

Reflection on Modern Chinese Marxism (Study on Three Theoretical Dimensions at “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” by Professor Ren Ping)¹

Размышления о современном китайском марксизме (исследование трех теоретических аспектов в трактате "Маркс в современной перспективе" профессора Рен Пина)

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Abstract

“Marx in Contemporary Perspective” by Professor Ren Ping is a masterpiece of philosophical reflection on the issue of Chinese modernization. The investigation lightens three theoretical dimensions, those of Marxist development philosophy, materialism in communicative practices, and historical aspects of Marxism. Specifically, Marxist development philosophy mainly discusses the “why” question, the materialism of social practices mainly discusses the “what” question, and the history with the historical appearances of Marxism mainly discusses the “how” question of China’s modernization. The existing idea that the Marxist philosophy of development has retired in it, just as the idea that this philosophy has not yet fully developed are considered. According to the textual philology study, this misconception is the result of misreading and misunderstanding.

Keywords: Ren Ping, Marx in contemporary perspective, development philosophy, modernization.

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Аннотация

"Маркс в современной перспективе" профессора Рен Пина - это шедевр философского осмысления проблемы китайской модернизации. Исследование освещает три теоретических измерения: марксистскую философию развития, материализм коммуникативных практик и исторические аспекты марксизма. В частности, марксистская философия развития в основном обсуждает вопрос "почему", материализм социальных практик в основном обсуждает вопрос "что", а история с историческими проявлениями марксизма в основном обсуждает вопрос "как" китайской модернизации. Рассматривается как существующая идея о том, что марксистская философия развития ушла в отставку, так и идея о том, что эта философия еще не полностью сложилась. Согласно исследованию филологии текста, эти заблуждения являются результатом неправильного прочтения и непонимания.

Ключевые слова: Рен Пинь, Маркс в современной перспективе, философия развития, модернизация.

Professor Ren Ping is an expert in contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy. Since publishing "On the Change of Behavior" in "Guangming Daily", Professor Ren Ping has been involved in academic researches for more than 30 years. Professor's academic exploration path is referred to in famous Master's interview in the "Academic Monthly". This interview has been revised and later served as the preface to two collections of essays, "Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation" and "Ren Ping's Selected Works". The version of "Ren Ping's Selected Works", on the contrary, edited by the author himself, is more likely to highlight Professor Ren Ping's own thoughts of love and wisdom. "Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation" and "Ren Ping's Selected Works" contain a brief representation of Professor Ren Ping's academic achievements. In this regard, these two collections of essays cover the field from the Marxist development philosophy and the materialism of social practice, to the historical path of Marxism. These problems remain relevant and cannot be considered the ones of the academic ideological policy in the true sense. In contrast, "Marx in Contemporary Perspective", as the largest academic masterpiece currently published by Professor Ren Ping, was first released on the eve of the official shift to modern studies of Marxism, so it is difficult to discern the various theoretical dimensions of the work. Mr. Feng Yangli highly praised Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" saying "Professor Ren Ping's recent work "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" has opened up a unique path for the study of Marx's philosophy by responding to various problems of the current era and carrying on dialogue with Chinese and Western philosophy" [1, P.79-80].

There is no doubt that the concept of social practice and the materialism of communication practice are the ideas that permeate Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective". Since the philosophy of Marxist development, the materialism of social practice, and the history of Marxism are three theoretical dimensions of Professor Ren Ping's academic exploration path, this raises two questions. First, has the philosophy of Marxist development retired in "Marx in Contemporary Perspective"? Second, is Marxism relevant in the idea of "Marx in Contemporary Perspective"? In view of Professor Ren Ping's important academic position in the study of contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy, and even more in view of Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" it is one of the most important specimens of ideological history that we first analyze and then synthesize all theoretical dimensions of Professor Ren Ping's Marxist, such as development philosophy, communication practice of materialism and Marxist history. From the perspective of reflecting on China's modernization, we will conduct a textual philological study of Professor Ren Ping's representative work "Marx in Contemporary Perspective".

