
ЗНАТЬ, ЧТОБЫ ПРЕДВИДЕТЬ...

TO KNOW SO THAT TO FORESEE...

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ФЕНОМЕН НЕОМАРКСИЗМА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ КИТАЕ И ЕГО СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ

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Аннотация. Рассматривается феномен неомарксизма в современном Китае и обосновывается его особый философско-методологический статус как программы практического материализма. Проводится краткая историко-философская реконструкция процесса становления парадигмы неомарксизма в западной философской традиции и выявляется ее существенное отличие от китайской версии неомарксизма. В качестве важнейших этапов этого процесса зафиксированы ассимилятивный неомарксизм (конец XIX – начало XX вв.), западный марксизм (1920–80-е гг.), пост-марксизм (1980–90-е гг. и первые десятилетия XXI в.). В истории становления и развития парадигмы неомарксизма в Китае выделяются три основных этапа. Первый этап совпадает со временем правления Мао Цзэдуна и утверждением его идей китаизации марксизма, второй этап включает в себя период фронтального реформирования Китая и его идеологической программы в контексте социальных инициатив Дэн Сяопина, третий этап предполагает дальнейшее развитие неомарксизма в Китае, включающее углубление и конкретизацию его социально-практической направленности и построение социализма с китайской спецификой. Этот этап ассоциируется с программой активной модернизации неомарксизма в соответствии с новым политическим курсом и деятельностью Коммунистической партии Китая под руководством Си Цзиньпина. Социокультурный статус и роль идеологии неомарксизма в современном Китае рассматриваются на примере анализа двух его фундаментальных идей и их преломления в жизнедеятельности китайского общества: модернизации экономического базиса и технологий государственного управления при доминировании идей

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экономического равенства и социальной справедливости, а также фронтального использования и распространения идей гуманизма в политике, культуре и образовании.

Ключевые слова: генезис и становление неомарксизма; неомарксизм как практический материализм; неомарксизм в современном Китае.

THE PHENOMENON OF NEO-MARXISM IN MODERN CHINA AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. The main purpose of this article is to consider the phenomenon of neo-Marxism in modern China and to substantiate its special philosophical and methodological status as a programme of practical materialism. For this purpose, a brief historical and philosophical reconstruction of formation of neo-Marxism paradigm in the Western philosophical tradition has been carried out and its essential differences from the Chinese version of neo-Marxism have been revealed. As the most important stages of this process assimilative neo-Marxism in the late 19 – early 20th centuries, Western neo-Marxism in the 1920–80s, post-Marxism in the 1980–90s and the first decades of the 21st century are recorded. The history of formation and development of neo-Marxism paradigm in its Chinese version is also considered as consisting of three main stages: stage associated with the activities of Mao Zedong and the assertion of his ideas (sinicisation of Marxism), stage including the period of frontal reforming in China and its ideological programme in the context of Deng Xiaoping's social initiatives, stage supposing the further development of neo-Marxism in China, deepening and concretising its social-practical orientation and the construction of socialism with Chinese specifics. This stage in the development of neo-Marxism in China is associated with the programme of its active modernisation in accordance with the new political course and activities of the Communist Party of China under Xi Jinping leadership. In the article socio-cultural status and role of neo-Marxism ideology in modern China are studied using the analysis of two its fundamental ideas and their refraction in the life of Chinese society. Firstly, this is the sphere of modernisation of the economic basis and the technology of public administration under the aegis of economic equality and social justice. Secondly, this is a programme of frontal using and dissemination of humanistic orientations in politics, culture and education.

Keywords: genesis and formation of neo-Marxism; neo-Marxism as practical materialism; neo-Marxism in modern China.

Introduction

Marxism is both a science and an idea, but it is rather universal than an absolute idea. This implies that the application of Marxism to transform real-world societal contexts requires case-by-case analysis. Furthermore, certain specific views proposed by K. Marx during the creation of Marxism may need innovative development from a critical and up-to-date perspective. «Each nation and region have unique realities and circumstances, necessitating a critical and creative transformation of Marxism when analysing or shaping their social development»¹ [1, p. 4]. Adopting a critical stance toward Marxism is not only essential for applying it to practical efforts in changing reality but also integral to genuinely practicing Marxism. The goal of critique is to guide new practices through theoretical innovation that adapts to specific contexts. This process requires a dialectical approach that balances critique with inheritance, allowing for the innovative development of ideas from K. Marx and other classical thinkers while adhering to the ge-

neral principles of Marxism, particularly its stance, perspectives, and methods.

