

# The Theoretical Framework and Realistic Direction of Das Kapital

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## ABSTRACT

This paper combs the creation, publication, dissemination, and internal logical system structure of Das Kapital. It is proposed that the logical starting point of understanding Das Kapital is to understand the motivation of Marx's research on economic problems, and the logical framework is to grasp the basic principles and overall structure of the four volumes of Das Kapital. To study Das Kapital, we should tightly integrate the reality of China's economic development and give full play to the practical guiding role of theory. This article explains the contemporary value of Das Kapital from three aspects: first, the regularity of Das Kapital provides important enlightenment for understanding contemporary capitalism and building China's socialist economy; second, Das Kapital is an important ideological source of Xi Jinping's new socialist economic thought with China's characteristics in the new era; third, Das Kapital is a socialist political economy with China's characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Das Kapital, theoretical framework, realistic direction*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

General secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: China's Sinicization of Marx has formed two theoretical achievements of China's theoretical system of Mao Zedong thought and socialism with Chinese characteristics, which has been traced back to the source. These two theoretical achievements were obtained under the guidance of Marx's classical theory. As one of the most important classic works of Marxism, capital has been tested by time and practice and always shines with the light of truth. We should apply what we have learned, give full play to the practical guiding role of theory, and further deepen, enrich, and develop the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Das Kapital, published in 1867, is the heaviest and richest work of Marxism, known as "the Bible of the working class". This important speech of the general secretary points out the direction and value of studying capital in the new era.

## 2. THE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF DAS KAPITAL

Das Kapital is an epoch-making classic of political economy, which was completed by Marx with all his life

(1843-1883). It is an encyclopaedic building of Marxist theory. To grasp the logical starting point of Das Kapital, we need to start from the motivation of Marx's creation of Das Kapital.

### 2.1. The motivation of Marx's study of economic problems

The "difficulty" of expressing opinions on material interests is the initial motivation of Marx's study of economics. Marx once said: "during 1842-1843, as the editor in chief, I encountered the difficulty of expressing opinions on the so-called material interests for the first time. It's the initial motivation for me to study economic issues [1]." Engels also said: "I heard Marx say more than once that it was his research on forest theft and the situation of farmers in the Mosel river area that pushed him from politics to the study of economic relations and thus to socialism [2]."

The analysis of civil society and the exploration of "where society is going" are the main reasons for Marx's in-depth study of economics. During his work, Marx encountered many practical economic and political problems, the most prominent of which was the question about the state and law. To seek the anatomy of civil

society, he devoted himself to the study of political economy.

Seeking the conditions for the liberation of the proletariat is the fundamental cause of Marx's lifelong study of economics. What Marx pondered hard was what decided the material interests of this miserable living condition? These problems related to the development trend of capitalist society and the overall process of human social development are the fundamental motivation to promote Marx's lifelong study of economics. To seek the "theoretical demonstration" of communism, Marx chose the profession that could work for the welfare of human beings and fought for the happiness of millions of people.

The motivation of Marx's research on economic problems fully shows the basic research position of capital: always standing on the side of the proletariat, seeking theoretical support for the liberation of the proletariat and the happiness of mankind. This also provides a logical starting point for understanding the theory of surplus value, that is, the theory of capitalists' exploitation of workers.

## ***2.2. The publication and dissemination of Das Kapital***

On September 14, 1867, the first edition of *Das Kapital* in German was published by Meisner press in Hamburg. After Marx's death, Engels made great efforts to edit and publish the second and third volumes of *Das Kapital* and the third, fourth and English editions of the first volume of *Das Kapital*. Engels began to edit the manuscript of Volume II of *Das Kapital* in February 1884 and published it in 1885. After the second volume was published, Engels immediately devoted himself to editing the third volume of *Das Kapital*, which was published in 1894.

The publication of the first volume of capital is widely welcomed by the working class in various countries. In 1868, the International Congress of Brussels made a special resolution on *Das Kapital*, which discussed its great significance and required it to be translated into various languages for wide dissemination. Later, various versions were published one after another. The first foreign translation of Volume I of *Das Kapital* was published in Petersburg, Russia, in 1872. Later, French, Italian and English versions were published successively in France (1872-1875), Italy (1886) and Britain (1887).