1. Analysis of development philosophy decline problem

It's necessary to analyze whether the Marxist philosophy of development has withdrawn from the field in "Marx in Contemporary Perspective". In the first part of "Marx in Contemporary Perspective", "Communication Practice, Globalization and Marx", and the second part, "The New Era of Globalization and the Contemporary Trend of Marxism", Professor Ren Ping successively introduced the old Marxism and the contemporary Marxism in the eras of old and new globalization. It is the practical view on Marxism and contemporary Marxism that constituted the base of the work and have always been the concept of communication practice and the social materialism, rather than Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy were. Marxist development philosophy began to be discussed only in the third part of "The Practical View of Communication: the Central Vision of the New Global Issues", especially in Chapter 11. "Global Development: Justice, Theory and Choice". As for Marxist political philosophy, it was arranged to conduct special research in the fourth part of "Politics of Difference, Global Justice and the practical View of Communication". In this way, Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" cannot be called a work of Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy in any case. On the contrary, it can only be called a work where theoretical exploration of the practical view on communication and the social materialism practice is carried out. Only taking into account that "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" is strongly interconnected with contemporary Western philosophy and postmodernist philosophy, we do not regard the concept of communication practice itself and the materialism of communication practice as a closed system. However, this is obviously a serious misreading of the communication practice concept and the materialism of communication practice.

Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy are of great significance to Professor Ren Ping's academic career. In 1988, "The Quiet Revolution", edited by Professor Ren Ping, was not only his first published academic work, but also his first work on Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy. According to the academic biography of "Ren Ping's Selected Works" edited in 2010, Professor Ren Ping was also the first master's and doctoral supervisor in China to offer master's and doctoral degrees in Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy. Professor is also the first contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy researcher in the country to guide Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy master's and doctoral students. Professor Ren Ping said: "The work of changing research methods and forms and promoting theoretical innovation can often be achieved by means of changing the academic disciplines. The exploration of this change with the opening of new academic disciplines was the only possible way at that time"[2, P.4]. Moreover, according to the short academic biography "Ren Ping's Selected Works" (2010) Professor Ren Ping is still supervising master's and doctoral students in Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy, having a series of fruitful teaching and scientific research achievements.

The conceptions of communication practice and the social materialism are not a closed system, the reasons for which are directly related to Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy. Just as Kant specifically rewrote the a priori deduction part in the second edition of "Criticism of Pure Reason" in order to prevent readers from misunderstanding, Professor Ren Ping has obviously taken into account the possibility of such misreading. Professor Ren Ping said in his postscript: "Perhaps, this is the most long-awaited work in history, not only because "Marx will always live in history", his name is a historical eternity, but also because he has two distinctive characteristics praised by postmodernity: ruthless critical spirit, and openness for the future. — Any interpretation is nothing more than a historical temporary way for thoughts to point to the future"[3, P. 600]. Since, as Professor Ren Ping has already reminded readers, Marx in the contemporary vision is not a closed system, so where does the source of living water come from? Since the wrong conclusion, stating that Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" is a closed

system, is based on the premise that this work is not the one of Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy, then, as it can be seen, the reason to possibly consider the concept of communication practice and the social materialism as a closed system is in failing to fully understand the political philosophy dimension and the development philosophy dimension in Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective". From this point of view, we believe that Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy did not fall back from Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective"; moreover, the concepts of communication practice and the social materialism, as the source of living water, prevented the theory from becoming a closed system.

