

## Study on Marx's Theory of Civil Society and Alienation

WEN Jichang<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Department of Marxism, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Civil society is a particular period of the social development, refers to the communication relationship between the private individuals and it is a private field of activities which are opposed to the political society. Before the capitalist society, the political nation and the civil society have many coincident values and the separation of the two dues to the intrinsic requirements of the capitalist market economy development, and the separation also generates the representative democracy. As for alienation, it is the basic term to represent the process of the social activities; however, there is a transformation from moral priori estimation to historical priori estimation which has been ignored.

**Key words:** Marx's theory; Civil society; Political society; Representative democracy; Alienation; Economy development

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### INTRODUCTION

Young Marx's civil society theory does not possess the characteristics of historical materialism, just as Marx has admitted, at that time, he does not analyze civil society with the regard with material production, and he does not consider the relationship between the properties as

the manifestation of the material relationships; so young Marx has not concluded the material live relationship from the relationship of the properties; and most of his civil society theories are based upon the spiritual feature which Hegel has summed up from the civil society. Until 1844 economic and philosophic manuscripts have been taken into consideration, Marx begins to associate the civil society with the relationships between the material properties. Marx believes the material live relationships or the economic relationships play an important role in the political society. Families and civil society convert themselves to a state, and they are the original power of the changing process. The political society will not exist without the basis of the families and the civil society. After Marx has reversed Hegel's relationship of the civil society and the political society, the productivities has been analyzed under the condition of the material production, and the formation of the civil society has been explained form the perspective of economic development. After that, Marx begins to illustrate the relationship between the economic basis and the political ideology which evolves into the problem of the separation between the civil society and the political society.

Marx has proposed his historical materialism in the year 1845, and the logic of the humanism alienation has been changed dramatically. Marx denies the historical view of the alienation, moreover, he continues to criticize the material social relationship and the alienate power which have been created by human. This can be manifested form the new theory of the materialization through his study on the political economy. Marx's materialization theory which essentially distinguished from the historical alienation theory is established on the basis of the historical materialism. All the evolution of Marx's alienation theory has a natural process which is not clearly clarified for several decades.

## 1. RECONSIDER THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL SOCIETY

In Marx's opinion, "civil society" and "political society" are both a historical category and analytical category. As a historical category, civil society refers to a particular period of social development, and in this period, the essential characteristic is the existing of the class interests. Marx argues the development of the civil society is the same process of for the development of individual interests to the class interests (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.22). Both civil society and political society is the derivation of social division. With the development of social productivity, interests division comes into being. Private interests gradually develop into the class interests who always represent the contradictions between the special private interests and to prevalent public interests. This means civil society is also a society with class and class interests like political society and it cannot exist in the classless of primitive society or the communist society which also do not have the classes.

As an analytical category, civil society is an abstract conception of private activity field. Marx argues that with the division of the social interests, the whole society separate into civil society and the political society. As a result, each individual plays a dual role, one is the member of the civil society, and the other is the member of the public society. For an example, as government officials, an individual plays the public role when he does his job, and plays the private role when he purchases his own profit. Marx illustrates that: "In a real developed political country, individuals live a dual life not only in their mind or their consciousness but also in their reality and practices. The former is a heaven life which can be called the life of the community where human consider themselves as a social beings, however the latter is a secular world where individuals play a private role, take others as a tool and also decline them as a tool which can be used arbitrary by the external force." (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.160) Civil society is the sum of all the human private interests, especially refers to the private material interests. Marx has concluded the conception of civil society which means a social organization which generates in the process of the production and communication development (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.30). Marx explains the logical division between civil society and political society does not mean their division in the reality world. On the contrary, especially in medieval society, the political society and the civil society are uniform, and at that time, all the power has been exploited from the civil society by the political nation, the whole nation live a political life, and there is no definite boundary between the two societies. Marx has investigated this condition and illustrates that there are serves, feudal manor and craft

guild in the medieval society, in this condition, national material contexts are determined by the national form, all the private fields has a political feature, which means in medieval society, the system of politics is the system of private properties (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.131).

