

An Historical Analysis of Poverty's Implications within the Perspective of Marxism

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Abstract

Since the beginning of human civilization, the interpretation of the meaning of poverty has always reflected the unique historical characteristics of each era. From the interpretation in moral perspective in early ancient age to the analysis by classical political economists who focus on economy, it was not until Marx's revelation of the underlying motivation for the development of the history that the course of poverty has been found. Nowadays, the researching progress on poverty has been enriched by contemporary researchers who have used Marx's theory of poverty as the starting point and interpreted poverty in multiple dimensions. The dilemma is that, despite the improvement of basic material conditions, poverty has not been decreased, which requires for an institutional reflection that transcends the level of production. In addressing this major "obstacle" to social development, China, guided by the Marxism theory of poverty, has not only demonstrated to humanity its Chinese wisdom in dealing with poverty but has also highlighted the institutional advantages of socialism. Thus, it has become a crucial practical example of the eradication and reduction of poverty worldwide.

Keywords

Poverty, Marxism, Institutional Reflection, Socialism

1. Introduction

Poverty is a fundamental social issue that accompanies the development of human societies. It is linked to the most basic limits of human existence and the achievability of subsequent development. Even now, despite the significant rise in production, the issue of global and regional poverty is still a major concern. If poverty is not effectively addressed, it can lead to a host of secondary social issues, and in the contemporary socio-cultural context, it is even classified as a se-

rious “psychological problem” (Roelen, 2017). Poverty is no longer just a problem that needs to be addressed in backward regions; those developed nations must also deal with the challenges of poverty in today’s background of neoliberal globalization. Therefore, it is not enough to understand poverty as an economic problem that is solely related to material conditions, but rather as a complicated social issue that needs to be examined in multiple dimensions. It is consequently only by clarifying the evolution and development of the meaning of poverty from a historical perspective that we can go further in truly solving the problem of poverty on a national and international scale. The situation of poverty today is complicated, ranging from absolute poverty due to the regional inherent backwardness of productivity to the more complex problem of relative poverty that persists in the functioning of society. The intersection of absolute and relative poverty and the different realities between countries make it even more challenging to define what poverty is and how to tackle it.

The study of “poverty” and “anti-poverty” has a deep history in both Eastern and Western civilisations. And in terms of the perception of poverty in the West and China, it can be broadly argued that these perceptions, in general, have undergone “three transformations” as the level of socio-historical inquiry has expanded. That is, from the moral, religious dimension of understanding to the economic realm of reality, then from the economic realm, with distribution and circulation as representations, to the realm of relations of production, and ultimately to a multidimensional, integrated approach to interpretation. During this period, Marx’s theoretical vision provided an important resource for the scientific evaluation and further development of the theory of poverty, and it was thanks to the successive emergence of the Enlightenment and historical materialism that the search for the causes of poverty received the attention it deserved and a scientific path of explanation. The difficulty in dealing with poverty in modern conditions of social production is that the connotation of poverty has been expanded in a multidimensional way. It is obvious that the large variety of social issues that poverty involves cannot be properly explained by a strategy that exclusively relies on economic growth. Against the backdrop of a globalisation process that has been heavily criticised by left-wing scholars, Chinese society has achieved a new breakthrough in human history on the issue of poverty eradication. This is mainly due to the profound understanding of the issue developed under the guidance of Marxist theory and, more importantly, to the institutional advantages of our country. Thus, China’s route out of poverty not only illustrates the scientific of the strategy, but also become a significant example in practice to show the validity of Marxism theory in contemporary era. This article argues that in the long search for explanations and solutions to the problem of poverty, the analytical perspective of Marx’s theory made a remarkable breakthrough and led to the pluralistic development of the problem in its later stages, while Chinese society used this resource to conform the practical validity of the Marxist theoretical position and social critique at the practical level.

2. The Understanding of Poverty in Early Social Conditions

The most fundamental aspect of poverty should be “survival” or “living”. It stems from the low productivity of early human societies and the lack of materials of subsistence, which led to “poverty” being an extremely common phenomenon in ancient societies that had not yet experienced rapid productivity development just like today. The problem of poverty at this time cannot be formulated as a strictly social problem, but more as a biological issue of how people could thrive by being more intimately connected with nature. Gradually, some people realized how to use resources such as education, business and politics to improve their wealth and status, and social stratification occurred. Poverty has also slowly changed from a widespread phenomenon to a state of affairs for some of the lower classes, but this state has not been fundamentally eradicated over the centuries as society has progressed.

