

# Probe into the Community Thought in the Marxist Classics

Wenliang Zhang

Zhuhai College of Jilin University  
Zhuhai, China

**Abstract**—The thought of community in the Marxist classics is concerned about the free and comprehensive development of individuals, which originated from the thought of the ancient city-state community and fully borrows from the thoughts of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and so on. The idea of community in Marxist classics includes "false community", "abstract community", "natural community" and "real community", as well as the relationship between community and individual, abstract monetary community and so on. Through the investigation of the communist society and the commonwealth of free men, the idea of human nature that truly represents the idea of community in the Marxist classics and belongs to the future society, is the idea of "free and overall development of each individual".

**Keywords**—community; Marx; freedom; state; society

## I. INTRODUCTION

The thought of ancient city-state community is the origin of Marx's thought of community. From Socrates to Plato to Aristotle's community of city-states, there are subtle differences between their ideas of community. Although they all attach importance to the role of the political community, Socrates paid attention to the universality and homogeneity of the political community, in which the individual personality and diversity were suppressed; Plato's Philosopher-king city-state community inherited Socrates' basic thought and advanced the theory of political community; Aristotle's criticism of the first two focuses on the maintenance and rescue of diversity under the suppression of universality and the publicity and recognition of heterogeneity under the control of homogeneity, which initiated a new idea of city-state community.

Hobbes' "Leviathan", in a certain sense, is a great transition from political community to contractual community. Of course, this transition is based on the criticism of Aristotle's political community, which finally stops at the node of sovereignty in monarch. Rousseau's idea of contract community was thus extended. He fiercely criticized Hobbes' idea of sovereignty in monarch and proposed the political idea of the new generation of people-centered thinking of sovereignty in the people. The collective liberalism lying in such idea based on "public will" was of course subverted by Hegel's ethical community characterized by holism and nationalism. Hegel opposed both the theory of contract and the theory of absolute authority, and

emphasized the importance and significance of the legal system, that is, the national political system, which in his opinion was the essential characteristic of the modern state. Hegel's philosophy of law is the base of Marx's criticism and the source of nourishment. Marx's thought of community thus inherited the essence of the thought of city-state community that originated from ancient Greece, and at the same time, he constructed the real community he aspires to — the union of free men. A knot seems to be tied here in history. Marx thinks that a higher form of response to the ancient Greek community should be made, and that, the critique of Hegel's false community cannot remain only in a critical tone in that it is related to the thoughts of philosophers starting from Socrates, especially to their views and identification of the individual and the community, and more precisely to the definition of individual freedom and development in the solution of the real social program. From this point of view, the "communities" are not distinguished by their different forms, but only as a reminder of the meaning of life and value to the individual, and they gleam divinely in the minds of different thinkers. Based on this, the exploration of such a long evolvement of thoughts can obtain its proper meaning.

## II. THE GENERAL CONCERN OF MARX'S COMMUNITY THOUGHT IS ABOUT THE FREE AND COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

That is to say, the starting point and destination point for Marx to investigate the "false community", "abstract community", "natural community" and "real community" is to find a reasonable reflection of the real conditions of personal development for individual freedom and overall development. However, the basis of the search for this condition is exactly the premise of Marx's historical materialism, that is, "realistic individual". As a text reflecting the theoretical premise of historical materialism created by Marx, "realistic individual" can be demonstrated in "the German Ideology". "The premises we begin with are not arbitrary, not dogmatic, but realistic premises which can only be set aside in the imagination. These are realistic individuals, their activities and their material living conditions, both what they have and what their own activities create. Therefore, these premises can be confirmed in a purely empirical way." [1] Marx's "realistic individual", the logical premise of historical materialism, is also the confirmation of the historical premise of historical view. There is no doubt that

this is the starting point of Marx and Engels' historical investigation, which is different from the subjectivism of human beings, including the Platonism of rationalism, Cartesianism, and the existentialism of irrationalism on the one hand, and the objectification of human, including Feuerbach's thought of "natural person", Adam Smith's "economic man", Comte's "positivist man", etc. on the other. In other words, Marx and Engels refined the basic premise of their historical materialism on the basis of reality, on the basis of "living individual existence", and at the intersection of nature and history, individual and class.