2. Analysis of the development philosophy decline

Now, having solved the problem of Marxist development philosophy decrease, and pointing out that the Marxist development philosophy did not recede in "Marx in Contemporary Perspective", we must discuss the next problem of Marxist development philosophy status declining, existing in the text of "Marx in Contemporary Perspective". Marxist development philosophy and Marxist political philosophy were generally in an equal theoretical position during the first five-year plan corresponding to Professor Ren Ping's youth. To the moment of "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" publication, the independent status of Marxist political philosophy remained unchanged. On the contrary, Marxist development philosophy became nothing more than a reflective problem, or rather a theoretical part in the new global problem, juxtaposed with environmental protection issues (Chapter 9. "Green Marx': Ecological Reconstruction and Practical View of Communication"), knowledge economy issues (Chapter 10. "Fashion of Knowledge': Global Hegemony and Practical View of Communication"), consumerism issues (Chapter 12. "Passion Marx': Criticism of Postmodern Urban Life and Consumer Culture") juxtaposed as Part 3. "Practical View of Communication": A chapter in "The Central Vision of New Global Issues". It can't help but remind of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit". As Marx said in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", "Phenomenology of Spirit" can be described as the "true birthplace and secret" of Hegel's philosophy. Marx then said: "Now take a look at Hegel's system. It must start with Hegel's "Phenomenology", that is, from the true birthplace and secret of Hegel's philosophy" [4, P. 97]. Even Hegel himself once called it the first part of the scientific system, but in the end it was reduced to the second part of the subjective spirit in "Complete Philosophy. Part Three. The Philosophy of Mind", which stands between anthropology and psychology, its importance being significantly weakened.

The literal context of Professor Ren Ping's discussion of Marxist development philosophy and Marxist political philosophy in "Marx in Contemporary Perspective" should first be reviewed. Chapter 11. "Global Development: Justice, Theory and Choice" is the core theoretical concentration of author's Marxist development philosophy. Professor Ren Ping said: "The development philosophy of studying the global development laws, exploring the inner logic of development, and solving the mystery of development has increasingly become the conceptual premise and core program for countries to elaborate development strategies and to construct development theories, having attracted widespread attention from the global society. At the same time, its own theme and conceptual model are also undergoing a double transformation" [3, P. 334]. Professor Ren Ping first responded to the global development discourse, including the development discourse of both modernity and postmodernity, and then proposed the three major global trends of Marxist development philosophy in the context of the new globalization era, that is the main subject, development content, and development horizon of Marxism evolution. Professor Ren Ping's "Marx in Contemporary Perspective", Part 4. "The Politics of Difference, Global Justice, and the Practical View of Interaction" are all discussing Marxist political philosophy. Specifically, Chapter 13. "Black Marx': The Politics of Difference and a Global Perspective" mainly discusses the politics

of difference. The formulation of “Black Marx” originates from the American scholar Robinson’s “Black Marxism”. In fact, it is basically a political philosophical interpretation of Marxism with the postmodernistic perspective as a base. Professor Ren Ping first introduced the postmodern global political philosophy that prevails in contemporary Western academic circles, and then constructed a new direction of global political philosophy in the sense of communication practices conception. Chapter 14. “Global Political Philosophy: The Public Domain and Global Discourse” mainly discusses the issue of global justice. In fact, Chapter 14 not only discusses this issue, but also continues to delve into it, further discussing the theory of civil society examined by young Marx in his works such as “Hegel’s Criticism of Right and Philosophy” and “Introduction to Hegel’s Criticism of Right and Philosophy”.