In both Greco-Roman and early Chinese societies, people’s attitudes towards the causes of poverty and its treatment differed greatly from those of later societies. Because of the influence of moral and religious concepts, people in early times were used to thinking about the issue in terms of nature and virtue, and such a way of thinking about the issue was particularly prominent in Western civilisation. Since ancient Greece, wise men have used the idea of virtue, which overrides material life in general, as a approach of explanation in their analysis of poverty, “they argued that there was an inherent inequality between people, and that groups such as the poor, who lacked virtue, were a particularly degraded class of people who did not deserve anything at all.” (Xu, 2020) Therefore, at this moment in history, poverty was seen as a condition that sprang from a lack of virtue or an unsuitable desire. Poverty as a kind of “evil” was socially unacceptable, and the poor were even denied the right to continue living in the city-state as a result. The ancient West lost a perspective on poverty that assumed the awareness of basic material survival could not point to a practical method to battle it because it saw poverty as a solely personal matter and fundamentally disputed the need for the state to fight with poverty.

By the Middle Ages in Europe, social thoughts were in charged by religion, and Christianity reversed the prevailing social perception of poverty. They view the poor as a crucial population that needs to be taken care of and protected, and they use the relief to aid the helpless. This, although in keeping with the Christian ideal of building a society of solidarity, does not lead the poor to make a change by improving the productivity. Thus, despite the definitions of poverty in ancient Greece and the Middle Ages are diametrically opposed, both of their searches for solutions to this social issue didn’t grasp the essence of poverty fundamentally, i.e. instead of focusing on the cause of poverty itself, but the emphasis on how the political or religious establishment can control or alleviate this problem.

Since the beginning of Chinese agrarian civilization, poverty has long existed alongside social development and has been regarded as a fundamental issue of

people's livelihood by successive rulers. Different from Western civilisation, early Chinese society was much more rational about the causes of poverty and strategies to deal with it. Although natural religious factors such as ghosts and gods of heaven had great impacts on people's understanding of daily life including the analysis of the causes of poverty, the Chinese people, infused with Confucianism, made a further analysis of the root causes of their poverty, realising that years of war and lack of material goods directly led to the inability to secure basic food and clothing for the people, and accordingly, the governments of different dynasties formulated more comprehensive policies to support the poor. They determine the living conditions of each family by means of a kind of auditing house by house, identifying families with poverty problems and, in particular, identifying the elderly, the young and the lonely as those in need of priority care. "There were the old and wifeless, or widowers; the old and husbandless, or widows; the old and childless, or solitaries; the young and fatherless, or orphans, these four classes are the most destitute of the people, and have none to whom they can tell their wants, and King Wen, in the institution of his government with its benevolent action, made them the first objects of his regard." (Mencius, 2011) It is easy to see that in ancient China, "ritual" was at the heart of the issue of poverty, that priority was given to the elderly and the weak in the process of defining the poor, that benevolent governance was insisted upon in solving the hardships of the people, and that the efforts of society as a whole were integrated to support the disadvantaged, resulting in a simple understanding of the positive significance of the issue of poverty. This tradition of poverty reduction and eradication is also deeply embedded in the Chinese people's hard-won path to national renewal.

In general, the early stages of history were characterised by a religious and simplistic understanding of "poverty", as people had not yet reached a scientific understanding of the process of social development. However, with the process of social mindset wrested from the heavens and brought it down to earth, there was a significant change in the understanding of the essence of human being. The discussion of the meaning of poverty has also become more focused on reality, thus beginning the discovery process of poverty from the economic and productive spheres.