The separation of civil society and political society is accomplished in the capitalist period; it is the product of the market economy. The inherent requirements of the market economy are its division between the process of material production, exchange, consumption and the interference from the government. Marx explains that only through the political revolution can the internal requirements be satisfied. "After the political revolution defeats the power of feudal autocracy, national affairs are promoted to be the individual's affair, that's why political revolution can eliminate the political features of the civil society." (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.171) The political revolution Marx has mentioned refers to the capitalist revolution, which marks the real division of civil society and political society. So in the capitalist society, the boundary between civil society and political society is very explicit. What should the nation do or not to do and the range of individuals' activities are to be stipulated by the national institution. In this sense, the essence of the national institution is nothing but to give an authoritative definition of the boundary between civil society and political society, just like a contrast between the two societies. Most importantly, this separation causes the institution of democracy representatives and he explains in three aspects.

Firstly, this separation promotes the development from hierarchy to representative. In the medieval society, the inequality of the civil society is the inequality of the political philosophy, however, after the separation, company with the inequality is the fairness of the political national form, and the representative system is the best proof. The development of the history has changed the political grade into the social grade; the representative system is the basis of the democracy system, and the election is the essence of the representative. Secondly, this separation causes the separation of the three powers. In Marx's opinion, the judicial power and the executive power are the same thing, so the separation of the three powers are just the separation of the two, and the division of legislative power and the executive power is the need of the division of civil society and the political society. So there must be inter media between the civil society and the political society; the individuals in the civil society participates the political activities through the legislative power, however, the individuals in the political society participate the activities in the civil society through the power the administration. Thirdly, this division causes the establishment of human right and civil right, and makes the civil right to become one part of the human right. Marx illustrates that in the medieval society, where

the civil society and the political society are united; the political system is the purpose of the existing of human being, however, the human being will be the purpose of the political system after the division of the civil society and the political society. So the egoism of the individual is not only the purpose of the civil society but also the purpose of the political society. This means in the civil society, the purpose of human being is the human right and in the political society, the purpose of human being is the civil right. Marx makes a further explain that the individual in the civil society is the original being because they have feeling, characteristics, and exist directly; however, the individual in the political society is the abstract and artificial (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.182). This means the individual of the civil society is the real person, and the individual of the political society is the abstract person. The individuals should first be the members of the civil society and secondly, they are the members of the political society. So the civil right belongs to the human rights, and beside the civil right, the human right also has some other natural right.

Marx has criticized Hegel's theories about the division of the two kinds of societies. Marx first agrees Hegel's law philosophy theoretical foundation of the division between civil society and political society; however, Marx does not agree Hegel's research method of absolutely separating the civil society from the political society. Marx criticizes Hegel because he tries to use a illusory "absolute idea" to solve the contradictions between the two societies. Marx explains that the contradiction between the two kinds of societies is not absolutely but relatively, their division is just superficial not radical. The political society will eventually be united by the civil society, and it can be analyzed through three aspects below.

Firstly, the member of the civil society and the member of the political society is the same person in the society. The member of the civil society is the natural human without political elements, and it is the natural basis of the political society; the latter is the abstraction of the former. Secondly, the civil society is the foundation of the political society. Just like Marx has alleged, the natural basis of the ancient countries is the slavery, the natural basis of the modern society is the civil society and the individual who live in it. Modern country is natural basis admitted by the common human right, but the human right does not create the natural basics. The modern country is a product after the civil society defeats the old political system, so to advocate the human right is its best method to identify itself (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.50). Thirdly, the political nation is determined by the civil society. Civil society is the driving force of the political society, and with the development of the civil society, it will become a kind of the political society and eventually will continue to develop into another kind of the civil society. Civil society represents the real interests of the private individual and

the political society is nothing but a method to satisfy the need of the civil society, just like what Engel has said: "nation and political institutions are the affiliate things but the civil society and the economy field are the crucial factors. Not nation restricts and decides the civil society but the civil society restricts and decides nation." (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.350)

