



Marx's Anti-Poverty thought Contained in *Das Kapital* and Its Contemporary Value

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to sort out the theoretical origin of anti-poverty in *Das Kapital*, the root cause and performance of poverty, and the anti-poverty way of discourse in Marx's *Das Kapital*. The research method is to use literature research, combining theory and reality, the unity of logic, and the historical research method. This paper systematically analyzes the anti-poverty thought contained in *Das Kapital*, summarizes the practical experience of anti-poverty in China, and promotes the development of anti-poverty causes in the future.

Subject Areas

Political Economy

Keywords

Das Kapital, Marx's Anti-Poverty Thought, Contemporary Value, The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics

“*Das Kapital*, which was published in 1867, is the most profound and abundant work of Marxism and is known as the Bible of the working class,” [1] said Xi Jinping in a speech at the conference commemorating the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth. Focusing on surplus value, *Das Kapital* thoroughly criticized capitalism and revealed the causes, types and anti-poverty approaches of proletarian poverty under the capitalist system. In *Das Kapital*, Marx surmounted the anti-poverty thought of western economists and sociologists and formed a complete anti-poverty thought concept, which is still shining with the brilliance of truth.

1. Introduction

Poverty is a longtime problem that has troubled mankind. Although economic

globalization has greatly promoted the development of the world economy, the global poverty problem has not been completely solved. Therefore, exploring the root causes of poverty and actively carrying out anti-poverty practices is a process that every country must go through to get out of poverty. From the theoretical perspective, Marx's anti-poverty thought contained in *Das Kapital* is an important part of the treasure house of Marxist theoretical thoughts, which reveals that the lagged development of productive forces is the cause of poverty, and capitalist private ownership is the main source of deepening poverty. To this end, Marx put forward the direction of the human anti-poverty cause, which was to overthrow the capitalist system through revolutionary means, vigorously develop productive forces, towards communism, and finally achieve the common prosperity of all mankind, to achieve the ultimate goal of anti-poverty. From a practical perspective, China has entered a new era. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the CPC Central Committee has made poverty alleviation a priority concerning the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Through overall planning and vigorous progress, the first centenary goal has been achieved. Although approximately 700 million people around the world still live in extreme poverty and the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing in many countries, China has won its battle against poverty on schedule and achieved the poverty reduction goals set out by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ago. China's wisdom and solutions of targeted poverty alleviation and the use of development to reduce poverty that it has experimented with and created are its contributions to reducing global poverty. The systematic analysis of Marx and Engels' anti-poverty thought and the practical experience of the anti-poverty thought with Chinese characteristics in the new era are of great significance for consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and initiating the cause of comprehensive rural revitalization. This paper will discuss from the introduction, the ideological origin of the anti-poverty thought in *Das Kapital*, the main content of the anti-poverty thought in *Das Kapital*, the contemporary value of anti-poverty thought in *Das Kapital*, and the conclusion.

2. The Ideological Origin of Anti-Poverty thought in *Das Kapital*

Poverty is a persistent disease of human society, and its eradication is a common challenge for human society. Many classical economists in the west have formed rich anti-poverty ideological achievements in the anti-poverty research, and put forward their own unique views and reflections on poverty and anti-poverty from different class positions. Marx combined the concrete reality of the development of capitalist society at that time, carried on the critical inheritance of the existing anti-poverty thought, and formed the anti-poverty thought in *Das Kapital*.