So why did the Marxist philosophy of development decline in the status in “Marx in Contemporary Perspective”? There are only two possible explanations for this problem. First, with the shift of academic interest, Professor Ren Ping gradually abandoned the study of Marxist development philosophy and turned to the concept of communication practice, the social materialism and the Marxist philosophy of communication. However, according to “Ren Ping’s Selected Works” (edition of 2010) and especially to the academic biographies, Professor Ren Ping is still supervising master’s and doctoral students in Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy. It is obviously unlikely that Professor Ren Ping has given up the study of Marxist development philosophy. Second, the concept of communication practice, the social materialism and the Marxist philosophy of history are actually theoretical extensions of the Marxist development philosophy. In this regard, the theoretical dimension of Marxist development philosophy has not disappeared, but has also been greatly expanded. In the investigation of Marxist development philosophy, Professor Ren Ping discovered the research method of reflective problem, and then gradually constructed the concept of communication practice, the social materialism and the Marxist philosophy of history. Or rather, the theoretical dimension of Marxist development philosophy is being precisely the theoretical source of the practical approach to communication, social materialism and Marxist philosophy of history. In other words, the problem of reflection is precisely the source of Marx’s living water in the contemporary vision. It is precisely in the philosophical reflection on a series of global issues that the concept of communication practice, the social materialism and contemporary Marxism have emerged. From this point of view, we argue that the theoretical dimensions of Marxist development philosophy and Marxist political philosophy have neither withdrawn from “Marx in Contemporary Perspective”, nor have they truly declined in status, but have always been the living water source of the approach to communication, the materialism of communication practice, and the modern Marxist philosophy.

Now we begin to discuss whether the modern Marxism has already appeared in “Marx in the Contemporary Perspective”, paying attention to two small textual details. In 1991, Professor Ren Ping published the article “The Practical View of Marxist Communication and the Issue of Intersubjectivity: A Review of the Bipolar Philosophical ‘Subject-Object’ Model Defects”, which marked the official advent of the practical approach to communication. He said: “The practical view on communication is the basic theoretical scale for Marx’s scientific analysis, deep insight and overall grasp of all historical development and the nature of human subjects. Therefore, it constitutes a central vision that runs through Marx’s lifelong ideological development. This also laid a solid theoretical foundation for the formulation of materialism in later social practices” [5, pp.11-19]. It was implemented in the article “Towards the Materialism of Social Practices” published by Professor Ren Ping in 1999. The author said: “The concept of a social practice is by no means nothing more than the product of the Western philosophy evolution. It is a new vision of contemporary Chinese philosophy as well” [6, pp. 53-69]. According to Professor Ren Ping’s original vision of “One body, two wings”, the concept of communication practice and the social materialism are the direct products of complete dialogue with contemporary Western philosophy and postmodernist philosophy. In the second year after putting forward the practical view of

communication, Professor Ren Ping published his “Principles of Generalized Epistemology”, which mainly aimed at the American scholar Rorty’s postmodernist philosophy. Rorty talked about the dispel of epistemology, so Professor Ren Ping proposed a generalized epistemology. Subsequently, after seven years of deep reflexion, Professor Ren Ping published “Communication Practice and Intersubjectivity”. This time it was written mainly in response to two main theoretical disadvantages of spiritual communication and a priori rationality in the German scholar Habermas’ communication theory, so Professor Ren Ping reiterated the significance of materialism. Regarding “Principles of Generalized Epistemology” and “Communication Practice and Intersubjectivity”, Professor Ren Ping made a certain introduction in both academic biographies, and even specifically discussed the Japanese scholar Hiromatsu Sibū’s worldview and its general similarities and differences with the concept of communication practice and the social materialism. However, the problem is that Professor Ren Ping did not mention the equally important, if not more important, “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” in his two short academic biographies. It is impossible for Professor Ren Ping to inadvertently forget his most comprehensive theoretical academic masterpiece, not to mention the author’s extensive efforts put in this ambitious work. It seems that the reason is some kind of hidden, inconvenient, and related to a deep consideration.