However, there are still tow problems need to be clarified, The first view we should clarify is that the term "civil society" is borrowed from Hegel when Marx's theories have not been mature, after he has finished a systematical theory, the term "civil society" has been substitute by the terms "productive relation" and "economy base". This opinion comes from Stalin's On Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism, which is considered as the programmatical document. In the ancient explanatory model, there is necessity to ignore the conception of "civil society", because in this explanatory model, the development of the social history is highly summarized as productivity and production relations, and sometimes can be simplified as "superstructure" and "economic basics" and in this process, the political relations has been simplified as "ideology". Through this approach, the complicated contents have been simplified and the relations between the civil society and the political society have vanished. However, in Marx's opinion, the "civil society" refers to the private life in the market economic society, and the "productive relations" and the "economic basics" are only the form of the private life. As a field private life, the economic communicate activities are the basic contents, however, there are also many other colorful social communicate activities, and it is normal for the political nation to exercise the public power to maintain the position of the ruling class and oppress other stratum. Only to understand the civil society comprehensively and its relations with the political society can the pure economic determinism be avoided.

The second problem should be clarified is that Marx's term of "civil society" has a universal value and can be suitable for the entire private life field without the limitation of the history period. More specifically, some researchers insist that, according to Marx's historical view, since the nation come into being, the society has divided into the civil society and the political society, and the civil society has already existed before the emergence of the market economy. Definitely, Marx usually uses the term "civil society" to imply the private field and the private communicating relationships of the European medieval period, however, this does not mean Marx's term of "civil society" can suitable for all the social formation. This confusion is caused by the misunderstanding of the history condition of the term "civil society". The original market economy of Europe develops in the independent and autonomous city where generated the earliest civil society.

There is a particular history condition in the late medieval period of Europe. At that time, the society confronts with the situation of division, and many of the citizens receive the oppressions from signiory; the city members do not only have the obligation of servitude, but also should submit the taxes. So after the well development of the city, city members always choose an open or hidden way to struggle with the signiory. In the struggle between the citizens and the lord, some citizens try to obtain some autonomous right by submitting redeem money to the lord, and this forms the unique "autonomous city" of the medieval Europe and this is called the primitive formation of the civil society by Hegel which means an associated organization constituted by the free individuals. However, this formation of the civil society cannot exist in all the social formations and it can also not exist in the social formation which has the same levels of the productivity and productive relations; it is only a unique phenomenon of Europe. Marx never admits the civil society can be the social formation without the commodity economy both in the way of logic or reality. Though in the medieval period, the market economy has not developed well, it is the important social relations of the ruling class, so it is natural to form this unique civil society. It is clear that Marx use the terms of "primitive", "old", and "medieval" to imply the civil society in the capitalist society and this indicates Marx's distinction between the civil society in the medieval period and the civil society in the capitalist period. That why Marx argues that: "only in the eighteenth century, the civil society becomes the tool of its individuals, and this is its necessity." (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.91) The crux of the problems is either Marx or Hegel believes the division of civil society or the political nation is caused by the need of the economic system. This means the division is a modern phenomenon which can be only established on the basis of the highly developed commercial life and the industrial life. So, the civil society Marx has referred to closely links with the modern society, it cannot exist in all the sorts of social formations and the "rural autocracy" should be distinguished with the "civil society".

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## 2. RECONSIDER THE THEORIES OF ALINATION

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To define the conception of alienation is an important part of Marx's study. In the evolution of Marx's alienation theory, there is a radical transition, that transfers from the "moral value priority" of young Marx to the "history value priority" of the mature Marx and the premise of this transition is his historical materialism. Due to the misunderstanding of this transition, it is unavoidable to consider the alienation theory of young Marx as the whole Marx's alienation theory and to the important value has been buried.