Essentially, neo-Marxism represents a Marxist model and theoretical discourse distinct from the practice and theoretical style of Marxism that evolved in Russia and the Soviet Union. Fundamentally, it belongs to the domain of Western Marxism. «Neo-Marxism re-examines and revises Marx's classical ideas from a humanistic perspective, adhering to core Marxist principles such as the theory of class struggle. Simultaneously, it expands the themes and forms of Marxism through a rebellious stance, drawing on ideas from Hegelian philosophy, anarchism, liberalism, and rational choice theory» [2, p. 116].

Neo-Marxism asserts that Marxism does not possess absolute truth but it is primarily a methodology. Marxist methods should be applied to solving specific issues in practical contexts, making rational choices based on real human needs rather than passively accepting historical inevitability, as posited by classical

¹Here and further translated by Tang Yongbo.

Marxism. «While many of neo-Marxist ideas are limited, its commitment to advancing theory in step with the times and addressing real human needs provides a valuable perspective for adapting Marxism to contemporary global challenges. Moreover, it offers a fresh lens for interpreting certain social phenomena in modern China» [3, p. 11]. Despite its theoretical limitations, neo-Marxist

approach to problem-solving, theoretical development, practical application, and some of its views hold significant reference value for the innovative development of Marxism in contemporary China. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyse the manifestations and social impact of neo-Marxism in contemporary China, grounded in its fundamental viewpoints.

Paradigm of neo-Marxism: genesis, formation and contemporary modifications

The problem of the place and role of Marxism in the modern world does not lose its relevance and still initiates permanent discussions about its positive and negative aspects as a philosophical worldview and socio-ideological doctrine. One of the unconditional results of these discussions in the process of rethinking the role and status of Marxism as a fundamental theory of the historical process has become an understanding of its ambivalent nature.

On the one hand, the intention of the classics of Marxism to develop and substantiate a strategy for the liberation of the working masses from all forms of economic inequality and social oppression, thus overcoming their alienation from property and power, definitely causes support and approval. On the other hand, the Marxist doctrine turned out to be quite vulnerable in the face of real historical transformations and metamorphoses. And the reason for this is the obvious weaknesses and shortcomings of this doctrine [4, p. 23–24].

These include such features as the pronounced Eurocentric character of Marxist social theory. The features and specific experience of Eastern societies remained outside the competence of this theory. Its characteristic features were an accentuated economic determinism and the most radical forms of revolutionism, an apology for violence and class struggle. Elements of providentialism and social utopianism were also, to a certain extent, characteristic of Marxist doctrine [5, p. 126–130].

These and other shortcomings and negative features of classical Marxism became the subject of critical analysis, attempts to rethink and reinterpret in various forms and types of neo-Marxism. While maintaining the critical pathos of Marxist theory in relation to the exploitative essence of the capitalist world order, various representatives of neo-Marxist thought proposed their projects for rethinking the basic postulates of Marxism with the aim of adapting them to the new social conditions of the modern era, as well as criticising the shortcomings and erroneous predictions of classical Marxism.

Since the phenomenon of neo-Marxism is a rather complex and significantly variable set of philosophical ideas and socio-theoretical concepts, it makes sense to designate it as a kind of paradigm in the structure of social and humanitarian knowledge of the period of the 20th–21st centuries. Let us point out the most important stages in the formation of this paradigm in its Western European version. It is customary to distinguish such

three stages or three kind of intellectual formations: 1) assimilative neo-Marxism in the late 19 – early 20th centuries; 2) Western neo-Marxism in the 1920–80s; 3) post-Marxism in the 1980–90s and the first decades of the 21st century.

The specific feature of assimilative neo-Marxism was the emphasis on the socio-critical orientation of the theory of classical, or orthodox, Marxism. Therefore it is entirely legitimate to consider and qualify its main representatives (K. Kautskii, A. Bernstein, O. Bauer, K. Renner, G. Plekhanov and others) as Marxist «epigones».

