



# Exploration of Historical Materialism and Marx's Spiritual Quality—The Preface to the Critique of Political Economy

**Hongguang Zhang**

Guizhou Health Vocational College, Tongren, Guizhou, China.

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\***Corresponding author:** Hongguang Zhang, Guizhou Health Vocational College, Tongren, Guizhou, China.

## Abstract

The Preface to the Criticism of Political Economy written by Marx is a classic work, it highly summarizes the main basic principles of historical materialism. From the height of combining philosophy and economics, the Preface brilliantly explains the basic content of historical materialism, which is a reading classic that people cannot understand and understand historical materialism. In the preface to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx's summary of the basic principles of historical materialism includes the following aspects: The morphological structure of human society and social existence determines social consciousness. The contradictory movement of productive forces and production relations is the fundamental driving force for promoting social development, historical conditions of social change, the division of human social development form, etc. These classical expressions have always been an important guiding ideology for us to understand and transform the world. They are an important guide for us to adhere to socialism with Chinese characteristics and an important magic weapon for us to promote the realization of the Chinese dream of a strong modern socialist country and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. They also have a pivotal position in the history of Marxism. In the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, in addition to systematically explaining the main contents of historical materialism, the concise content also reveals Marx's admirable personal qualities and charm at the entrance of scientific research. It mainly includes adhering to the scientific spirit of seeking truth from facts, adhering to the revolutionary spirit of the pursuit of truth, and the fearless spirit of courage and courage. Marx's personal quality is the brilliant portrayal of Marx's life, which is of great significance for us to carry out the fundamental task of cultivating people by virtue and guiding young students to strive to be good young people in the new era with ideals, dare to take responsibility, can bear hardships and are willing to struggle.

## Keywords

Marx, Preface of Political Economy, historical materialism, spiritual quality

## 1. Introduction to the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy

For beginners of Marx's classic original work, it is a basic work to clarify the social and historical background of the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy and understand the basic situation of the original work. Only by mastering the original appearance can we deeply understand and understand the historical status and practical sig-

nificance of Marx's classic original works.

The Preface to the Critique of Political Economy is included in the Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 2) (2012 edition). The notes of this classic work comprehensively explain its basic information and main contents. The note states The Preface to the Critique of Political Economy is a critique of Political Economy written by Marx from November 1858 to January 1859. The preface is written in the first volume. In the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx reviewed the process of his study of political economy and discovering historical materialism. It scientifically explains historical materialism. It also scientifically explains that the productive forces determine the relations of production, and the economic base determines the superstructure. It also scientifically explains the basic principles of people's social existence, and social materialism determines people's social consciousness. By analysis of the contradictory movements of the productive forces and relations of production, the economic foundations, and the superstructure. It reveals the general law of human social development and the general process of the social form evolution of the economy, demonstrating the historical inevitability that the old social form is replaced by the new higher social form. It also points out that no matter which social form, all the productivity it can hold is out. It will never perish; and the new higher production relations, before the conditions of its physical existence had matured in the fetuses of the old society, never appear. The short annotation on this classic work clarifies the basic content and core thought of the Preface to the Criticism of Political Economy and thoroughly demonstrates Marx's historical materialism to the readers. As Lenin pointed out, "In the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx made a complete expression of the basic principles of materialism widely applied to human society and its history".

## **2. The basic content of historical materialism in the preface to the Critique of Political Economy**

### **2.1 The basic content of the form and structure of human society is expounded**

Marx pointed out in the fourth paragraph of the preface of the Critique of Political Economy: "People have certain, inevitable relations in the social production without changing their will, that is, the relations of production suitable for a certain stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society, that is, the legal and political superstructure erected it, and has a certain form of social consciousness corresponding to it. The mode of production of material life restricts the process of the whole social life, political life, and spiritual life". From the content of this expression, Marx revealed the content of the form structure of human society: the material productive forces and the relations of production corresponding to them, the legal and political superstructure and the realistic basis corresponding to them, that is, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the economic base and the superstructure. In social production, based on a certain stage of development, the material productive forces must form certain relations of production. These relations are compatible with a certain stage of development of people's material productive forces, that is, the productive forces determine the relations of production. The sum of the relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society will inevitably form the corresponding legal and political superstructure, that is, the economic foundation determines the superstructure. The productive forces determine the relations of production, and the economic foundation determines the superstructure. It is the basic structure of our human society. It is the total result that Marx used in the research process of solving his troubled doubts to guide his research work.