Marx's alienation theories can be studied through its development stage. There are three stages of its development; the first stage is the young Marx's alienation stage. The back ground of this stage is complicated, and it can be concluded in four aspects, such as the thoughts of Hegel, the thoughts of Feuerbach's humanism, the theories of the utopian, and the thoughts of national economics. In the theories of Hegel's alienation, the most important part is his spirit alienation which emphasizes the absolute idea alienates and materializes the whole nature world, However, the focus has changed in the theories of the young Hegel school's alienation. Feuerbach adopts the conception of alienation to the study of the regional criticize, considers God as the alienation of the humanity, and emphasizes the essence of the theology is the alienation of the humanity. On the basis of Feuerbach, Powell raises a proposition of "self-alienation". If Marx uses the alienation conception in his doctoral dissertation in the same sense of Hegel, it can be concluded that in Marx's Critical Study of Hegel's Legal Philosophy, Jewish Problem, and Preamble of Critical Study of Hegel's Legal Philosophy, the conception has been used in the sense of Feuerbach. The national economic theory has played an important role in the process of forming Marx's elimination theories. With the studying of national economy, Marx has surpassed the study field of Hegel and Feuerbach's, however, at the same time, it also should be clear that the general idea of young Marx's alienation theory is based on the abstract humanity and the theoretical system of communist which refer to the ethical value, and this determines Marx's unique research field. So what is young Marx's starting point of his ethical critics on the alienation is an important question need to be solved.

Marx has said:

The communism is an active sublation of the private properties and human alienation; it is a real occupation of human self by the means of human and on the purpose of human. This kind of sublation is a return to the society, and this return is thoroughly, self-conscious, and inherits all the value of its development history. This kind of communism can be called humanism or naturalism. (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.246)

In the theories of young Marx, the terms of "communist", "humanism" and "naturalism" have the same meaning. The term of "communism" has more emphasizes on the French Utopian theory, and the terms of "humanism" and "naturalism" have more emphasizes on Feuerbach's study on humanity. French utopians choose their research object as a general personality, change the contradictions of the classes to the contradictions of the ethic and substitute the "good and evil", "justice and injustice" for classic struggle, this is why the class struggle has the characteristics of the ethic. Similarly, Feuerbach also influenced by the thoughts of French utopias, and he conceives the social struggles as the ethical contradictions between Egoism and altruism.

So Feuerbach explains that the purpose and essence of human's development exists in the ethical value, and his utopian philosophy has at last becomes a kind of ethnology and some kind of religious theories. To sum up, Marx has disclosed deeply about the essence of the alienation that all the history of the world is nothing but the process of human practice, and the alienation is the contradiction between the humanism and the naturalism. However, there are a lot of similarities between Marx and Feuerbach, because Marx has influenced by Feuerbach that their humanity is abstract, and in some sense of ethic, all their estimate theoretical system is based on the ethology.

The second development stage of Marx's alienation can be call a stage of "perspective conversion", during this stage, after the deep study of human history, Marx discovered the theory of historical materialism and his research on the alienation has transferred from a moral value to a history value. In *The Holy Family*, when Marx criticizes the historical idealist, he points out that the history activities are the practices of the entire human, the mass do not consider the consequences of their alienation as a conception of the illusion or consider them as an alienation of the self-conscious. This means Marx does not agree with young Hegelians especially their view of explaining the alienation problems with the ethical theories. The perspective conversion can be clearly seen in Marx's illustrations of the alienation.

Both the property owners and the proletariat are the alienations of human, however, in the process of alienation, the property owners find themselves constantly be satisfied and consolidated, they consider this alienation as a proof of the self-strong, and the alienation for the proletariat is constantly self-destroy, they find themselves vulnerable and inhuman existing reality. (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.25)

Compared with *Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in which Marx illustrate the proletariat's alienation in a literature ethical way, in *The Holy Family* Marx study the alienation in an objective and historical estimation. What he concerns is no longer the ethical obligation the property owners should have but he clearly points out that the property owners themselves are also the results of the alienation. Marx explains that world history is the primitive condition of the proletariat existing, and each individual's life has significant relations with the world history (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.53). This proves Marx has surpassed his young thought to explain the alienation problem in an ethical way; Marx has sublated Feuerbach's humanity and adopted a new method of historical materialism. According to Marx's view, the phenomenon of alienation or the problems of religion, philosophy, and moral should be considered in a development way of material production and communication, and he discusses that the alienation is a history phenomenon, it is not a pure phenomenon along

with the mentality, moral or ethics and all the study no the alienation should be based on the view of history. Marx's historical estimation values can be concluded from his *Communist Manifesto*, in which work he admits the significant progress that the capitalist has made, and he argues that the general alienation of the capitalist is accompanied by the necessity of the history. To sum up, during the second development stage of Marx's alienation theories, Marx has abandoned the abstract humanity and the ethical communist, and made a new expiation for the communist in a historical material perspective. This is the stage for Marx to transmit from the ethical moral value to the historical value.