Another small detail is about Professor Ren Ping’s article “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”. Published in 2004, this article is of great significance to the study of contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy. Professor Ren Ping in “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism” says: “The key to contemporary Chinese Marxism’s choice of a new form is the need for a new theoretical fulcrum and a new methodology” [7, pp. 18-22]. However, this article was only listed in the unauthorized version of “Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation”, and was mentioned only by the interviewee. In the authorized version of “Ren Ping’s Selected Works”, this extremely important paper was not mentioned at all, moreover, the original interviewee’s brief introduction to this paper was also deleted by Professor. Furthermore, neither “Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation” nor “Ren Ping’s Selected Works” were included in the article “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”. In view of the high status of this article in the ideological history of contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy research, it is obviously impossible that the above-mentioned happened due to momentary negligence or oblivion. Although, according to Professor Ren Ping’s words in the “Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation” postscript, “Being a literary person, I consider essays the main way of expressing my academic life”. It can be seen that Professor Ren Ping himself values his monographs, not his articles. However, the problem is that Professor Ren Ping mentioned some of his important papers that had to be mentioned in both short academic biographies, but he did not mention “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”. It seems that there are some concerns. So what is the connection between these two small details?

3. Answers to questions about historical appearances

If these two subtle details are linked, could it be that there is some kind of secret ideological connection between the 2003 book “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” and the 2004 article “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”, and even “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” itself is a work of appearance that does not use the corresponding academic language to write? Is it precisely because of the fact that Professor Ren Ping decided not to mention “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” and “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism” in “Philosophical Research in the Era of Innovation” and “Ren Ping’s Selected Works”? If the work “Principles of Generalized Epistemology” is aimed at analyzing the American scholar Rorty’s epistemology, and “Communication Practice and Intersubjectivity” is a response to the German scholar Habermas’ mental communication and a priori rational idealistic communication theory, in fact, “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” is a reflection on the French scholar Derrida considering

Marxism outdated and no more relevant in “The Ghost of Marx”. The theoretical cross-examination, trying to make the practical view of communication and of the social materialism reappears as Marxism in the contemporary vision, and it is this difficult philosophical reflection that directly led to the emergence of “Marx in Contemporary Perspective”, the Marxist investigation trying to prove the modern character of this philosophy.

The preface and introduction to philosophical works are often crucial to read. For example, the introduction to Kant’s “Criticism of Pure Reason” raises the general question of how innate comprehensive judgment is possible. The preface to Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit” is regarded as a philosophical declaration that openly breaks with Schelling’s philosophy. Although “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” does not mention the historical aesthetics in a word, the introduction has already laid a general question for the book: whether Marxism and Marxist philosophy have become the ghosts of history written by the postmodernist Derrida, or are they still symbols of the time? Or rather, if Marxism and Marxist philosophy are still the spirit of the time essence, how should Marx in the contemporary vision be constructed? The whole book revolves around this general problem. For example, Professor Ren Ping said modestly in his postscript: “The topic is not that I already have a lot of academic skills to wait for a fight. This topic is really of great significance and makes me reluctant to give up. This is a work on the contemporary understanding and contemporary vision of Marx’s philosophy” [3, P. 598]. The ancient Roman philosophers believed that life is like a play, and we are all people in the play. The king’s exit and the reappearance of Marxism and Marxist philosophy are also derived from the long-standing theatrical performance art. The philosophical thinking of classical philosophers on the universe’s life can be described as profound and meaningful. Professor Ren Ping said: “The word ‘appearance’ comes from the ‘stage’ performance art. However, this stage is not the one of an ordinary theater, but the grand stage of human history. Compared with this stage, people are both the authors of the play and the characters in the play” [8, P. 9]. Ghost imagery, which is a matter of thought rather than folklore, first appeared in the opening of Shakespeare’s masterpiece “Hamlet” during the Renaissance, and for the second time in the 19th century, it appeared in the opening of the “Communist Manifesto” co-authored by Marx and Engels in order to formally create Marxism. In the 20th century, it appeared for the third time in the contemporary French deconstructionist philosopher Derrida’s “The Ghost of Marx”, and in the 21st century, it appeared for the fourth time in the introduction of Professor Ren Ping’s “Marx in the Contemporary Perspective”, which has undergone many theoretical transformations from the stage of literary imagery, the stage of philosophical speculation to the stage of question-and-answer logic. It is precisely in view of the fact that Marxism and Marxist philosophy have gradually been secretly converted into ghost studies by some Western scholars after experiencing the changes in the Soviet Union, not to mention the Japanese scholar Fukuyama who took the opportunity to trumpet the end of the Marxist history and Marxist philosophy. The traditional dialectical materialism from the Soviet textbook paradigm has been unable to accommodate a series of complex and profound major theoretical problems encountered in the study of contemporary China’s Marxist philosophy. This is especially necessary to propose a contemporary Marx that is different from “today’s Marx”, or rather, to propose Marx in contemporary vision.