3. Marx's Examination of the Root Cause of Poverty

With the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the bourgeoisie underwent its own initial development, and its focus on earthly life and material interests brought society back from the religious domination of the Middle Ages, which provided favourable reality and intellectual conditions for a greater understanding of poverty. The understanding of the origin of poverty in this period has also changed with this kind of social transformation. The poverty of the people in early societies stemmed from the general lack of means of production and the low level of productivity under the feudal system of exploitation, how-

ever, the rapid development of the workshop crafts and the industrial revolution led to the rapid occupation of the means of production by the bourgeoisie and a fundamental change in the issue of property. The issue of poverty also began to come to the fore in the form of a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

In parts of European countries where the industrial revolution was achieved, the capitalist pursuit of wealth made exploration of the economic sphere a leap forward for society at the time, and classical political economy became an important channel to strong the ideology of the bourgeoisie. The issue of poverty is arguably an inescapable reality in the course of economists' researches. "According to the logic of classical political economy, poverty as a social phenomenon is a natural consequence of the laws of the market economy and a necessary factor in maintaining the equilibrium of the market. The atomic individual in the market system, who cannot, through hard work, become wealthy, can only be eliminated by competition, either by falling into abject poverty or by accepting a wage level that sustains the basic needs of survival." (Zhou, 2015)

On the one hand, classical political economists justified capitalist private ownership by interpreting poverty as a form of natural rationality from the perspective of classical liberalism. On the other hand, moral explanations are used to solidify the situation of proletariat as the opposition of capitalism, thus avoiding real answers to the nature of poverty. An overview of the classical political economy of this period shows that the economists were able to give a largely factual description of the existence of the poor, but because their theories served the ideology of the bourgeoisie, they ended up suffering from their own flaws. Marx, on the other hand, made a fundamental critique of this set of theoretical perspectives and thus took a crucial step forward in the exploration of the problem of poverty.

3.1. The Exposing of Working Class' Poverty under Early Alienation Theory

In the early years of his studies, Marx has showed a great concern for real social issues. Marx has already begun to express his attitudes that the state authorities should be inescapably responsible for the poverty of the population since the period of "The Rheinische Zeitung", and defined the relationship of material interests to the determination of national rationality. In focusing on the state of poverty along the Mosel, Marx notes: "The state of distress in the Mosel region cannot be regarded as a simple state of affairs. At least two aspects of it have to be distinguished: the private aspect and the state aspect, for the state of distress in the Mosel region cannot be considered to lie outside the state administration any more than the Mosel region can be considered to lie outside the state. Only the mutual relation between these two aspects provides the actual state of the Mosel region." (Marx & Engels, 1975a)

The fact that the authorities are aware of the poverty situation but do not take a positive approach to solve this social problem is not simply a lack of political

responsibility but, more importantly, the systemic poverty determined by material interests, a manifestation of the class contradictions inherent in capitalist society at the level of real social problems. One of the major significance of Marx's account of poverty lies in the difference from the class position of the classical political economists is that he exposes the alienation of the proletariat's existence and labour from the perspective of the proletariat at large. And this aspect continues to inform Marx's eventual theory of human emancipation. By the time he reached the stage of systematic study of political economy, Marx had illustrated the real sources of poverty by analysing the relation of production in capitalism and applying the scientific method of materialistic dialectics. In pre-capitalist society, poverty represented either a moral inadequacy or a general state of life for the most disadvantaged, but it was not until the establishment of capitalist society that poverty became more prominent as a problem arising from class antagonism. In the theoretical context of Marxism, the central issue of poverty shifts from society's attitudes and approaches to the poor to a revelation of the real situation of the poor and an account of the underlying causes of poverty in the context of social transformation.

In "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", Marx describes the situation of the working class in terms of the alienation of labour. In terms of the working and living conditions of labour, the relation between wage labour and capital constituted under the capitalist system make poverty an extremely sharp issue in society, which makes the poverty of the working class the basic factual background to Marx's subsequent studies of other problems. The relation of production in capitalism brings about "the separation of capital, rent and labour" (Marx & Engels, 1975b), and the market, with its huge demand, contributes to the boom in production and the rapid accumulation of capitalists' wealth, but created a polarisation between the rich and the poor in an environment of general competition. Poverty has become a presence that is difficult to eradicate in the model of wage labour and is interpreted as an inevitability under modern society. "Thus in a declining state of society—increasing misery of the worker; in an advancing state—misery with complications; and in a fully developed state of society—static misery." (Marx & Engels, 1975b) Political economist based on the analysis of economic facts, pointed out that in theory, the worker as the owner of labour power, should receive the products of labour and own the money. But in practice, they only get a small share of the products of labour, while the capitalist and landlord, who do not need to work, enjoy the wealth. Even with the increase in productivity and the rapid growth of social wealth, workers have to compete not only with their counterparts, but also with machines. Thus the worker becomes the most vulnerable element in the progress of the development of economy. While this series of descriptions by political economists may seem to reveal the hardship of workers under the capitalist system, Marx recognised that they had been unable to get to the heart of this problem because of their research methods and class. They see people only as a simple worker, "the proletarian, the same as any horse, must get as much as will en-

