

Marx's Ontology of Social Power System for Ecological Justice

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Historical materialism provides the ontology basis to understand the contemporary ecological justice problem, which is the perspective for analyzing ecological interests from the nature, structure, and transition of the social power system. The transcendence of Marx's thoughts on western mainstream environmental justice theory lies that it does not based on the "speculative ontology" of metaphysics, but on the basis of "realistic ontology" of social power system.

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Introduction

Historical materialism contains two clues—"capital-power" criticism. Previous studies have paid more attention to the obvious line of "capital criticism", while often ignored the dark line of "power criticism". Some scholars have only noticed the "capital criticism", so the "objective relationship" behind the conflict of ecological justice comes down to "civil society" or "capitalist relations of production" (Benton, 1990). Although this view reveals the importance of the relations of production, it cannot escape the accusations of "production determinism" or "Prometheans doctrine". Not only because it unable to provide a strong explanation for the great controlling and shaping roles of state power, ideology on the pattern of material interests, but there is suspicion to degrade the theoretical height of Marx's Theory of Human's Free and Comprehensive Development. Some scholars do have been keen to capture the clue of "power criticism" of Marx, for example, the famous French scholar Balibar believes that "German Ideology outlines the theory of power construction" (Balibar, 2007, p. 111). However, the "power" is often narrowly defined into a political sense of the class state and ideology. This misunderstanding ignores the material production base and internal historical motivation of power itself, and thus cannot correctly reveal the deep roots of ecological injustice. These two misunderstandings are due to the fact that the "realistic ontology" of Marx's social power system has not yet been truly understood.

Marx's Ontology of Social Power System

From the perspective of the angle of exploring "what's the shaping force behind the unjust ecological interests pattern", an in-depth study will find: It is in the power criticism line that we can reveal the realistic possibility of ecological justice. Specifically, Marx and Engels have two sets of concentrated expressions in the "German ideology" which not only clarify the three different levels of "power" category and its relationship, but also overall reveal the "objective relationship" behind ecological interests:

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The conditions under which definite productive forces can be applied are the conditions of the rule of a definite class of society, whose social power, deriving from its property, has its practical-idealistic expression in each case in the form of the State; and, therefore, every revolutionary struggle is directed against a class, which till then has been in power. (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 84)

Through a revolution, in which, on the one hand, the power of the earlier mode of production and intercourse and social organization is overthrown, and, on the other hand, there develops the universal character and the energy of the proletariat, without which the revolution cannot be accomplished; and in which, further, the proletariat rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society. (Marx & Engels, 2009, p. 581)

These two paragraphs revealed the ontological basis of ecological justice relations, that is, Historical Materialism includes three categories of "power": "Social power" determines "political power", which can also act on the former; the dialectical movements of the two powers constitute the basic elements of the "social power system". The practice of contemporary ecological justice is subject to the pre-existing constraints of the entire social power system.

"Social Power" Is the Root of Ecological Justice Relation

"Social power" at the level of material life relations is the root of the formation of material interests relations.

In the "Paris Manuscript", "German Ideology", "The Capital", and other classic texts, Marx profoundly revealed the essential origin and development logic of "social power". According to Marx's theory, in the original society in nature, the primary meaning of "Power" is only "Objectification of Human Intrinsic Power", that is, the life power realizes itself through objectification and does not have the meaning of rule and controlling others. But with the development of productivity and division of labor, the confrontation of the common interests and special interests is generated, and

indeed, this communal interest does not exist merely in the imagination, as the "general interest," but first of all in reality, as the mutual interdependence of the individuals among whom the labour is divided. And finally, the division of labor offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 90)

In other words, the "way of life and the forms of communication", which had been interacted by the activities of people, became a social force that had a coercive and dominant relationship with them, and that was "the social power, deriving from its property. If this social power is carried by the land in the feudal era, its main carrier in modern society is "capital".

Marx pointed out further in "The Capital" that capital rose to dominant the production relations since the 16th century, that is, Capital becomes the root of all interests, including conflicts of ecological interests. The more social power relationship under capital logic expand, the more ecological interests inevitably fall into the strong conflict and contradiction. "The Critique of Political Economy" as the subtitle of Marx's "Capitalism" is intended to show that the purpose of this book is to sublate the "bourgeois social power generated by its property" by the critique of capital power in order to achieve the liberation of human essential power.

"Political Power" Is the Public Mechanism of Ecological Justice Situation

"Political power" at the political level, as the derivatives of social power, is the public mechanism to consolidate the material interests relationship. The discovery of social power exposes the nihilism foundation of

western modern metaphysics completely. Hegel's Reason of State cannot penetrate the material conflict of interests field, because he does not understand "social power" as a result of the division of perceptual society is the premise from which state system and legal rights relationship raise. Marx and Engels profoundly revealed the real foundation and essence of state: "And out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter takes an independent form as the State" (Marx, 1845). "The form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining these, is civil society" (Marx, 1845). "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (Marx, 1859). It can be seen that the state as an "illusory community" in essence represents the political power generated on the basis of the interests of the ruling class. Not only that,

At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labor, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism,

so "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery", but "to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power" (Marx, 1871). According to this, Marx and Engels's view on the relationship of social power and political power is clear: On one hand, social power fundamentally determines the nature of political power. on the other hand, the political power has a dynamic negative reaction on social power.

Conclusion

To sum up, Although Marx rarely uses the term "social power system", it is undeniable that "social power system" is the shaping power behind the ecological interests. In fact, only in modern times ecological justice becomes a universal social problem, precisely because the capitalist social power system gradually formed the basic constitution of modern society after the 15th century. It can be seen where the transcendence of Marx's view of ecological justice on western mainstream environmental justice theory lies in, that is, it does not base on the "speculative ontology" of metaphysics, but on the basis of "realistic ontology" of social power system. It is on the basis of the "realistic ontology" of the system of social power that historical materialism sublimates the concern of ecological justice from the distribution principals of economic society to the historical realistic concern for the liberty of human.

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