After the death of Engels, according to incomplete statistics, there were at least 140 versions of *Das Kapital*. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the outbreak of the capitalist economic crisis caused by neoliberalism, especially the outbreak of the international financial crisis, *Das Kapital* and its manuscripts have once again become popular books, and many books have emerged to

introduce and interpret *Das Kapital*. In Chinese history, Cai Erkang was the first to introduce Marx and capital. In 1899, he wrote that Marx wrote capital. In 1919, Li Dazhao introduced the basic idea of capital in my view of Marxism.

The wide spread of *Das Kapital* confirms the scientific nature and far-reaching influence of the truth revealed in the book.

## **3. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LOGICAL METHOD OF DAS KAPITAL**

The key to study capital is to grasp the basic principles and internal logical structure.

### ***3.1. The research object and purpose of Das Kapital***

Marx pointed out: "what I want to study in this book is the capitalist mode of production and its corresponding relations of production and exchange.". The "capitalist mode of production" here refers to the combination of means of production and labor based on ownership, including the relations of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. It belongs to the generalized production relations. "Production relations corresponding to it" refers to the relations between people in the direct production process, which is a narrow sense of production relations. As for the purpose of *Das Kapital*, Marx thought that "the ultimate purpose of this book is to reveal the law of modern social and economic movement [3]." *Das Kapital* reveals the most basic economic law of capitalist society, the law of surplus value, embodies the capitalist relations of production, and thus reveals the law of the emergence, development, and extinction of capitalist relations of production. The key to study capital is to grasp the basic principles and internal logical structure.

### ***3.2. The research methods of Das Kapital***

Fundamentally speaking, Marxism is a methodology of understanding the world. As Engels pointed out: "Marx's whole world view is not a doctrine, but a method. What it provides is not a ready-made dogma, but a starting point for further research and a method for such research [4]. "

The research method of capital is materialist dialectics. Marx has a classic expression of historical materialism in the preface of critique of political economy. "The mode of production of material life restricts the whole process of social life, political life and spiritual life. It is not people's consciousness that determines people's existence, on the contrary, it is people's social existence that determines people's consciousness [5]. "

In *Das Kapital*, Marx also discussed the method of rising from abstract to concrete, that is, the method of using abstract concepts or categories to theoretically describe the objective things and their internal relations. It relates to the method from abstract to concrete, which is consistent with logic and history. Engels pointed out: "where history starts, the process of thinking should also start, and the further development of the process of thinking is only the reflection of the historical process in the abstract and consistent form in theory; this reflection has been revised, but it is revised according to the law of the historical process itself [6]." In terms of logical methods, *Das Kapital* takes the analysis and synthesis, induction, and deduction of materialist dialectics as research methods to make scientific judgment, implement logical reasoning, and complete the cognitive task from abstract to concrete. Marx admitted that Hegel's dialectics helped him a lot in the process of writing capital. At the same time, Lenin also believed that "if we do not study and understand all of Hegel's logic, we cannot fully understand Marx's capital, especially its first chapter."

### ***3.3. The basic structure and internal logic of Das Kapital***

Fundamentally speaking, Marxism is a methodology of understanding the world. As Engels pointed out: "Marx's whole world view is not a doctrine, but a method. What it provides is not a ready-made dogma, but a starting point for further research and a method for such research [7]."

#### ***3.3.1. The basic structure and internal logic of Volume I of Das Kapital***

The first volume of *Das Kapital* is divided into seven chapters, with a total of 25 chapters. Among them, chapter 1-3 puts forward and discusses the theory of labour value, chapter 4-20 puts forward the theory of surplus value, and chapter 21-25 puts forward and expounds the theory of capital accumulation.

