

Discussion on the View of “Two Kinds of National Cultures”

—Reflections after Reading Lenin’s *Critical Remarks on the National Question*

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Abstract—In the *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, Lenin put forward the famous concept of “two kinds of national cultures” in accordance with the class analysis method of Marxism and the theory of globalization, aiming at the social ideological trend of dividing and disintegrating the workers’ movement and the socialist movement in the name of protecting “national culture”. Lenin’s criticism on the slogan of “two cultures” is not denying the national culture itself, but analyzing its composition according to the special historical context essentially. In the new era, the modernization of traditional culture has become the focus of social development. Lenin’s thought of “two cultures” has been scientifically applied to make a rational choice between the different components of traditional Chinese culture to enhance dialogue and exchange with different cultural forms.

Keywords—Lenin; two kinds of national cultures; traditional culture; modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, economic globalization promotes the world to become a “global village”, and cultural globalization has become a trend. It is a worldwide issue that how to deal with the relationship between globalization and national culture and how to protect and inherit national culture. Based on Lenin’s *Critical Remarks on the National Questions*, this paper discusses the concept of “two kinds of national cultures” and the current construction of Chinese culture.

II. LENIN’S CONCLUSION ON “TWO KINDS OF NATIONAL CULTURES”

Critical Remarks on the National Questions is Lenin’s critical work aimed at the Russian national issues in 1913. This article aims to “study the programmatic wavering thoughts of Marxists and bogus Marxists on national issues in general” [1]. In January 1912, the Prague Conference of Delegates ended the formal alliance between Bolshevik and Menshevik, and Bolshevik became an independent Marxist-Leninist political party in Russia. At that time, “the national problem has risen to a prominent position among many problems in Russian social life”, the nationalism of different “national” social nationalists wavered more and more seriously, and even developed to the point of violating the programme of the Party. Solving national

problems has become the top priority of the proletarian revolution.

As early as 1844, when analyzing the situation of the British working class, Engels realized that compared with the bourgeoisie, the workers spoke a different idiom, had different set of thoughts and concepts, followed different custom and moral principles and believed different religion and politics. They are two kinds of people having nothing in common. They are so different from each other as if they belong to different races [2]. Due to class oppression, the working class and the bourgeoisie in Britain seem to have split into two different nations. Then to 1848, when studying the social structure after the failure of the French Revolution, Marx keenly observe that the French nation is divided into two nations, namely, propertied nation and working nation [3]. Marx took the method of class analysis to study the national issues, and believed that the intensification of class contradictions will inevitably lead to the internal division of the national community and split the nation into “two nations”.

Lenin inherited and developed the national thought of Marx and Engels, and put forward the famous conclusion that there are two nations in every modern nation, and there are two kinds of national culture in every national culture [4]. In the *Critical Remarks on the National Questions*, he elaborated as follows:

In the culture of every nation, there are some democratic and socialist cultural elements, even though they are not yet developed. Because there are working people and exploited people in every nation, their living conditions will inevitably produce democratic thought and socialist ideology. But each nation also has bourgeois cultures (and most of them are gangster and sectarian cultures), and they are not only ingredients, but the dominant culture [5].

From Lenin’s point of view, the significance of distinguishing the two national cultures lies in: on the one hand, exposing that the bourgeoisie use national cultural slogans to deceive the laboring masses; On the other hand, “only absorbing democratic and socialist elements from each national culture” to “fight against bourgeois culture and bourgeois nationalism of each nation”. Before the October Revolution, the two major classes are antagonistic to each other in Russia, and contradictions in the culture and ideology field became

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more and more fierce. In the *Critical Remarks on the National Questions*, although Lenin emphasized the concept of “two kinds of national culture”, he did not deny the integrity of “national culture”, and admitted that international culture is also composed of various national cultures.

Since the human society developed into the class society and formed the nation, culture, as a social consciousness phenomenon, had both class nature and national character. A nation is a social community that contains and gathers different classes and strata. In a specific social formation, it is a broader social structure than a class [6]. Therefore, the national character not only exists in the culture of a certain class and interweaves with its class nature, but also universally penetrates into the culture of different classes of the same nation, which is presented through the culture of each class. Moreover, the cultures of different classes are closely related to their own national interests under certain conditions. For example, when aliens invaded and the nation was in a desperate situation, the different classes united to resist foreign enemies.