### **2.2 Put forward the basic principle of Marxism that people's social existence determines people's consciousness.**

In the Preface to the Criticism of Political Economy, Marx pointed out: "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". Marx here elaborated on the basic principle of historical materialism that social existence determines social consciousness, which is our fundamental boundary between historical materialism and historical idealism. Social existence is the sum of the material conditions on which the existence and development of social existence including natural environment, demographic factors, and mode of production. Natural environment and population factors are the indispensable material conditions for social existence and development, while the mode of production is the main content of social material living conditions, and is the internal basis and decisive force of social existence and development. When the material productive forces of the society reach a certain stage, they will conflict with the

existing relations of production or property. With the existence of contradictions, the era of social reform will come. Social consciousness is the spiritual aspect of social life, and it is the reflection of social existence, including legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical forms of consciousness. On the basic issues of philosophy, it advocates that matter is the first nature and spirit is the second nature. The origin of the world is matter, and spirit is the product and reflection of matter. Therefore, "Consciousness must be explained from the contradiction of material life, from the existing conflict between social productivity and the relations of production". The primacy of social existence determines social consciousness, and social consciousness reflects social existence and plays a role in promoting or hindering social existence. The classical discussion of the basic principle that social existence determines social consciousness is of great significance for us to both study and study Marxism and strengthen our belief in Marxism.

### **2.3 It proves that the contradictory movement of productive forces and relations of production is the fundamental driving force for social development**

Marx pointed out in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy that when the material productive forces of society reach a certain stage, they conflict with the existing relations of production or property relations (which is only the legal term of the relations of production) in which they have been moving. Therefore, these relations will change from the development form of productive forces to the shackles of productive forces. Then came the time of the social revolution, with the change of the economic base, all the huge superstructure also slowly or quickly changed. This paragraph shows that the productive forces are the most revolutionary and active factor in social development. Productivity is the ability of human beings to transform the material world and the ability of people to produce material products. It reflects the relationship between man and nature. Relations of production refer to the social relations between people formed in the process of material production, which mainly reflects the material interests between people, what kind of productive forces, there will be what kind of production relations. When the material productive forces of the society develop to a certain stage, it is inevitable to conflict with the existing relations of production or property relations, so that these relations from the development form productive forces into the shackles of productive forces, and then cause all the huge superstructure to change quickly or slowly. That is to say, the development of human society is advanced in the movement of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the economic foundation, and the superstructure. Grasp the productive forces, and grasp the decisive link between social and historical development.

### **2.4 Analyzed the historical conditions of social change**

Marx pointed out that in the investigation of social change, one must always distinguish the following two: "One is the production of economic conditions of material, can use the precision of natural science change, one is people to realize the conflict and strive to put it to overcome the legal, political, religious, art or philosophy, in short, the form of ideology". Therefore, we judge that such an era of change should be explained by the existing conflicts between social productivity and the relations of production. In the process of recognizing and judging social change, Marx emphasized, "Any social form will never perish until all the productive forces it can contain; new and higher relations of production will never appear until its material existence has matured in the cells of the old society". In other words, when examining social changes, we should proceed from reality and firmly grasp the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the economic foundation, and the superstructure. This is objective and independent of the will of the people.

## **3. The preface to the Critique of Political Economy reflects Marx's excellent spiritual quality**

### **3.1 Adhere to the scientific spirit of seeking truth from facts**

Marx insisted on the way the study from the social stage to solve his doubts, fully reflected Marx insisted on the scientific spirit of seeking truth from facts. Marx's study of political economy was initially motivated because he encountered the difficulty of expressing opinions on the so-called material interests. To figure out his problems, Marx conducted a long-term study of political economy. In the course of his study, Marx said it was superficial to "hear the faint philosophical echoes of French socialism and communism in the Rhine newspaper". But Marx quickly and frankly admitted that his "previous studies did not allow his false comments on the content of the

French society of the time". Such a cognitive attitude profoundly reflects Marx's scientific quality of seeking truth from facts in cognition. In the face of their distressed questions and inability to comment, Marx pointed out that from the "social stage back to the study" to solve. Marx's scientific spirit to understand and clarify his problems without commenting is an important spiritual driving force for Marx to study scientific problems.