What is a relationship between means and ends in Marx' thought of the relationship between community and individual, is in Hegel's view, a mystical religious thing, that is to say, an ultimate problem — the other (god), community, or society outside the individual becomes a inextricable sacred relational entity. Marx's criticism is based on the premise of saving people, which is actually people's freedom and development, and "real people" is the premise of this criticism. Marx pointed out: "if the conscious representation of these personal realities is false, and if they reverse their reality in their own minds, it is caused by their narrow mode of physical activity and, consequently, their narrow social relations."

### III. IN MARX'S VIEW, THE ULTIMATE AND RELIGIOUS EXISTENCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL IS JUST THE HISTORICAL PRODUCT OF THE "TWO-SIDE-OF-THE-SAME-COIN" NATURE OF THE NATURAL RELATIONSHIP AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP REPRESENTED BY PEOPLE'S LABOR, WHICH IS NOTHING BUT THE RESULT OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S SUBJECTIVE ACTIVITIES AND THOSE LIMITED BY PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES

In the abstract monetary community identified by him, Marx expressed the following thought: "therefore, money is directly the realistic community, because it is the general entity on which all people live; and at the same time is also the common product of all people. But, as can be seen, in money the community is only abstract, and to an individual it is only external and accidental; it is also a means of satisfying individual needs as an isolated person. ... From the perspective of money (exchange value), the objectification of an individual is not in terms of its definitive property, but in terms of a social specification (relationship), which is external to the individual." What Marx mentioned here is that money, as an abstract public body, is not only a general entity, but also an objectified relational community that reflects the characteristics of individual society. However, this relational community, according to Marx, is something external to individuals for the freedom and development of individuals. Whether it is a false community or an abstract community, for real individuals, the community is the product of real individuals, which is a confirmation of reality. For the "living individual", the existence of the community before the individual is a category of concepts rather than a category of time. That is to say, the community is a basic condition for existing individuals, namely, individuals can only achieve independence and development in the community. But Marx did not accept without restriction that

all communities could be so, hence there is his idea of the commonwealth of free men, the true community.

Professor Qin Long pointed out that, morphologically, many forms, including primitive group, clan, family, tribe, rural commune, state, class, money, capital and even communist society, are all included in the scope of Marx's community; in terms of scale, small family and large society all came into Marx's common vision; and in terms of development stage and representation, naturally formed communities such as primitive groups, clans, families, tribes and rural communes, abstract communities such as money and capital, false communities such as states and classes, and free person associations in the future communist society can all be included in Marx's community category. This understanding of the categories of the Marxist community is only a generalization, since Marx never gave the community a clear, normative definition. [2] Marx began to think about the form of real community as early as the critical period of Hegel's false community of state, because this process is the premise for Marx to clear the illusory fog in Hegel's theory and to build the thought of real community. "But Hegel is content with this: in the country aware of its own presence which is described as ethical spirit, which is only implicitly, according to the general idea, and is the only decisive thing. He does not allow society to be the decisive thing of reality, because it requires a real subject, and he has only an abstract subject, a fiction." [3]

### IV. THE BASIC IDEA OF TRANSFORMING THE COUNTRY INTO A FREE PERSON ASSOCIATION WITH THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WHOLE IN HARMONY, PROPOSED BY MARX UNDER THE SHADOW OF HEGEL'S RATIONALIST STATE VIEW THAT "THE STATE SHOULD BE CONCEIVED ACCORDING TO FREE REASON", IS A GUIDE TO THE FUTURE UNION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF REASON

Of course, this kind of thought is the necessary stage of Marx's early thought development, and it is also the initial germination of Marx's real community thought. In the "Manuscript of Economics and Philosophy in 1844", through the definition of alienated labor and objectified labor, Marx for the first time proposed that alienated labor (in Marx's case, alienated labor and private property have an essential consistency) should be sublated to return to the species nature of human, that is, to reach a new society through free and self-conscious activities. This process of ablating private property and thus ablating man's self-alienation is Marx's theoretical demonstration of the new system that replaces capitalism, namely communism. This kind of theoretical demonstration is a kind of humanistic logic that borrows Feuerbach's "ought" in his species nature responding to the "existing" of alienation. Marx pointed out that the society achieved through such sublation would be "a true possession of man's essence through man and for man's sake; it is, therefore, the humanly return of human beings to themselves and society... It is the real solution of the contradiction between man and nature, between man and man, between being and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, and between

individual and kind. It is the answer to the riddle of history, and knows that it is the answer." [4]