2.1. Adam Smith's Anti-Poverty Thought

In view of poverty, some classical economists believe that wealth and poverty are

natural opposites, and put forward that capital accumulation is a necessary way to provide social wealth for people and implement anti-poverty. Adam Smith, in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, believed that poverty is caused by the inability of society to provide the means of living for individuals. In order to solve the problem of social poverty, Adam Smith proposed that “the general affluence which has reached the lowest level is caused by the increased production of all trades and occupations... So there was general affluence among all classes of society.” [2] He believes that capital creates and accumulates a large amount of social wealth through wage labor and the division of labor, thus promoting the development of anti-poverty and enriching the state and the people. He criticized the Poor Law of England and advocated the adjustment of labor remuneration and labor mobility to solve the problem of poverty. Adam Smith’s anti-poverty thought has a certain progressive significance, but he still fails to see the essence of the poverty of proletarian laborers. As Marx criticized, “In their eyes, poverty is just the pain of every birth, which is experienced by both nature and industry.”

2.2. David Ricardo’s Anti-Poverty Thought

Some classical economists, such as David Ricardo, believed that the state’s distribution of wealth and consumption intervention was closely related to poverty and anti-poverty. He pointed out that the increase in workers’ wages would not improve their living standards, but would increase their poverty. The rise of workers’ wages will cause the subsequent rise in social prices, workers cannot reach the conditions of access to living materials, thus falling into poverty. Therefore, he objected to the Poor Law of England, pointing out that “the effect of the Poor Law is to transform the rich into the poor, to make the effort of labor merely for the sake of living, to disarray the boundary between the good and the bad of intelligence, to keep the human mind busy in order to satisfy the sensual desires, and finally to impoverish all classes.” [3] He believes that the poor must be rescued from the mire of poverty through labor. Excessive poverty relief destroys the operation rules of the capitalist market, which will not only affect the stability of the national economy but also cause the expansion of poverty. Marx criticized David Ricardo’s anti-poverty ideology, saying, “His theory is only true for a fully developed bourgeois society.” Although David Ricardo saw the problem of poverty, he proposed a series of anti-poverty measures that ignored the poverty of the proletariat, and did not delve into the root causes of poverty in capitalist society.

2.3. Thomas Robert Malthus’ Anti-Poverty Thought

A small number of classical economists, such as Thomas Robert Malthus, believed that the population problem was inevitably linked to the problem of poverty. Thomas Robert Malthus in his masterpiece *An Essay on the Principle of Population* proposed “population law”, believed that “social population accord-

ing to the geometric series increases, and livelihood because increase land limited only by the arithmetic progression, because of population growth rate faster than the growth rate of food supplies, and over time, the overpopulation caused by lack of food, it will lead to poverty, vice and so on.” [4] Therefore, he also opposed the Poor Law, and proposed that it was an important way to fight poverty to control population growth by means of birth control, late marriage and even war diseases. Marx criticized Thomas Robert Malthus’s anti-poverty ideology, saying that it was “the coarsest and most barbaric system that has ever existed.” But some positive aspects of his population theory were critically inherited by Marx.

3. The Main Content of Anti-Poverty Thought in *Das Kapital*

In the 1850s, Marx’s anti-poverty thought further developed, in this period, Marx illustrates the theory of surplus value in *Das Kapital*, combining the theory of anti-poverty thinking with the practice of anti-poverty struggle, sort out the root cause of poverty, performance and anti-poverty way, to form the main content of Marx’s anti-poverty. It becomes the core of Marx’s anti-poverty thought.

3.1. The Root of Poverty—Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty

Marx critically inherited the ideas of classical economists of anti-poverty, the workers of the proletariat in the capitalist society, analyzing the difficult situation in the *Das Kapital* was pointed out that “With the development of capitalism, the proletariat no matter in the working conditions or living conditions and other aspects of the worsening, the loss of labor and living materials of the proletariat and then into the ‘abject poverty’, nothing at all, which is the real wage reduction and even loss of the proletariat into absolute poverty outstanding performance.” [5] “Capital has only one living instinct, which is to increase its own value, to create surplus value, to suck as much surplus labor as possible with its own invariable part, namely, the means of production.” Capital shackles workers to the machine, like a blood-sucking pustule constantly swelling, workers are squeezed to get weaker and weaker. Workers’ surplus value has forcefully by the capitalists, the capitalists in order to obtain more surplus value, on the basis of the production technology, extend the working time, increase working strength, the products of the workers on the rise, to pay workers laborer to obtain subsistence wages are reduced, laborer labor more and more poverty. Workers are becoming more and more subordinate to machines. Machine-driven mass production reduces the threshold for workers’ labor proficiency. In order to reduce wage expenditure, the brutal bourgeoisie employs children and women to work in factories, realizing the transformation from exploiting one person’s surplus value to exploiting the surplus value of the whole family. As Marx said, “They... Squeeze the workers for eighteen hours and pay them for twelve.” [6] “There, back-breaking forced labor is an open form of overwork.” [6] In this case, on the one hand, workers are squeezed to the maximum by capitalists, resulting in ex-