III. A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF LENIN’S “TWO NATIONAL CULTURAL THOUGHTS”

First of all, Lenin’s theory of “two kinds of national cultures” is put forward at a special time and space background. In the early 20th century, under the guise of defending the motherland and “national culture”, the anti-socialist movement had become an important social tide in Russia. At the special social background, Lenin opposed the “national cultures” in the “general”, “empty” and “common” sense, because “it is one of the slogans of bourgeois nationalism. We support the proletarian international culture of total democracy and socialism. [6]” “National culture” is a complex constitution system, if defined it as a general and vague concept, it will be easy to blur and confuse the “class divide”. Lenin did not deny the existence of national culture, nor did he deny the national character and class nature of national culture. The real meaning of the slogan “national culture” does not depend on its literal interpretation, but “depends on the objective and mutual relationship between the country and the various classes of all countries in the world”. Lenin pointed out that “the slogan of the international culture of the democratic and the worldwide workers’ movement is only to extract the democratic and socialist elements from the culture of each nation, and taking out these elements is only and unconditionally for the purpose of antagonizing bourgeois culture and bourgeois nationalism within each nation.” That is to say, extracting the elements that are conducive to the development of democracy and socialism from various national cultures is absolutely not denying and replacing all national cultures. The proletarian culture that we emphasize does not exclude the national culture of each nation. What it opposes is the bourgeois culture in the national culture. Actually, the proletarian culture is based on the national culture. If there is no national culture, there will be no proletarian culture that can be refined.

Second, Lenin’s conclusion of “two kinds of national cultures” is the inheritance and development of Marxist thought. Marx’s method of class analysis is widely used in the theoretical analysis of various phenomena. Marx believed that

class division was a common phenomenon among nations. From the long history of human society, by the method of class analysis, Lenin pointed out that there are two nations in each nation, and there are two different national cultures in each national culture, which is the inheritance and development of Marxist materialist dialectics. Lenin further emphasized that these two national cultures are not in the equal relationship of “two-peak confrontation” and “two streams diverge”, but in the relationship of ruling and being ruled. However, although the status of the two nation in each national culture is not equal, it is not in a state of solidification and peace. On the contrary, the fierce struggle between the two kinds of national cultures has not stopped. In a sense, although the thoughts of the ruled class are still in a dominate position, they have always bravely fought against the thoughts of the ruling class, which made people’s culture form the basis of the whole social culture and promoted the continuous development of human civilization. It can be proved that people are the masters of history and subjects of practice. They are not only the creators of the social material wealth, but also the creators of the social spiritual wealth. The culture of the exploited class has always been the foundation and source of the whole social culture.

Under the impact of modernist trends, when discussing the theory of “two kinds of national culture”, the academic circle often ignores them. It seems that there is no class in the world and there is no opposition between the two ideological systems, which are not in line with the reality of the current world culture. Lenin’s theory of “two kinds of national cultures” has the function of epistemology and the significance of methodology for us to understand and analyze the world culture situation of the contemporary capitalism. Each nation has two kinds of national culture, especially for the modern nation. Therefore, when studying foreign cultures, we should absorb its essence, discard its dross, absorb the culture that has a positive effect on us, and discard the obstructive factors, so that we can preferably promote the healthy development of the multi-ethnic culture in China

IV. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF LENIN’S “TWO NATIONAL CULTURAL VIEWS” TO THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION IN CHINA

At present, China has entered a new era of inheriting the past and forging ahead into the future. Cultural construction is related to the development and stability of the socialist cause in China, while the key to cultural construction lies in how to push forward the process of modernization of Chinese traditional culture smoothly. An era will form a specific cultural state. Culture and the era are progressing and developing together. It is necessary to correctly handle the relationship between tradition and modernity. In the process of modernizing traditional culture, it is necessary to break through the dilemma of the old era and organically combine the tradition with the new era. As general secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, “National culture is a unique identifier that distinguishes a nation from other nations. We should strengthen the excavation and interpretation of Chinese excellent traditional culture, strive to realize the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese traditional virtues, carry forward the cultural spirit spanning

time and space, surpassing the country, with eternal charm and contemporary value, and spread the innovative achievements of contemporary Chinese culture that inherits excellent traditional culture and promotes the spirit of the times, based on China and facing the world. As long as the Chinese nation pursues a fine and high moral standard from generation to generation, our nation will always be full of hope [7]. The modernization of traditional culture needs to be carried out in the practice of real life. Practice constitutes the basis for the development of theory. Only in practice can we test whether the theory can correctly guide practice.