Although Professor Ren Ping’s “Marx from a Contemporary Perspective” was republished in 2008, he did not rewrite the whole book based on the history of Marxist philosophy. It can be seen that philosophical research experts generally do not write subsequent theories into previous works. A similar example is that Professor Zhang Yibing did not write the theory of structure proposed in “Back to Lenin” back into “Back to Marx”. As an example, Professor Zhang Yibing said in “Back to Marx”: “The third Chinese edition still retains the basic academic structure and overall context fulcrum of the original text”. To this end, Professor Zhang Yibing would rather open up new academic fields and explore Western philosophy, especially the theory of structure in contemporary Western philosophy, such as “Back to Heidegger” and “Back to Foucault”. Since Marxist exegesis

has not yet formed a system, how to evaluate “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” and “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”, which are inextricably linked to Marxist exegesis, is an extremely difficult theoretical work. As a well-thought-out expert on contemporary Chinese Marxist philosophy, Professor Ren Ping would not easily mention his unpublished Marxist appearance system and related texts, let alone introduce his “Marx in Contemporary Perspective” and “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism” in such two collections of papers mainly aimed at general readers. As general readers, how should we evaluate “On the Contemporary Development Path of Marxism”, not to mention the evaluation of such a huge masterpiece as “Marx in Contemporary Perspective”? In fact, the Marxist appearance system is also subject to the publication to be seen by a wide reader.

Conclusion

“Ren Ping’s Selected Works” reveal the three five-year plans that Professor Ren Ping made for himself in his youth. Professor Ren Ping said: “Regardless of the subsequent changes and life’s ups and downs, in the past 15 years I have implemented this plan in a fairly strict manner, and then completed the profound transformation of my academic life” [2, P.3]. The first five-year plan is roughly equivalent to Marxist political philosophy and Marxist development philosophy, the second five-year plan is roughly equivalent to the practical view on communication and the social materialism, and the third five-year plan is roughly equivalent to Marxist historical appearance. If we make a brief summary here, we can state that the social materialism is the question of “what” is China’s modernization. Here, mainly starting from the background of the globalization era between the old and the new epoch, we discuss whether China should build a certain kind of modernity, and if it should do so, then what kind of modernity should be built? Marxist historical appearance is the “why” question of China’s modernization. It is considered that if the old and new globalization eras all take the concept of communication practice and the social materialism as the essence of the time spirit, then what is the theoretical basis behind it, and the Marxist development philosophy is the most fundamental. The question is “what to do” in the process of China’s modernization. However, if we look at the works actually published by Professor Ren Ping, the materialism of Marxist development philosophy and communication practice and Marxist historical appearance are not diachronic, but intertwined, synchronic research paradigm, the theoretical dimension of synchronicity. The social materialism and the historical appearance of Marxism seem to be different research paradigms of Marxist philosophy with diachronic representation, and there is even a certain “epistemological fracture” in the sense of Althusser. In fact, not only the social materialism, the historical appearance as the form of Marxism and the premise of historical Marxism must be the concept of synchronicity, but also the Marxist development philosophy as a problem that pays close attention to the reflection of real life, and constantly draws the ideological resources of philosophical thinking from the living world. This concept needs to be constantly present, and is unlikely to become irrelevant.

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