In the period of "the German Ideology", Marx and Engels worked out the basic principles of historical materialism together. In the first volume, "Feuerbach", Marx, starting from the development of social division of labor and social productivity and the various forms of ownership associated with it, stated that "the difference between communism and all past movements is that, it overturns the basis of all the old relations of production and communication, and for the first time consciously regards all the presuppositions of spontaneous formation as the creation of their predecessors, abolishing their spontaneity and subjecting them to the domination of the united individual." [5]

In the section "Proletarians and Communists" in "The Communist Manifesto", Marx and Engels analyzed the basic conditions for the formation of the association of free men — to change capital into public social force and into social property, namely, they will lose their class nature and retain social nature; to eliminate the possessive activities that exist for the purpose of capital appreciation and serve to inform the interests of the class while preserving the productive possessive activities that sustain life; to destroy the false community of independence and character which is possessed by capital yet not by the active individual; to wipe out the education of a capitalist society, in which men are trained as machines, that the bourgeois fears to lose; to eliminate the modern family system based on capital; to remove the divisions and antagonisms between nations will disappear, and the unite the action of the proletariats in the civilized countries, which is the first condition for their liberation; and to completely break with traditional ideas. And these can be reduced to the elimination of private ownership, so as to reach a new union, where the free development of each person is the condition for the free development of all people, and this is Manifesto of the Communist Party.

In the "Capital", Marx pointed out that "when the productive forces of labor are at a lower stage of development, correspondingly, the relations of people within the processes of material life and production, that is, their relations with each other and with nature, are narrow. It is only when the process of social life, the form of the process of physical production, as the product of free association, is under the conscious and planned control of man, that it lifts its veil of mystery." [6] What Marx puts forward here as the product of the union of free men actually refers to the individual labor carried out by individuals united in a real community on the basis of joint possession and control of the means of production, which is directly social labor. That is to say, individuals in social relations have achieved conscious control over their social relations, blind production of goods is replaced by direct production of goods between people, and the dependence of things created by the magic of the market will be replaced by the free and conscious creation of relationships between individuals. Therefore, the idea of "under the control of man's conscious plan" put forward by Mark contains the real reconciliation between man and nature and between man and man. This is the only way to

answer the mystery of history, and also to return to the true essence of man, but Marx pointed out that this requires a certain social material basis or a series of material living conditions.

The thought "the ideal of human value is the abundant material wealth and free and comprehensive development of endowment of individuals" set up by Marx early in his career, opposes the transformation of the man of abundant attributes into a one-sided man. In this sense, Marx's theory of man is rich in anti-essentialism. But at the same time, Marx endowed this value ideal with the essence of free self-conscious activity. In his subsequent thinking, he further defined human nature as the sum of social relations, material production activities, and the necessary logic of capital and its movement in the process of exploring the realistic path of human value ideal, thus returning to the path of essentialism thinking mode. In other words, in Marx's theory of man, there is an internal conflict between anti-essentialism and essentialism." [7]

## V. CONCLUSION

It is believed that what really represents and belongs to the future society about the nature of man in Marx's theory of man is the idea of "free and comprehensive development of individuals". In the past, it is believed that the essence of human is free and conscious labor, which is a kind of humanistic thought and a borrowing of Feuerbach's meaning based on the essence of "class". In fact, this expression of Marx is just a way of thinking to extract the essence of human beings from the perspective of distinguishing human beings from animals. It shows a criticism in the metaphysical sense, but at the same time it is a future construction and commitment of ontology about human (as a class) and individuals, expresses Marx's expectations about the value of human and individuals.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Marx Engels Selected Works I [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1995: 66-67. (in Chinese)
- [2] Qin Long. Karl Marx's Discussion about "Community" [J]. Socialism Studies, 2006 (3). (in Chinese)
- [3] Complete Works of Marx and Engels III [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2002: 151. (in Chinese)
- [4] Marx. Manuscript of Economics and Philosophy in 1844 [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2000: 81. (in Chinese)
- [5] Marx Engels Selected Works I [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1995: 122. (in Chinese)
- [6] Marx. Capital. Volume I [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2004: 97. (in Chinese)
- [7] Xu Changfu. On the Inherent Conflict Between Essentialism and Anti-essentialism in Marx's Theory of Human Being [J]. Hebei Journal, 2004 (1). (in Chinese)