China has five thousand years of Chinese civilization and a long and profound traditional culture, condensing the excellent spiritual wealth formed in the long-term production practice of the Chinese people. However, thousands of years of feudal rule has formed a deep-rooted “cultural cross” among the people. Since the reform and opening up, China has rapidly entered the track of socialist market economy, and its social transformation is irreversible. China has spent more than thirty years experiencing the transformation from a mandatory planned economic system to a socialist market economic system, from a traditional rural economic society based on agriculture to a modern urban society dominated by industry and services as well as a further changing to a knowledge-based society is changing, from the traditional centralized political system to the socialist democratic political system, from the closed and semi closed economic society to the establishment of an open economy and a fully open society, from the single monopoly social governance dominated by the government to the multiple common social governance in which the government, the market and the society complement and restrict each other. Changes in the internal structure of our social system mean that people’s production mode, lifestyle, psychological structures, values and other aspects have undergone comprehensive and profound changes.

Lenin’s concept of “two kinds of national culture” has a distinct class characteristic, China as a country with thousands of years of feudal civilization, in the process of cultural development, will inevitably form the elements reflecting feudalism as the will of the ruling class, and the democratic and socialist cultural elements as the positive will of the ruled class. China has also experienced the sprouting and development period of capitalism. In the development of traditional Chinese culture, the cultural factors of feudalism and the cultural elements of socialism and democracy are dominant. Therefore, according to Lenin’s analytical logic, we should inherit and develop the democratic and socialist elements as the essence of culture in the process of vigorously promoting the modernization of traditional Chinese culture, and objectively abandon its feudal cultural elements.

Lenin adopted a very flexible strategy in dealing with national culture and class culture, and did not stick to the rules and regulations. When criticizing the cultural concept of populism in the early days, Lenin took an antagonistic attitude towards the narrow nationalism, but scientifically viewed and critically accepted the capitalism and socialism. Facing the fact that the proletariat of all countries trapped in the mire of nationalism in the first World War and devoted themselves to the wave of “defending the motherland” and “protecting

national culture”, Lenin exposed the conspiracy that capitalism used nationalism to collapse the socialist movement. Under the background of globalization, exchanges and dialogues between Chinese culture and different civilizations in the world are not only the collision between Chinese traditional culture and world civilization, but also the connection between socialist culture and capitalist culture. Consequently, the dialogue and competition between socialist culture and capitalist culture have not been reduced or outdated compared with the era of Lenin. Since the end of the Cold War, the upheaval of Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the socialist cultural form has experienced ups and downs in the world and has been baptized as well. The process that China opens it to the world is not only the process of traditional national culture opening to the world, but also the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics opening to the world. Socialist culture is not only national in form, but also has the class characteristics and distinct national identity of the proletariat in content. The relationship between class nature and national character is interlaced and overlapping in content and form. They influence each other and penetrate each other, and they have defects as well as merits. It is of great referential significance to scientifically inherit and develop human cultural heritage.

V. CONCLUSION

In general, Lenin fully applied Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism to the reality of Russia in his article “Criticism on National Issues”, and deeply and powerfully criticized various opportunistic national views at that time. It systematically and comprehensively interprets the basic principles of Marxism on national issues. It is a controversial work full of Marxist dialectical historical materialism. However, it is worth noting that Lenin’s series of thoughts on national culture are based on specific issues and under specific time and space. Social development may have certain historical limitations. Some of Lenin’s thesis may not be fully applicable to the present, but the debate and discussion of the method between cultural globality and cultural nationality undoubtedly has great methodological significance for the rational promotion of the development of traditional national culture under the globalization situation, and it needs further research and summary in academic circles.

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