The history of Western neo-Marxism begins in 1923, when two main works («Marxism and philosophy» by K. Korsch and «History and class consciousness» by D. Lukacs) were simultaneously published in German.

The main idea of these works was to return the regulatory practice of the liberation of the proletariat to the need to understand the revolution in its consciousness. Revolutionary practice should be inseparable from the philosophical understanding of reality, therefore, Marxism should be interpreted not as a set of empirical recipes for revolutionary action, but as a philosophical concept that continues the traditions of modern European philosophy and, above all, German idealism.

That is why the ideas of K. Korsch and D. Lukacs had an unconditional influence on the theorists of the Frankfurt school, whose creative work is associated with the further development of neo-Marxism in the 1930s. The activities of the Frankfurt school quite rightly connect with the organisational and institutional design of Western neo-Marxism. In the works of its representatives, such as M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, H. Marcuse, F. Pollock, J. Habermas and many others a dialectic-humanistic version of neo-Marxism was developed. The philosophical methodological basis of it was critical social theory. This theory relied on the tradition of German idealistic dialectics and the critical analysis of the bourgeois political economy of K. Marx.

Representatives of the Frankfurt school radically revised the most important foundations of orthodox Marxism on the leading role of the proletariat as the subject of revolutionary action, on the dominant status of economic social relations and the leading role of the political superstructure in the life of society, on the progressive direction of the historical process and its completion in the form of the universal emancipation of the workers within the framework of the communist for-

mation. As a result, they propose a programme of total criticism of capitalist civilisation and culture which are based on the universalisation of the so-called technical rationality and instrumental reason. In this programme the most important values and social institutions of the later bourgeois society as a civilisation of total alienation are proclaimed as the object of criticism and radical denial: Christian religion, family, power, traditions, etc. According to J. Habermas, as one of the most prominent representatives of the second generation of the Frankfurt school, the most important characteristic of this society of «mature modernity» is the conflict between the system of social institutions, the repressive state machine, on the one hand, and the «life world of man», on the other hand. The possible prospect of resolving this conflict, according to the theorist, is associated with the establishment of communicative rationality in society, which presupposes the dominance of consensus and the achievement of mutual understanding between people on the principles of democratic liberalism.

In the 1920–30s neo-Marxism was developed in a number of Western European countries. So, in Italy the leader of the Italian Communist Party A. Gramsci in his widely known work «Prison notebooks», substantiates the central thesis of his concept «philosophy of practice», according to which modern Marxism is not a set of abstract philosophical schemes and constructions, but a genuine revolutionary practice, aimed at conquest of political power with the goal of creating a new humanistic civilisation.

In France during this period of time a trend of neo-Marxism was developed within the framework of so-called existentialist Marxism, which has been fully represented in the philosophy of J.-P. Sartre, in particular in his two-volume work «Critique of dialectical reason». Also, this type of Western neo-Marxism includes M. Merleau-Ponty, C. Castoriadis, H. Lefebvre, R. Garaudy and other French philosophers and intellectuals who united around the journals «Les Temps Modernes», «Socialisme ou barbarie», «Arguments».

For this version of Neo-Marxist philosophy, it is characteristic to develop an anthropological concept, based on the synthesis of the ideas of early K. Marx and existentialism. So, according to J.-P. Sartre, the only possible anthropology is Marxism, but in order to fully return man to it, one should turn to existentialism.

In the second half of the 20th century a new generation of European intellectuals increasingly began to turn to Marxism not only as an influential political ideology but also as a promising methodology for social researches.

The most important reason for such transformation was the obvious increasing of crisis processes in the development of capitalist modern society and the aggravation of global problems in the structure of technogenic civilisation. In these new conditions Western neo-Marxism is constituted in two main directions: humanistic neo-Marxism and scientific neo-Marxism.

The main ideas and conceptual foundations of the first direction of neo-Marxism were formed and shaped by the mid-1930s under the influence of neo-Hegelianism, phenomenology, existentialism and somewhat later structuralist and post-structuralist ideas and concepts. An important impetus to the development of this humanistic direction was given by turning to the early works of K. Marx, especially to his anthropological views, developed in the «Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844».