In the first volume of capital, Marx first analyses the two internal attributes of commodity: value and use value and points out that labour is the source of these two attributes and thinks that concrete labour creates the use value of commodity, while abstract labour creates the value of commodity. Therefore, Marx further put forward the law of commodity value, and based on explaining the basic content, analysed its various forms in the capitalist market, and elaborated its role in different forms.

Secondly, starting from the argument that "labour creates value", Marx creatively put forward the viewpoint that "the value created is greater than the value of labour force", which leads to the concept of "surplus value", and specifically introduces the measurement method and development law of surplus value.

Finally, based on a comprehensive introduction of the concept of surplus value, Marx analysed the social status quo of the polarization between the rich and the poor in capitalist society at that time, and pointed out that with the development of capitalism, capitalists would extract more surplus value from workers in order to expand reproduction, which made some people accumulate wealth while others become poorer. Therefore, capital accumulation will inevitably lead to the sharpening of capital contradictions and the intensification of main contradictions in capitalist society, and this process will eventually lead to the historical inevitability of the demise of capitalism.

#### ***3.3.2. The basic structure and internal logic of Volume II of Das Kapital***

The second volume of *Das Kapital* is divided into three chapters, including 21 chapters. Chapter 1-6 puts forward and discusses the theory of capital circulation, chapter 7-17 puts forward the theory of capital turnover, and chapter 18-21 puts forward and expounds the theory of reproduction of total social capital.

In the second volume of capital, Marx first analysed in detail the circulation process of industrial capital and the forms of its functions, that is, the process of purchase, the process of production and the process of sale. The corresponding forms of industrial capital are monetary capital, productive capital, and commodity capital.

Secondly, Marx pointed out that the condition for the smooth circulation of industrial capital is to coexist in space and continue in time. Based on this, he put forward the theory of capital turnover, that is, capital can bring residual value to capitalists only in repeated, continuous, and repeated circulation. This process is called capital turnover, which has two influencing factors: one is the time of capital turnover. Second, the composition of fixed capital and current capital in production capital. Marx also made a distinction between capital circulation and capital turnover: capital circulation focuses on the continuity of capital movement, which reflects the overall process of value proliferation in industrial capital circulation; capital turnover focuses on the speed of capital movement, which reflects the impact of capital turnover speed on the residual value.

Finally, based on elaborating the reproduction process of individual capital from a micro perspective, Marx analyses the reproduction process of total social capital from a macro perspective. In the first step, Marx pointed out that repeated social production is social reproduction, and the core issue of social reproduction is the realization of social total products, which includes "two compensations", that is, value compensation and material compensation. In the second step, Marx defined the two basic premises of social production: first, from the material form, the total social product can be divided

into two categories, namely, the means of production (I) for production and consumption and the means of consumption (II) for living consumption; second, from the perspective of value, the total social product (total social value) can be summarized into three components, namely, the package It includes the transfer value of the means of production in the product (c), the value created by the workers' necessary labour in the product (V) and the value created by the workers in the remaining labour time in the product (m). In the third step, Marx elaborated the conditions for the realization of social reproduction, that is, if social reproduction is to be carried out smoothly, there will be a certain constant proportion in the scale and structure of the production of the above two major categories I and II. When this proportion cannot be maintained, the capitalist economic crisis will break out. In fact, this is the inevitable rule to solve the problem of social production in a forced way Law.

### 3.3.3. *The basic structure and internal logic of Volume III of Das Kapital*

The third volume of Das Kapital is divided into seven chapters, including 52 chapters. Chapter 1-15 puts forward the essence of capitalist wages and discusses the process of transforming surplus value into profit. Chapter 16-47 expounds the concrete form of the division of surplus value. Chapter 48-52 criticizes the "Trinity" formula and reveals the real source of all kinds of income.

In the third volume of Das Kapital, Marx first analysed in detail the essence of capitalist wage under the capitalist system, that is, the value or price of labour force. Workers work for capitalists, while capitalists buy workers' labour force in the form of monetary wage. Here, the wage is "the price of labour", that is, the remuneration of all workers. There are two forms of capitalist wage: time wage and piece wage. The representative forms are "Taylor system" and "Ford system".