able him to work” (Marx & Engels, 1975b). This one-sided understanding of the nature of the human being was centrally rejected by Marx in the *Manuscripts*, and the analysis of people’s living conditions from this perspective led political economists use “senseless and needless beings” as a label for workers, neglecting the truly essence of the human force and abandoning the significance of the relation between people. Under the position of endorsing private ownership, “the fundamental nature of political economics is not to fight poverty, but to fight the poor” (Zhang, 2016). By this time, Marx was able to point out clearly that classical political economy confined themselves to relationships among things and ignored the fundamental relationships among people. Marx’s description and analysis of the situation of proletarian poverty here make the text an important supporting manuscript for the study of Marx’s understanding of the problem of poverty and a preparation for Marx’s fundamental exploration of the issue of poverty using historical materialism.

3.2. A Revolutionary Understanding of Poverty under the Critique of Political Economy

Marx’s understanding of poverty comes not only from his touch with the reality issues, but also from the fact that as his study of philosophy and political economy advanced, the laws of capitalist production were gradually revealed as the root cause of systemic poverty. As mentioned above, the classical political economists were not concerned with the meaning of human being at all, “they saw this individual not as an historical result, but as the starting point of history; not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature, because for them this individual was the natural individual, according to their idea of human nature.” (Marx & Engels, 1986) For them, this large number of workers who are troubled in “absolute poverty” are merely a mechanical part of the production process. They see the sale of labour power and the resulting employment relationship with the capitalists as the result of their own choice and the realisation of their rights of freedom. They view poverty as a transient ailment of society, thus they characterise it as a natural position in a market economy and don’t need to deal with it. What’s more, because of their class stand totally different from the poor, those fatalism classical political economists keep silent about flaws of capitalism. So when confront with the misery of the proletariat they do not think about the way to improving their living conditions and the solution to this social issue. But Marx’s understanding of the individual in capitalism is much more enriched, “The further back we go in history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and belonging to a larger whole” (Marx & Engels, 1986), thus the essence of individual is closely related to the society. Although with the emergence of the market, commodities and money became central to wealth, and individual was understood by classical political economists as a profit-seeking one, the historical mystery of production was concealed by relationships among things. Marx was able to transcend the metaphysics of political

economy because he understood man in their corresponding economic system, thus revolutionarily transcending all previous one-sided understandings and exploring the fact that the misery of the proletariat came from the separation of the means of production and production. In an extremely exploitative and unequal working environment, the part of revenue from the sale of goods that workers can share can hardly even sustain their families, let alone use it for self-improvement and the education of future generations, leading to an infinite cycle of proletarian poverty and the absolutisation of poverty. In Marx's research perspective, he recognised from the outset that poverty in capitalist society has always been closely linked to the proletariat. Proletarian poverty acts as a political concept with a social revolutionary mandate in his practical system, unlike the poor workers of classical political economy, who were classified as natural products of the market, or Hegel's concept of the untouchability, which was stuck in the logical derivation. Marx grasped the root of poverty from within the relations of production and gave the poor, i.e. the proletariat, a revolutionary mission of struggle. Thus from this aspect, Marx's understanding of poverty critically revolutionary.

