the decisive force of social change. Engels referred to Marxism as a new faction that has found the key to understanding all social history in the history of labor development.

The viewpoint of historical materialism on the subjectivity of the people is reflected in its evaluation of the historical role of outstanding figures. The materialist view of history holds that no outstanding figure can surpass the limitations imposed by historical times. For example, most elite figures in class society are in the ranks of the ruling class. This is precisely because class differentiation itself is the result of the separation of material labor and spiritual labor among the real population. Although there will always be some outstanding figures who can promote and accelerate the development of history in the process of historical development, the reasonable degree of their existence and the size of their historical role mainly depend on the degree to which they meet social needs and functions. So, in theory, outstanding figures are the products of meeting social needs and fulfilling social functions. The reason why they are outstanding is that they have the special ability to undertake historical missions at a specific period, and this ability enables them to use the power of the people to meet the needs of society. So the materialist view of history believes that the emergence of outstanding figures has a certain historical inevitability, but it is still based on the people as the subjects and creators of history. From this, it can be seen that the birth of Marx and Engels in the 19th century was a historical inevitability, which fully reflects the sharp internal contradictions in European capitalist society at that time, because the three major movements of European workers in the 19th century quickly brought the proletariat onto the historical stage and objectively became an inevitable requirement of human society for the emergence of scientific socialism. Under this social background, Marx and Engels, by summarizing revolutionary theory and deepening revolutionary practice, ultimately transformed socialism from utopian to scientific and grew into the founders of scientific socialism.

### **4. The sublimation and development of historical materialism in the process of sinicization of Marxism**

History is a true manifestation of the inevitable connection between the existence and development of human society, and any society or class has a historical view based on its own social development. Therefore, on the basis of criticizing various idealistic historical views represented by Feuerbach, Powell, and Steiner, Marx regarded the "real people" engaged in material production practice as the starting point of the materialist historical view, The

basic content of historical materialism, such as "social existence determines social consciousness", "social consciousness has a dynamic reaction to social existence", "the contradictory movement between productive forces and production relations", "the contradictory movement between economic foundation and superstructure", and "the people are the main body of creating history", correctly reveals the various complex phenomena behind the development of human history. At the same time, he also elevated these phenomena to a theoretical level and proposed that the development of human society, like nature, has its own inherent objective laws. This scientific understanding of social and historical development based on materialism is precisely the Marxist materialist view of history. It can be said that the materialist view of history focuses on the in-depth study of "real people" in historical development, revealing the objective laws of human social and historical development by deeply analyzing the decisive role of real people and the production methods of material resources behind them. It not only provides rich ideological resources and scientific methodological principles for people to correctly understand history, but also makes outstanding contributions to exploring the progress and development of human society in the active struggle against various ideologies such as idealism in history. It is hailed as the "greatest achievement in scientific thought".

With the further development of economic globalization, economic trade, political communication, and people-to-people exchanges among countries have become increasingly close, and it is impossible for each country to develop independently from the world. Therefore, how to leverage the trend of globalization to assist domestic development has become a major practical issue that countries are considering and urgently need to solve. Especially for developing countries with low levels of economic development, insufficient cultural heritage, and unstable political construction, how to grasp the initiative of development while maintaining their independence in the wave of world economic integration has become the biggest challenge for them to break through their own development difficulties. But for the development of human social history, Marx emphasized as early as in the German Ideology that the continuous accumulation of material means of production and the rapid development of social productivity have made the connections between people, regions, and countries closer, that is, the development and formation of world history have promoted the development of "communication". Therefore, in the Marxist concept of historical materialism, only through mutual "communication" between countries can the overall productivity of society achieve a higher level of development, promoting the continuous inheritance and progress of human history. It can be said that, as Marx predicted at the time, the main characteristic of the current world is the continuous strengthening of global integration, which has led to the gradual trend of "cooperation and win-win" in the current economic and political landscape of the world under the influence of complex international situations. So, although the current conditions of human society have undergone significant changes compared to the 19th century, the scientific and

objective nature of Marxist historical materialism in analyzing problems remains an important reference for us to understand the world and explore history, and also provides crucial theoretical guidance for the future progress and development of human society.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly talked about the "Great Outlook on History". To grasp the historical development laws of human society with contemporary Sinicized Marxism: "We should educate and guide the entire party to embrace the overall strategy of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the unprecedented changes in the world in a century, establish a grand historical perspective, analyze the evolution mechanism and explore historical laws from the long river of history, the tide of the times, and the global situation, propose corresponding strategic strategies, and enhance the systematicity, foresight, and creativity of our work." [11] President Xi Jinping clearly pointed out that: "We must adhere to the dialectical materialism and historical materialism worldviews and methodology, and correctly handle the relationship between reform, development, and stability." [12] This fully reflects the truth and scientific nature of the new era's grand historical view. "From the centennial struggle of the Party, we can see clearly why we were able to succeed in the past and how we can continue to succeed in the future, so as to more firmly and consciously fulfill our original mission and better adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era." [13]

## 5. Conclusion

It can be said that the materialist view of history, due to its high emphasis on the summary and application of objective historical experience, more reflects the objectivity, continuity, and logicity of history compared to other ideas. Therefore, while directly laying the theoretical foundation of Marxist philosophy, it has important practical guiding significance for the proletariat to lead the people to understand and transform the world. This theory not only provides a fundamental theoretical basis for the further development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the current new era, but also points out the direction of the CPC in the new journey of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way. It also accumulates important historical reference and practical experience for China to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the ultimate realization of a community of shared future for mankind. For this reason, President Xi Jinping once clearly pointed out: "History and reality both indicate that only by adhering to historical materialism can we continuously raise our understanding of the laws of socialism with Chinese characteristics to new levels and open up new horizons for the development of contemporary Chinese Marxism. It can be said that it is under the long-term guidance of historical materialism that the CPC has formed a rigorous, coherent and connected view of history by constantly absorbing historical wisdom and historical vision, and has made great achievements in both theory

and practice on the road of China's socialist modernization. The historical materialism of Marxism has also developed rapidly in the process of its localization in China. It has not only gradually developed into a more scientific and perfect theoretical system under the theoretical innovation of the number of generations of the CPC, but also has been comprehensively tested in the long-term practice of the Chinese people under the leadership of the CPC.

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