Secondly, Marx thinks that when the surplus value of workers' labour is regarded as the product of all the paid in capital, the surplus value will be transformed into profit. In this way, the value of goods is equal to the cost price plus profit. Marx specially points out that profit and surplus value are the same thing, but the difference is that the surplus value is for variable capital, and the profit is for all In terms of advanced capital. Marx also explained that the equalization of profit rate is the inevitable result of competition and the law of surplus value: there must be a competitive relationship between capitalists in various production departments, so the capital will be transferred from the Department with low profit rate to the Department with high profit rate. As the transformation form of commodity value, production price makes the form of value law change significantly: the market price of commodity will change with the change of production price.

Finally, Marx criticized the formula of "capital interest, land rent, labour wage". He thought that the formula of "Trinity" was the wrong view of vulgar economists, and there was an absolute contradiction with the concept of value. He further analysed the theory of interest and the theory of land rent and concluded that only human labour is the truly real source of all kinds of social income.

### 3.3.4. *The basic structure and internal logic of Volume IV of Das Kapital*

The fourth volume of Das Kapital is divided into three volumes, with a total of 24 chapters. Among them, chapters 1-7 are related to the economic theory of productive labour, mainly studying the theories of Fran. OIS Quesnay and Adam Smith, the founders of political economy. Chapters 8-18 expound the economic theory of surplus value distribution. Chapters 19-24 study the disintegration of David Ricardo school and the development of bourgeois vulgar political economy It's produced.

The fourth volume of Das Kapital is mainly the part of historical theory. In this volume, Marx mainly studies the history of the development of surplus value theory by drawing on the strengths of French Physiocrat school, British classical political economy, and free market school.

## **4. THE CONTEMPORARY VALUE AND REALISTIC DIRECTION OF DAS KAPITAL**

The key to study capital is to grasp the basic principles and internal logical structure.

### **4.1. *The regularity and significance of Das Kapital***

In Das Kapital, Marx mainly reveals the law of value, the law of surplus value, the theory of capital accumulation, the theory of capital circulation and turnover, the theory of average profit, the theory of economic crisis, the theory of production price, the theory of land rent, etc. these theories not only have the individuality of capitalism, but also have the generality of commodity economy and market economy, which is of great significance to the understanding of contemporary capitalist economy and development It is of great theoretical value to develop socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. After the outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008, Das Kapital and other works are hot again. "When the outbreak of the financial crisis in the United States led to the worldwide economic crisis and recession, some politicians and capitalists in western countries had to suppress their inner disgust and fear and read" Das Kapital ". Even the Roman Catholic Church had to admit that Marx's criticism of

capitalism was reasonable." The basic contradiction of capitalist society revealed by Marx is the root of the economic crisis, which provides an important method for understanding the economic crisis of today's capitalist society. Capital in the 21st century highly praised Marx's theory of capital accumulation: "Marx's principle of unlimited accumulation shows his profound insight, and its significance for the 21st century is no less than its influence in the 19th century." The outbreak of the novel coronavirus pneumonia in the United States has fully exposed the drawbacks of the American Medical System Based on private ownership, and the ordinary people have not received the tragic situation of effective treatment [8].

#### ***4.2. Xi Jinping's important theoretical source of socialist economic thoughts with China's characteristics in the new era***

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The Central Committee of the CPC, with Xi Jinping as its core, has constantly deepened its understanding of the law of socialist economic development, and has formed a new socialist economic thought with China's characteristics in the new era with the new development concept as its main content in practice. The new development concept of "innovation, coordination, green, opening and sharing" is the deepening and development of the law of contradiction between Marxist Productive Forces and production relations. The focus of the five development concepts is to promote the development of social productive forces and optimize and perfect the production relations with the development of productive forces. The development thought of "taking the people as the centre" fully adheres to the fundamental position of the proletariat in capital. While deeply expounding the fundamental defects of "capital cantered" capitalist mode of production, *Das Kapital* points out the socialist direction for the development of human society. To overcome the problem of "taking capital as the centre" and establish "taking people as the centre" is the proper meaning of the socialist mode of production. The theory of perfecting socialist market economy and establishing modernized economic system is firm and development based on fully understanding the basic contradictions of capitalist society. The theory of community of human destiny is the promotion and development of Marx's world market theory, and so on.