Marx's revolutionary realization of the essence of poverty was even more closely linked to the research method he adopted, and the change in scientific method he achieved in his critique of political economy comprehensively pointed out the shortcomings of the classical political economists' studies of this field. In the introduction of "Grundrisse", Marx clearly pointed out the problems in classical political economists' researches, i.e. Wilhelm Giedd and David Ricardo had gone from the concrete to the abstract while Marx had followed the path of advancing from the abstract to the concrete. The former was used to catching on to the concepts of appearance which were from empirical observation and thus getting lost in chaos. For example, when analysing the relation of production to distribution, exchange and consumption, Ricardo and others intuitively juxtaposed the four in turn, each forming a separate sphere, and the internal link between them becomes a one-way dominant relationship in which one determines the other. This had led to a superficial understanding of the concept of production, which does not allow the unification of the diversity of this category. The flaws in the method also appeared in Proudhon's writing, and so Marx in "The Poverty of Philosophy" also concentrates his criticism on Proudhon's abstract understanding and ordering of economic categories, the result of this method was the inverting understanding of historical process. It was not until Marx that the true nature of history was unveiled. Capitalism has never been natural, nor is it the result of free choice for workers to sell their labour power to the capitalists. The real situation is that they have nothing but their labour, in order to survive they have to work under the exploitation of the capitalists and thus earn a meagre income, while at the same time facing constant competition between workers. What's more, the increase in the organic composition of capital has led to an increase in the relative surplus of the population, and in order not to lose their jobs, workers have increased their labour intensity while lowering their demands

for wages, which not only increases the level of exploitation but also increases poverty. Marx achieves a revelation of the essence of capital's logic through the enrichment of conceptions' determinations, starting from the concept of commodity. This is the key to his understanding of the human society, especially the capitalism. Beyond the facade of fetishism, contradictions of production and class contained in poverty can be revealed through this insistence on an understanding based on production relations.

3.3. The Proletariat's Way out of Poverty

By analysing the historical laws inherent in capitalism, Marx clarifies the fundamental cause of proletarian poverty, which has its roots in the capitalist mode of production, manifests itself in class antagonism and should ultimately be resolved in the class struggle. "The very moment civilisation begins, production begins to be founded on the antagonism of orders, estates, classes, and finally on the antagonism of accumulated labour and immediate labour." (Marx & Engels, 1976) Therefore, in Marx's theoretical context, the solution to the problem of poverty is embedded in the problem of the self-emancipation of the proletariat. This kind of exploitative relation of production must be transcended, which is the inevitable end of the capitalism and the necessary way to solve the problem of proletarian poverty.

In the pre-capitalist period, the relief system provided material assistance to a certain extent to those living in poverty at the lower end of the hierarchy, but this instrument evolved more from a religious mentality that was unable to address the fundamental causes of poverty, and was therefore a negative approach to poverty governance. Although social assistance was gradually legislated in Western countries in the 16th and 17th centuries, the English Poor Relief Act, for example, gradually ran counter to the original aim of improving the lives of the poor, thus demonstrating that external assistance alone could not solve this issue. The reason for the gradual withdrawal of social assistance in the early days was, on the one hand, a lack of understanding of the causes of poverty from the perspective of socio-historical development and, on the other, the neglect of the subjective role of the poor themselves in dealing with the problem of poverty, treating them simply as powerless and weak people waiting to be dealt with by others. These problems did not seem to have been well resolved in the early years of capitalism either. Only when the nature of social-history and the underlying dynamics of capitals were uncovered by Marx did we gain an effective tool to explore capitalism for what it really is and thus be able to analyse and respond to the poverty problems rooted in it.

Marx's vision of communism to overthrow the relations of production under capitalism, which reflect the essence of exploitation, and to be able to rescue common people at the bottom of society from class antagonism, are aspects that cut most deeply into the heart of the problem of poverty. Absolute poverty can be reduced by economic development, but the problem of relative poverty is on the one hand directly related to the way in which the community is constituted,

and on the other hand, it makes demands at a higher spiritual level. In order to solve the problem of poverty once and for all it is necessary to enrich oneself at the intellectual and moral level, thus restoring one's social nature, expanding one's needs in all aspects, and truly abandoning alienation in a communist society, which is the appropriate level for the free and comprehensive development of the human being. Marx's understanding of poverty thus reflects both the crucial fundamental position of the economic base as the basis for understanding the problem, and also captures the importance of the spiritual and cultural dimensions in addressing poverty, which cannot be ignored.