Marx's theory of scientific interpretation of the fundamental driving force of social development fully embodies Marx's scientific spirit of adhering to seeking truth from facts. The judgment of an era of change cannot be based on its consciousness. On the contrary, "this consciousness must be explained from the contradiction of material life, from the realistic conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production". Here, Marx pointed out that when we judge an era of change, we should explain it realistically from the realistic conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production, and cannot be divorced from the reality of social existence. Only from the perspective of real society, can we correctly judge an era of change.

### **3.2 Adhere to the revolutionary spirit of pursuing truth**

Marx's generous attitude that the research results should not be printed. It fully reflects Marx's revolutionary spirit of adhering to the pursuit of truth. In the preface, Marx introduced his cooperation with Engels in political economy. He explained that his research results were consistent with Engels's. He also fulfilled his desire to liquidate his previous philosophical beliefs and achieved the purpose of studying political economy—to clarify the problem. Marx studied political economy to find out the problem rather than pay for the publication. For not paying for the publication, Marx adopted the open-minded attitude of being "willing to let the original manuscript leave the teeth to criticize the mouse". Such an attitude reflects Marx's revolutionary quality of pursuing truth by being willing to leave the original mouse teeth to criticize to find out the problem.

Marx's attitude towards people's comments and the prejudice of the ruling class fully reflects Marx's revolutionary spirit in the pursuit of truth. Marx's view, "No matter how people comment on it, no matter how incompatible it is with the selfish prejudice of the ruling class, it is the result of years of honest research". My research in the field of political economy is enough to prove this point. No matter how the outside world commented, no matter how biased the ruling class was, Marx always insisted on the pursuit of truth and did not influence his honest research because of external factors.

## **4. The practical significance of historical materialism in the preface to the Critique of Political Economy**

### **4.1 It provides scientific theories and methods for us to understand social development**

The preface to the Critique of Political Economy, the first classical expression of the basic principles of historical materialism, plays a very important position in the development history of Marxism. These classical theories provide a scientific guiding ideology for the world's broad proletariat and its liberation movement and provide scientific methods for people to fully understand the basic structure of human society and its development trend. By adhering to historical materialism to understand and grasp the basic laws of social operation and development, we will be able to overcome difficulties and challenges, and always move towards a bright future on the tortuous road (Wang Ping, 2018).

### **4.2 It provides spiritual strength for us to adhere to the lofty ideal of communism and our socialist beliefs**

The Preface to the Critique of Political Economy shows that the productive forces determine the relations of production, and the economic base determines the superstructure. They are the fundamental driving forces for the development of our human society. In addition, the theory that social existence determines social consciousness provides a scientific way for us to understand society. The scientific and practical nature of Marxism provides us with important methods and theories in all practical activities such as production and life, and is the source of spiritual strength for all our actions. Deng Xiaoping once pointed out: "I firmly believe that there will be more people in favor of Marxism in the world because Marxism is science. It uses historical materialism to reveal the law of social development. Feudal society replaced slave society, capitalism replaced feudalism, and socialism will inevitably replace capitalism after a long process of development. This is an irreversible general trend of social and historical development, but the road is tortuous". Strengthening the in-depth study and understanding of historical materialism will help us to firm the lofty ideal of communism and socialism, even if the difficulties, the faith in the

heart will not be shaken.

### **4.3 It provides scientific guidance for us to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics**

As we all know, upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics has been the distinct theme of all the theories and practices of our Party since the reform and opening up. As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics remains the fundamental principle that we must adhere to in all our theories and practices (Wei Guangzhi, 2022). A deep understanding and grasp of China's current basic national conditions hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we will coordinate the five-sphere integrated plan, the four-pronged comprehensive strategy. To become a great modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics, and to realize the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation, we need to deepen the use of the basic principles of historical materialism combined with China's specific realities. The scientific method of combining with the excellent traditional Chinese culture, we will continue to promote and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era. To adhere to the scientific development, and strengthen our confidence in the path, system, theory, and culture, we will continue to write a new chapter of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

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