Representatives of this trend made the main emphasis on the problem of man as a free and responsible subject of historical action. The central themes of their philosophical works became the problems of overcoming the alienation of the personality in a modern industrial-oriented society, criticism of mass culture and one-dimensional man, possible ways of overcoming crisis processes and dysfunctions in the social institutions of the technogenic civilisation. The most significant and influential in this direction of neo-Marxism became the works of representatives of the Frankfurt school, followers of D. Lukacs, A. Gramsci, J.-P. Sartre.

Representatives of the second direction of neo-Marxism proposed a different interpretation of the Marxist doctrine of society, emphasising in it, first of all, the scientific and constructive-rational component. Their conceptual and methodological position consisted in purifying Marxism from abstract philosophising and speculative constructions. This position assumes giving Marxism the form of a scientific theory, based on the principles of rationality and social realism.

The most notable figure within this direction of neo-Marxism became French philosopher L. Althusser, author of the famous work «For Marx» and the book «Reading Capital» (co-authored with E. Balibar and J. Ranciere) published in 1965. He proposed to cleanse Marxism of the remains of Hegelianism and Feuerbachianism, as well as of the ideological leanings of abstract humanism. From his point of view the most important and significant thing in classical Marxism is the reconstruction of the objective logic of history and the justification of the basic laws of its progressive development.

The turning point in the development of neo-Marxism was the mid-1980s. During this period the so-called post-Marxism was formed as a relatively new direction within the framework of the socio-critical strategy of modern Western philosophy development. The main intention of post-Marxism was to rely on the results and achievements of linguistic philosophy, several structuralist theories, modern anthropology and ethnology to develop a new concept of discursive logic of the sociality [6, p. 68–72]. This intention manifested itself very distinctly in the creative work of Argentine political scientist E. Laclau and Belgian political philosopher Ch. Mouffe. Their main joint book «Hegemony and socialist strategy» published in 1985 is devoted primarily to the problem of radical modernisation of classical

Marxism. The main goal of this modernisation was to preserve the critical pathos of Marxist social philosophy but at the same time significantly transform its conceptual foundations based on the principle of economic determinism. From their point of view, the economy is not a special and dominant sphere of social life, but is a kind of discursive formation that depends to a decisive extent on the political situation and so-called discursive practices.

Along with the above-mentioned directions of Western neo-Marxism, it can also include a number of such intellectual and socio-political trends and concepts in which the emphasis on critical reflection in relation to modern society and its cultural standards is traditionally preserved. In particular, these are attempts to re-think Marxism in the spirit of postmodernist philosophy

(S. Žižek, J. F. Lyotard, J. Derrida, F. Jameson). The theorists of radical democracy and libertarian Marxism are also associated with the traditions and paradigm of neo-Marxism (D. Guerin, H. Steiner, R. Nozick, etc.). Marxist-oriented feminism, various environmental movements, representatives of antiglobalism also in many ways share ideas and the postulates of neo-Marxism paradigm.

Thus, even a brief and fragmentary analysis of the process of formation and contemporary modifications of the Western neo-Marxist paradigm allows to make a quite convincing conclusion that the obviously meaningful invariant of this paradigm is not a constructive but a reflexively-critical intention in relation to modern society and its culture.

Chinese version of neo-Marxism as a programme of practical materialism

On 17 May 2016, the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, speaking at the meeting on the development of philosophy and social sciences, re-affirmed that Marxism remains the guiding theory. He stated: «In the history of human thought, no theory has exerted such a profound and extensive influence on the progress of human civilisation as Marxism has» [7, p. 10]. In his view, Marxist philosophy aligns with both global trends in the 21st century and the trajectory of modern China.

This strong emphasis on the role and significance of Marxism in shaping China's philosophical and ideological framework highlights the need to justify its priority status in the evolution of socio-political and philosophical thought. The focus, however, is not merely on popularising and applying the classical heritage of Marxism but on its creative development, adapted to Chinese realities. This is underscored by the following assertion: «The vital force of Marxism is not in the writings of K. Marx and F. Engels themselves, but in its attitude to practice» [8, p. 3]. Within China's contemporary intellectual and ideological landscape, neo-Marxism has emerged as a distinct and influential phenomenon, occupying a significant position.

To analyse the key elements of neo-Marxism, it is essential to outline its formation within Chinese philosophical and social thought, explore its conceptual foundations, and examine its stylistic characteristics. Broadly speaking, the development of neo-Marxism in China can be divided into three relatively independent stages.