4. The Multidimensional Studies of Poverty in Modern Society

As capitalism moves into a more rapid phase of development, the issue of poverty has not really be solved, but gets into a more complex phase of evolution. On the one hand, the post-war capitalist boom brought a degree of material prosperity to workers, and the working class, which had been responsible for the revolution, gradually began to "fall back" on capitalism. And on the other hand, the alleviation of widespread impoverishment directly challenged Marx's analysis of the problem of poverty in capitalism. Western economists began to devote their research to the poor on a global scale, and these objects of concern were mainly from non-communist, backward countries, with India and Africa as particular examples. From Gunnar Myrdal's focus on social inequalities resulting from political flaws with institutional roots, to Angus Deaton's exploration of the measurement of poverty in India, to Amartya Sen's answers to poverty from the perspective of the deprivation of entitlement, and Abhijit Banerjee's revelation of the "poverty trap" caused by the wasteful use of resources by the poor, all have significantly expands the horizons of modern poverty studies.

In terms of conventional views, "poverty is almost synonymous with hunger, indeed, poverty lines in many countries were originally set to capture the notion of poverty based on hunger" (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). But contemporary economists have noted that there is no absolute causal connection between the two, and Banerjee's examination of the fact that when a poor person has more money at his or her disposal, he or she is more likely to spend it on a television shows that poverty is no longer simply a proxy for hunger. By looking at the loans, savings systems, education and health awareness of the poor, Banerjee argues that the root cause of their poverty is the wasteful use of "resources", based on the unfriendliness of the financial system to the poor, the asymmetry of market information, the lack of self-control and the lack of long-term foresight that prevents them from using their limited resources in a rational and profitable way. The poor are unable to rationalise and maximise their limited resources. All of this forces poverty into an unbreakable cycle. And Amartya Sen also found after his study of the famine in Bangladesh that the mass famine was not due to a lack of food, but the root of the problem was the deprivation of entitlement. He points out that when one is placed in a relationship of entitlement, "a person's

ability to command food—indeed, to command any commodity he wishes to acquire or retain—depends on the entitlement relations that govern possession and use in that society” (Sen, 1981). In this way, he locates the root of poverty in the inequality and absence of entitlement. In light of the current state of poverty in capitalism as well as globally, these scholars have indeed undertaken a significant expansion of thinking in understanding the problem of poverty, “but the problem is that their thinking is as simple as the debate over whether to give direct relief to the poor or to give them labour opportunities that arose around the reform of the Poor Law, only shifting the focus to the debate over whether to invest in poor areas or to encourage their complete marketisation. Even the few scholars like Sen who have advanced the idea of a multidimensional poverty theory have remained stagnant in their exploration of the socio-historical nature of poverty.” (Tang, 2021)

And Marx’s exploration of the problem of poverty in the present remains important and instructive. Although Marx did not give a systematic account of poverty, he essentially answered the following key questions with his comprehensive understanding of poverty: What are the underlying causes of the hardship suffered by the subjects of poverty since capitalist society? And what is the fundamental way out of poverty for the proletariat? The answers to these questions are closely related to Marx’s revealing of the essence of capitalism. It is precisely because of the mistakes made by previous generations in grasping the inherent logical laws of historical development, and of capitalist society in particular, that inevitably led to a one-sided understanding of the problem of poverty. Marx’s historical judgement, though frequently contested, has repeatedly shown that the capitalist crisis is still relevant today. In the current study of poverty in the Western capitalism, left-wing scholars, with Marxism as the theoretical foundation, are generally concerned with the current state of poverty worldwide, using the persistence and even worsening of poverty as powerful evidence in opposition to capitalism. More crucially, no exploration of a just, democratic social structure can ignore how a society addresses the issue of poverty, making Marx’s explanation of poverty utterly unique.