cessive production into poverty; on the other hand, they dare not get rid of factory machines, thus losing their only source of survival and falling deeper into poverty.

3.2. Manifestation of Poverty—Polarization and Social Disintegration

Under the capitalist wage labor system, the capitalist concealed the actual inequality in the exploitation surplus value in the form of paying wages to the laborers, and “better food and clothing, higher pay, and more special property will not eliminate the subordinate relationship and exploitation of the employees.” [7] Capitalists possess the vast majority of wealth in the society, and laborers’ “labor belongs to the bourgeoisie, and products are the property of capitalists, rather than the property of direct producer workers.” Poverty in capitalist societies is represented by social polarization, [8] “at one level by the accumulation of wealth, and at the other pole by the accumulation of poverty, labor torture, servitude, ignorance, coarseness and moral degradation on the part of the class that produces its products as capital.” Capitalists pursue surplus value infinitely, capital “it is like a vampire, only sucking labor can live, the more sucking labor, its life is more vigorous.” With the extended reproduction of capitalism, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, and the continuous differentiation of wealth accumulation and poverty accumulation will inevitably make the problem of social poverty increasingly prominent.

3.3. Anti-Poverty Approach—Overthrow Capitalist Private Ownership

In view of the root cause of proletariat poverty in the capitalist society, the anti-poverty measures proposed by classical economists in the past cannot help the proletariat fundamentally get rid of poverty. Marx deeply analyzed and thought about the root cause of proletariat poverty, and put forward the anti-poverty way that treated both principal and secondary aspects, which is to overthrow capitalist private ownership and establish a communist society. Marx pointed out in *Das Kapital* that “the increasing degree of exploitation... There was growing resistance from the working class... The death knell of capitalist private ownership is about to sound, and the dispossessed are about to be dispossessed.” Marx argued that only on the basis of the progress made by capitalism, and through the negation of capitalism, could he rebuild a new kind of individual ownership based on joint ownership of the means of production. Only in this way, the proletariat workers can finally realize the liberation of people, extricate themselves from the capitalist exploitation relations, eliminate poverty and achieve common prosperity.

4. Contemporary Value of Anti-Poverty Thought in *Das Kapital*

Poverty, as a social and historical problem, seeks to cure the chronic disease of

poverty and fight against poverty throughout the development of all countries, accompanied by the development of human society. Marx based on the capitalist society, not only made an in-depth analysis of poverty in the capitalist society, formed Marx's anti-poverty thought, but also provided a practical path for the proletariat to overcome poverty. It has important guiding significance for consolidating the achievements of poverty eradication and opening the cause of rural comprehensive revitalization in the post-poverty era.