The first stage of neo-Marxism in China is associated with the activities of Mao Zedong, who, in the 1930–40s, emphasised in various works and speeches the need to «concretise Marxism in China, to endow it with the necessary Chinese features» [9, p. 191]. Even earlier, in the 1920s, key figures of China's revolutionary democratic movement, such as Sun Yat-sen, Li Dazhao, and Ai Siqi, had repeatedly advocated for a systematic study

of Marxist theory and its necessary adaptation to the revolutionary movement in China.

At the 7th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1945, Mao Zedong's philosophical thought was explicitly established as the guiding ideology and was incorporated into the CPC Constitution, marking the first significant historical leap in the sinicisation of Marxism. One of Mao Zedong's central theoretical assertions was that the leading social force of the socialist revolution in China should be the peasantry rather than the proletariat, contrary to the orthodox view of classical Marxism. In the late 1930s, he put forward the theory of new democracy, arguing for the necessity of a broad democratic alliance between the peasantry, working class, intelligentsia, and national bourgeoisie. This conceptual shift proved to be a highly productive ideological innovation, significantly contributing to the CPC's ultimate victory in the civil war. Mao Zedong's philosophical thought is described as «a philosophical summary that combines the universal principles of Marxism with the specific practices of the Chinese revolution», «the inheritance and development of Marxist philosophy in China», and «the sinicisation of Marxist philosophy» [10, p. 106].

From 1966 to 1972, the promotion of Mao Zedong's thought, including his philosophical ideas, took on extreme and irrational forms. His words were transformed into slogans, subject to absolutisation and sanctification. His work «On practice» was interpreted through the lens of voluntarism, while essay «On contradiction» was expounded in the spirit of a «philosophy of struggle». These interpretations were used at the time to justify Mao Zedong's theories of revolution under the proletarian dictatorship and to legitimise the practical implementation of the cultural revolution. In 1976, following Mao Zedong's passing, the cultural revolution was officially declared over.

A significant turning point occurred in early 1978 when the journal «Chinese Social Sciences» published

Zhu Guang Qian's article, «An overview of Renaissance to 19th-century Western bourgeois writers and art critics' views on humanism and human nature». In August of the same year the same journal published Zhu Xing's article «The young Hegel's thoughts on labour and alienation: an exploration of the problem of alienation». These articles, which touched upon themes of humanism and human nature – topics previously considered taboo – sparked intense debate among cultural figures and theorists. In 1979, a new Chinese translation of K. Marx's «Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844» was published, further deepening discussions on humanism [11, p. 256].

The emergence of practical materialism, which critically engaged with dialectical and historical materialism, was closely linked to the humanistic intellectual currents that arose after 1978. In December of that year, the 3rd Plenary Session of the CPC's 11th Central Committee initiated a new phase of re-evaluation and appraisal of Mao Zedong's philosophical thought. This marked the beginning of China's era of reform and opening up, a process that continues today. The defining characteristic of this period has been a gradual shift from the ideological dissemination of Mao Zedong's philosophy to its study within cultural and scientific frameworks, transitioning from a rigidly Marxist framework to a more open, multifaceted, and multilayered exploration.

The second stage in the development of neo-Marxism in China is associated with the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and his theory of the three representations. In this theory, he proposes a distinctive criterion for reforming socialist society in China, emphasising the need to achieve «three blessings»: 1) further development of productive forces and economic renewal; 2) strengthening the comprehensive national power of the socialist state; 3) raising the living standards of the people. Deng Xiaoping stated: «It is necessary to begin to integrate the universal principles of Marxism with the specific situation in the country. Go your own way, build socialism with Chinese characteristics» [12, p. 189].

The reform programme and the framework for building socialism with Chinese characteristics, introduced at the 12th National Congress of the CPC in 1982 under Deng Xiaoping's guidance, marked a departure from orthodox Marxist statements and broke with the previous strategy of administrative command management. However, it retained the fundamental role of the state and the CPC in the country's political and economic development, ensuring continuity within the ideological framework. This allowed Deng Xiaoping to repeatedly emphasise that his vision for China's social and economic reform remained aligned with traditional Marxist theory.