The British left-wing thinker Alex Callinicos notes that while neoliberalism confidently shows off “economic growth” as measured by numbers, the human condition has not changed yet. “Remarkably then, in an era proclaimed as marking the definitive triumph of liberal capitalism over the systemic challenge represented by socialism and communism, the working majority in the most powerful economy in the world experienced, perhaps for the first time, something resembling what Marx called ‘absolute impoverishment.’” (Callinicos, 2000) However, the gap now exists not only between the rich and the poor in a country, but also between the development of the North and the South. In fact, neoliberalism hasn’t actually been able to maintain its own economic development, and it couldn’t do much to lessen poverty or close the wealth gap, which has now turned into a very challenging worldwide issue. The more capitalism has developed, the more it has become more than just a national issue. As a result

of geopolitical competition, trade protection and other means of exploitation, poverty has evolved from an intra-state class conflict to a confrontation between states, and the superpowers have actively promoted a kind of globalisation from up bottom in order to form the legitimacy for their economic domination, thereby accelerating their resource plundering and economic restraint of other countries. In the face of this, the early years of the 21st century were marked by the rise of social movements under the slogan of “anti-capitalism”. They emphatically emphasised that capitalist countries were losing their dominance as a result of successive economic crises while identifying with Marx’s theory of the crisis of capitalism. The problem of poverty resulting from inequalities in income and distribution cannot be concealed by the wealth of capitalists, and it has become a specific contemporary task for Marxism to confront head-on the deformation and expansion of the capitalist mode of production in a global context. Today, the means of exploitation used by capitalism are no longer limited to the extraction of surplus labour from workers. They are able to isolate groups on the opposite side of their interests by blocking information resources, interfering with individual rights and restricting environmental resources, thus preventing them from pursuing equal opportunities for survival and development, thereby creating more complex obstacles in the way of solving the problem of poverty. The analysis of this series of conditions by Western left-wing scholars cannot be separated from Marx’s theoretical resources. From the perspective of Marx’s historical attitude, the model of complex globalised capitalism still does not go beyond the framework of Marx’s explanation of the logic of capital, and according to Marx’s judgment of the future society, the pursuit of a democratic socialist society becomes a viable attempt to solve the problem of poverty.

In addition to this, the connotation of poverty has been expanded and nowadays poverty no longer simply refers to material and economic deprivation, but also spiritual deprivation and powerlessness in modern society have become contemporary features of poverty. The nature of poverty is still an important issue that has yet to be agreed upon in different dimensions of research. The inequality of opportunity and the lack of development of individual talents, the intergenerational impact and inheritance of the environment of poverty, and the poverty of women due to gender issues are all evident, and therefore the manifestations and explanations of poverty in the current social context are becoming increasingly complex. We must recognise that poverty is also a historical concept, if we want to realise its nature as well as identify solutions to it, “that is, to offer both philosophical arguments and socio-economic analysis”. (Callinicos, 2000)

5. The Distinctive Path of Governance from “Poverty Alleviation” to “Common Prosperity” in Contemporary China

On 25 February 2021, General Secretary Xi announced to the world that China

had achieved a comprehensive victory in the battle against poverty, and that China had thus made another significant advance in the governance of poverty. It is thus clear that the Chinese Communist Party has developed a scientific understanding and advanced concepts in the understanding and governance of poverty in the country under the guidance of Marxist theory, which makes this path of poverty reduction and eradication taken by China an important reference value for the current study of poverty throughout the world.

Looking back on the history of the Chinese people's fight against poverty, getting rid of poverty and pursuing a better life have always been the common aspiration of successive generations of rulers and people. China's long-standing agrarian history, big base population, and extensive terrain have resulted in the country's poverty problem being unique. With the absence of a decent infrastructure, the enormous rural population has long remained isolated and backward, producing a large divide between the rich and the poor in urban and rural areas. In order to achieve "common prosperity", it is therefore important to lift the rural population out of poverty in the Chinese style of poverty alleviation. But it was not until the founding of the Communist Party of China that a people-centered view of poverty began to be established, and through the explorations of several generations of Party leaders, China gained remarkable results against poverty based on the strengths of its political system. From the eradication of the feudal land ownership system during the land reform period, to the large-scale relief of peasants after the founding of the country, to the specific institutionalisation of poverty alleviation targets, to targeted poverty reduction proposed by General Secretary Xi, China's management of the poverty problem has gone through a general development process from livelihood assistance to institutional reform, and from the economic dimension to the overall layout of the "Five-sphere Integrated Plan", so that China has eliminated "absolute poverty" and people's living standards, especially those in rural areas, have been substantially improved. In this process, IT development has brought a tangible contribution to the path of poverty alleviation in China. The internet has enriched the rural economic model, with e-commerce platforms driving sales of agricultural products and making it possible to effectively reduce time and transport costs. At this level, China's poverty-relief efforts have depended on technology innovation to broaden its thinking and provide people with more opportunities for progress.