After the two stages of development, Marx has a more detail illustration of the alienation especially in his *Capital* and 1857-1858 *Economic Manuscript*, and this means Marx's alienation theory has come into a new stage of development. Marx has put forward the theory of the three social formations. Marx proposes that the dependency relationship of human is the original social formation. Under this formation, the development of the productivity is based on a narrow region and isolate field. The second formation is the human independent which based on the dependency of the materials. In this status the general exchange of the substances has come into being, a multiple relation and a comprehensive relationship constitute the social communication system. The third status establishes on the bases of the personal freedom which consist of the full round development of human being and their common production capacity. The second status creates the conditions for the third status (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.241). This statement can be analyzed through three aspects, firstly, the phenomenon of alienation and materialization come into being only when the human history has evolved into the second social status, they both have historical necessity and historical transience; secondly, this kind of alienation and materialization have positive significance because they form the pervasive social material exchange, and the full around relationship as well as the multiple necessity of social system; thirdly, the stage of alienation which based on the materialization provides the material power for communist society.

When Marx considers the proposition of "full development of humanity", he explains that, in order to realize this individuality, the development of the ability must arrive a certain degree and a condition of comprehensiveness, this means the pervasive alienation and the full development of humanity is two aspects of one thing. The phenomenon of capitalism alienation should not be analyzed through the dimension of morality, but should analyze through the perspective of history and the positive significance of the alienation should be recognized. Without the realistic and pervasive alienation to form a medium, communism and full development

of humanity are nothing but a beautiful myth. In Marx's perception, to discuss the development of an individual without consider his alienation is a manifestation of romanticism. Marx argues that communism is a sublation of alienation and materialization; however this sublation must proceed under the condition of alienation and materialization. In *Capital*, Marx discuss the alienation problems in two dimensions, in one side, Marx proposes the conception of natural historical process, which elaborates the meaning of the value prior estimation. Marx argues:

I never describe capitalists and the landowners with a color of rose, the human being I mention is a product personalized by the categories of economy and the undertaker of the class relationship and benefits. The development of the social economic is a natural historical process, no matter how subjectively a man tries to surpass all the relationships in the society, he can never get rid of his feature of material which formed by the confliction of between different relationships. (Marx & Engels, 1975, p.445)

Marx emphasizes the methods of investigating of the social situation; he denies to study human motivation and moral responsibility through the way of abstraction, but to illustrate the human evolution especially the process of the alienation in the way of historical dialectic. The important issues are in the process of historical movement and history estimation, if these methods have been omitted; the economists will lose their judgment and integrate with the vulgar economists. On the other side, Marx exposes the most important form of capitalism alienation representation which named commodity fetishism and finally sweeps away the last mental blocks for the mass to accept the theories of historical materialism. In the philosophy area, matter has been summarized as a kind of abstraction, however, in Marx's theory, Marx points out the essential content of historical form is the mountain of commodities. Marx makes a further explanation that the secrets of the commodities form are concealed in the relation between the human labor and the commodities themselves; through the commodities forms the social feature of human labor has been reflected as the feature which exists in the products naturally. During this reflection, the relation between human and human's labor has been converted to the relation between an external matter and another external matter; the true relation of human to

human has been covered by the illusion relation with the form of commodity.

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## CONCLUSION

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The concept of civil society is important in Marx's theory, Marx convinced the essential of this concept exists in the humanity which can be attained from the daily life and the daily revolution of the working class. No matter how long the government can control the society, the consciousness of the civil spirit can still not be eliminated, and during the development of the social class itself, the civil society can be constructed in a more democratic way. And the mature Marx has to consider the alienation issue through a perspective of historical priori estimation, however, this does not mean Marx has to abandon his moral estimate perspective, actually, he has established the moral estimate theories on the basis of the historical estimation.

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