Following Deng Xiaoping's passing in 1997, it became increasingly evident that the remarkable success of socio-economic reforms was pushing China toward a potential «modernisation trap». In other words, these reforms raised the urgent issue of synchronising poli-

tical power with the new economic realities. Over the past 25 years, various approaches have been proposed to address this fundamental challenge in China's socio-political dynamics, all of which have been closely tied to the continued advancement of the reform and opening-up policy. Generally, these approaches have remained committed to the doctrine of the sinicisation of Marxism, treating it as an essential ideological foundation for China's systemic modernisation.

This trend is particularly evident in the speeches of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, but it has become even more pronounced with the rise of a new generation of nationally oriented leaders under Xi Jinping. His programmatic article «On socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era» is regarded by many Chinese political scientists and philosophers as the most recent and significant development in the sinicisation of Marxism.

In light of the aforementioned factors, the third stage of neo-Marxism's development in China is closely linked to the approval of a new political course and its philosophical and ideological justification following the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, where Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary. This period is characterised by several key priorities in the evolution of China's philosophical and socio-political thought: the development and theoretical grounding of a new concept of social justice, social harmony, and national unity across all social strata and regions; an inquiry into the dialectical relationship between scientific, technical, and technological progress and the ideological and moral development of Chinese society; the formulation of a vision for China's global participation in shaping a fair system of international relations that balances national interests with the collective security and sustainable development of all nations; a systematic study of contemporary environmental challenges and the justification of strategies for a sustainable future of human civilisation; and an intensified engagement with the achievements and values of traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, aiming at their creative adaptation to modern social communication and the evolving spiritual culture of Chinese society.

A crucial aspect of Chinese neo-Marxism is its fundamental distinction from neo-Marxist thought in Western countries. Western neo-Marxism emerged as a complex intellectual movement that significantly contributed to the formation of a social-critical philosophical framework in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By contrast, Chinese neo-Marxism is primarily oriented toward constructive and creative endeavours, adapting the core principles of Marxist philosophy to the practical demands of social transformation and addressing urgent economic, political, and environmental challenges. Consequently, the defining conceptual characteristic of Chinese neo-Marxism is its focus on resolving pressing issues related to the development and modernisation of contemporary Chinese society.

Accordingly, Chinese neo-Marxist philosophy is rooted in the theory of practical materialism. The adoption of this concept as a theoretical framework for the comprehensive modernisation of China's economy and social structure was preceded by an extensive and complex debate on practical materialism, which spanned more than two decades within the Chinese philosophical community. This discourse involved a critical reassessment of the rigid dogmatism inherited from Soviet philosophy of the 1930–40s.

The article «The philosophical flag of our era: practical materialism» encapsulates the core tenets of this philosophy, asserting that Marxist philosophy is, in essence, practical materialism. It argues: «Today, we reaffirm our commitment to practical materialism, partly because K. Marx's practical materialism has been historically distorted, and more importantly, because practical materialism embodies the spirit of our age, asserting human practice and elevating human subjectivity» [13, p. 85].

The establishment of practical materialism marks a revolutionary shift in philosophy, characterised by several fundamental transformations.

Firstly, the understanding of the world transitions from the principle of the object to the principle of the subject, reflecting a profound change in philosophical methodology. Karl Marx's principle of practice is, in essence, the principle of the subject. While the natural world exists objectively, the sensory world experienced by humanity is one that has been shaped through practice. Consequently, to comprehend phenomena, one must adopt human subjectivity as the standard, interpreting the world as an object through the lens of practical activity.

Secondly, the very structure of philosophy has undergone a transformation. To the two traditional starting points (thought and existence) third (practice) has been added, resulting in a tripartite structure of thought – practice – existence. This represents a fundamental reconfiguration of philosophical structure. The historical struggle between old materialism and idealism has become obsolete, as simplistic answers to the relationship between thought and existence no longer meet the demands of contemporary practical

activity. In this new tripartite structure, the question of the interaction between thought and existence remains, but in a more nuanced and complex form.

Thirdly, the construction of the philosophical system is now grounded not in the principle of matter but in the principle of practice, marking a decisive shift from a closed system to an open one. Practice determines the extent of human mastery over matter, consciousness, the world, and its governing laws. There is no longer a need to explain practice through the framework of matter. Instead, understanding must begin with practice itself. The world is envisioned as a blueprint or an engineering project – a construct continuously reshaped through human practice and evolving alongside it.