"Ending poverty, improving people's well-being and realizing common prosperity are the essential requirements of socialism." (Xi, 2013) Over the past hundred years, the Chinese Communists have inherited the Marxist tradition of putting the interests of the people first, and poverty as an obstacle to the vast majority of people moving towards a better life is bound to be contradictory to China's socialist system. The elimination of absolute poverty provides the necessary material basis for achieving "common prosperity", but to help the poor, we must first enhance intelligence. Poverty is not a fear, what is feared is the lack of knowledge and mental commiseration. To get rid of poverty and become rich,

we should not only pay attention to enriching our wallets, but also our mind. The common prosperity we seek is thus an all-round common prosperity. A single economic approach cannot fundamentally enhance the ability of the poor to create wealth and prevent a return to poverty, so General Secretary Xi points out that more attention should be paid to raising the awareness of thinking on the road to poverty alleviation in China to prevent the transmission of the problem of inter-generational poverty. The shift from defining poverty as a lack of the most basic material wealth to a concern for the spiritual dimension of consciousness is a deepening development based on the Marxist theory of poverty, and a scientific path that is in line with the proletariat's path toward communism and the achievement of comprehensive self-development.

China's fight against poverty has not only solved our nation's long-standing social condition of having a large number of poor people, but in doing so has also demonstrated Chinese wisdom to the world. China's ability to draw strength from Marxist ideas on poverty, to make scientific judgements about the historical status of the masses and the critical nature of the problem of poverty, and to provide anti-capitalists in the West, who are still in constant search, with references to successful cases of socialist solutions to poverty and equality, makes China an important place where Marxist ideas on poverty can continue to develop.

Today, even the most economically advanced Western capitalist countries are still plagued by poverty and socialism has become an important alternative to the disadvantages of a liberal economic system. This, coupled with the institutional advantages that Chinese society has demonstrated in terms of economic development and poverty governance, has enabled Marxist theories of poverty to be validated in both theory and practice. The solution to the problem of poverty cannot be overcome naturally by a single rise in economic volume. Chinese society has proposed "targeted poverty reduction" for different groups of poor people on the basis of the solution to institutional poverty, which has truly achieved sustainable development of individuals under government support and eliminated the recurrence of the problem of poverty. Thus, the current anti-capitalist trend in Western academia is not without foundation; yet, some arguments, such as planning without markets, are inevitably overly rigid due to a lack of comprehension of the socialist system. To truly address the global problem of poverty, it is necessary to draw on the wisdom of all aspects of the governance of the problem and to update the knowledge of poverty. And relies on a globalisation from bottom up that unites all countries and resists a model of economic globalisation in which the superpowers have absolute control, giving each country and region an equal right to participate in the world economy and to take its own initiative in economic and political development.

6. Conclusion

A historical review of the development of poverty in Chinese and Western societies shows that the mechanisms of poverty formation are by no means simply a

matter of productivity levels, and that there are differences in the way societies perceive and offer solutions to poverty at different social stages. Marx, on the other hand, guided by his historical materialist position, scientifically revealed the systemic roots of the problem of poverty since capitalist society and gave the working class the historical task of overthrowing the capitalist system and emancipating itself. But before the contradictions contained in the real historical development had fully erupted, capitalism still concealed its exploitative nature under a neoliberal ideology. The exploration of the nature of poverty at this time did not go beyond Marx's conclusions on the one hand, but on the other hand it gained a broader understanding and greatly expanded the content of poverty theory. At a time when Western left-wing scholars generally believe that the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing under globalisation, Chinese "fight against poverty" has won a world-renowned victory, relying on the advantages of its socialist system and the absorption and development of Marx's poverty theory, proving the contemporary validity of Marxist poverty theory with its rich results in fighting poverty.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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