#### ***4.3. Theoretical guidance for the establishment and development of socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics***

Adhering to and developing socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics is guided by Marxist political economy. From the formation and development of socialist political economy with Chinese

characteristics, capital has always been its most basic and important theoretical resource.

From the perspective of the basic framework of socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics, the basic task of socialism, the basic economic system of socialism, the distribution system, the socialist market economic system, the socialist market system, the opening-up, the macro-control system and other theoretical construction are all guided by the scientific theory of Marx's capital [9].

The basic method that runs through capital is materialist dialectics. Adhering to this basic method, the Chinese Communists put forward a series of important ideas to guide China's economic and social development in practice, such as "new normal of economic development", "supply side structural reform", "transformation and upgrading of economic development", which well guided the reality of China's economic development and realized the sustained, rapid and healthy development of China's national economy. For example, on the issue of supply side structural reform under the new normal of China's economy, Professor Kong Xiangli analysed the formation mechanism of overcapacity under the new normal of China's economy on the basis of elaborating Marxist economic theory, and proposed that "the opposition of two factors of commodity is the starting point of overcapacity becoming possible, excessive capital accumulation lays the material foundation for overcapacity, and the interruption of circulation links increases In addition, the imbalance in the reproduction ratio of total social capital is the fundamental reason for the formation of overcapacity. " For the sustainable development of China's economy, Professor Wang Zhigui uses the dynamic coupling model to study it, pointing out: "finance and technological innovation are coupled with each other and co evolved. Through the four stages of coordinated development of low-level coordinated development, coordinated development, extreme development and spiral rise, the dynamic transformation of economic growth can be realized, and then the sustainable development of economy can be promoted." At present, the anti-globalization trend of thought in some western countries is the result of highly globalized capital under the instigation of domestic right-wing forces. We can correctly view the development of the global economy under the tide of anti-globalization only when we start from Marx's classical theory, recognize the law of globalization development, consolidate our own development advantages, speed up the transformation of economic development power, and speed up our own scientific and technological innovation Finally, it puts forward the scientific countermeasures.

Engels pointed out in his anti-social forest Theory: "the ultimate cause of all social changes and political changes should not be found in people's minds, in

people's increasing understanding of eternal truth and justice, but in the change of production mode and exchange mode." China is not only the largest socialist country in the world, but also the largest developing country and the second largest economy in the world. Therefore, in the face of practical problems in the construction of socialist market economy, it is necessary to combine the Marxist economic theory contained in capital with China's national conditions, and put forward the development strategy of socialist market economy suitable for the new normal of economy, which is of great significance to speed up the construction of socialist market economy. It is of great practical significance to promote the reform and innovation of socialist mode of production and mode of exchange in the new era, accelerate China's socialist modernization, and steadily promote the construction of a powerful socialist country [10].

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper is proposed that the logical starting point of understanding *Das Kapital* is to understand the motivation of Marx's research on economic problems, and the logical framework is to grasp the basic principles and overall structure of the four volumes of *Das Kapital*. To study *Das Kapital*, we should tightly integrate the reality of China's economic development and give full play to the practical guiding role of theory. This article explains the contemporary value of *Das Kapital* from three aspects: first, the regularity of *Das Kapital* provides important enlightenment for understanding contemporary capitalism and building China's socialist economy; two, *Das Kapital* is an important ideological source of Xi Jinping's new socialist economic thought with China's characteristics in the new era; three, *Das Kapital* is a socialist political economy with China's characteristics.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Zhaoyang Cen contributed to the conception of the study. Zhaoyang Cen contributed significantly to analysis and manuscript preparation. Xiping Cao performed the theoretical analyses and wrote the manuscript. Xianglong Xiao helped perform the analysis with constructive discussions.

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