4.1. The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics Is the Institutional Advantage of Poverty Eradication

Marx revealed in *Das Kapital* that the root of proletarian poverty is the capitalist system, and the way to fight poverty is to overthrow it and establish a new system conducive to fighting poverty. This new system has been found in the difficult exploration of the Chinese nation since modern times, that is, the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. "We should make full use of the political advantages of China's socialist system, which enables us to concentrate resources to accomplish major tasks, and form a common will and action to fight poverty," Xi Jinping said. He attributed China's achievements in the process of eliminating poverty to the advantages of China's socialist system. Since the Chinese economic reform, China has adhered to the socialist road. In years of anti-poverty practice, history shows that the path created by the Communist Party of China united and led the Chinese people is in line with China's national conditions and has effectively eliminated absolute poverty. "Adhering to and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only way to fight poverty. We must stick to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which is the road to a strong country and prosperity for the people." [8] "In the post-poverty alleviation era, we must continue to uphold the Leadership of the Party, continue to put the people first, continue to tap and give full play to the strengths of other aspects of the socialist system, consolidate and build on the achievements made in poverty alleviation, and comprehensively promote rural revitalization." [9]

4.2. Achieving Common Prosperity Is the Value Goal of Poverty Eradication

Marx argued in *Das Kapital* that the proletariat, by denying capitalism, would rebuild a new, united, individual ownership based on the common possession of the means of production, which would eliminate poverty. Marx also stated that the ultimate goal of poverty eradication is to achieve common prosperity. "Common prosperity is an important goal of socialist modernization," Xi Jinping said, "We will continue to promote social equity and justice and ensure that the fruits of development benefit all the people in a more equitable way." In the practice of anti-poverty, China is constantly narrowing the gap between rich and poor, eliminating social polarization, and is committed to realizing common prosperity of poverty management practice and socialist construction. The victory in the battle against poverty and building a moderately prosperous society is

the best proof that the CPC is united and leading the Chinese people in achieving common prosperity. “Eradicating poverty, improving people’s livelihood and achieving common prosperity are the essential requirements of socialism.” To eradicate poverty, in the final analysis, on the basis of ensuring people’s basic living standards, we need to ensure that the people share the fruits of social reform and the benefits of social development. “To enable the poor to share more of the fruits of development and better meet their aspirations for a better life will be a higher requirement for leading the poor to further common prosperity. Only the elimination of absolute and relative double poverty can fundamentally reflect the basic socialist principle of common prosperity.” [10]

4.3. The Development of Productivity Is the Material Basis for Poverty Eradication

Marx systematically explained the importance of the development of productive forces in *Das Kapital*, the actual material premise of the proletariat to get rid of poverty is to realize the development of productive forces, based on vigorously developing productive forces, to fight against poverty. By raising the level of material production, workers can obtain adequate means of living and avoid falling into poverty. “Continue to emancipate the mind, adhere to Chinese economic reform, constantly unleash and develop social productive forces, and unswervingly follow the path of common prosperity,” [11] Xi Jinping said in his speech at the national Poverty alleviation Review and recognition conference. Since Chinese economic reform, the liberation of productive forces has created good material living conditions for the people, achieving a leapfrog transformation from poverty to adequate food and clothing and then to an overall well-off life. The development of productive forces can provide a solid material foundation and realistic conditions for Chinese poverty eradication. On the way to eliminate poverty, China attaches great importance to the development of social productive forces, and proposes to eliminate poverty through the development of social productive forces, overcome contradictions in various fields, take the development of productive forces as a means of foundation, improve people’s livelihood, and gradually realize common prosperity.

5. Conclusion

Although China has achieved nationwide poverty alleviation, there is still some relative poverty, and the development of anti-poverty causes is still a long and arduous process. The anti-poverty thought elaborated by Marx in *Das Kapital* is of great guiding significance to the development of anti-poverty causes in China. With the continuous improvement of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and with the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee, we have consolidated our achievements in poverty alleviation, launched comprehensive rural revitalization, shared the fruits of a moderately prosperous society with the broad masses, and made continuous progress toward the ultimate goal of an-

ti-poverty—common prosperity. The limitation of this study lies in that the theoretical sorting and research of Marx and Engels' anti-poverty thought is not deep enough, and it is necessary to strengthen the literature excavation and pay attention to the theoretical logic grasp, which needs to be improved and perfected in the future research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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