Lastly, there has been a shift in philosophy's central purpose from merely interpreting the world to actively transforming it, signaling a fundamental change in its objectives. This transformation underscores the active role of human agency in shaping reality, moving beyond passive observation and interpretation to an engaged, practice-driven approach to change. This evolution in philosophical thought highlights the importance of human creativity, initiative, and the potential for progress in striving for a more just and equitable society.

It is important to note that the theory of practical materialism reveals an organic connection with many ideas and values of traditional Chinese philosophy [14, p. 381]. Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasised this in his articles and speeches [15, p. 126], arguing that the Chinese version of neo-Marxism must integrate the ethical and philosophical achievements of «all the beautiful elements of Chinese civilisation» (cit. from [16, p. 36]). Therefore, not only Confucianism but also the philosophies of Taoism, Legalism, and other classical Chinese schools should serve as vital sources for the theoretical, moral, and political foundations of neo-Marxism in its modern Chinese interpretation [17, p. 423]. This integration implies that traditional Chinese values, such as adherence to laws, sincerity in human relationships, diligence, duty, moderation in consumption, and tolerance, should become fundamental norms guiding the behaviour and activities of individuals in a modernising China [18, p. 9–10].

Socio-cultural status of the ideology of neo-Marxism in modern China

Neo-Marxism, as a critical inheritance and innovation of traditional Marxist theory, demonstrates its unique theoretical value and practical significance in contemporary China. One of its core ideas, advocating economic equality and social transformation, deeply aligns with certain aspects of China's socialist practices. By analysing the theoretical propositions of neo-Marxism and their concrete manifestations in contemporary China, we can better understand its crucial role in promoting economic and social development.

In political economy, neo-Marxism critiques traditional Marxism by asserting that the classical labour theory of value is incomplete. It advocates using the division between complex and simple labour as an entry point for research to achieve a more comprehensive labour value theory. Based on this, neo-Marxism champions economic equality and strives to advance need-based distribution. Particularly in resource and wealth allocation, it seeks to reduce exploitation driven by capital. Simultaneously, it promotes social transformation

and upgrades, thereby reshaping societal values and creating a new cultural paradigm. Through the principle of need-based distribution, neo-Marxism endeavours to construct a fairer social structure, thus creating equal economic opportunities for all members of society. «While the theoretical and practical foundations of neo-Marxism’s advocacy for economic equality and social transformation may not entirely align with China’s national conditions, the emphasis on fairness amidst economic and social development, especially under the premise of adhering to the socialist system while invigorating the market economy, reflects an enduring economic equality philosophy» [19, p. 98].

As of February 2024, the monthly disposable income of Chinese residents can be categorised into five tiers, each accounting for 20 % of the population (table). The annual and monthly disposable income of the highest tier is ten times that of the lowest tier, indicating the objective existence of income disparity in China, with a significant gap between high-income and low-income groups.

To address this substantial income disparity, the Chinese government first ensured the basic livelihood of low- and middle-income groups through its poverty alleviation campaign. As illustrated in fig. 1, during the seven years from 2013 to 2020, when the government vigorously pursued its poverty alleviation efforts, fiscal allocations from both central and local governments

for targeted poverty alleviation increased annually, reaching an enormous scale, ultimately leading to the successful completion of the campaign in 2020.

Building upon this foundation, China has continued to advance income distribution reforms. For instance, during the 3rd Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the CPC in 2024, the Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on further deepening reform and advancing Chinese-style modernisation was adopted, emphasising the need to improve the income distribution system and establish a coordinated institutional framework integrating primary distribution, redistribution, and tertiary distribution. Additionally, the Communiqué of the 3rd Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the CPC underscored the commitment to urban-rural integration, calling for efforts to narrow the development gap between urban and rural areas. It positioned urban-rural integration as an essential requirement for Chinese-style modernisation, advocating for equal exchange and bidirectional flow of urban and rural resources to reduce disparities and promote shared prosperity.

In the new era, China has explicitly set the goal of achieving common prosperity, which extends beyond the distribution of material wealth to include the optimisation of social structures. These practices not only absorb the foundational principles of Marxism but also resonate with neo-Marxism’s emphasis on economic equality.

Five income brackets of Chinese residents

Bracket	Annual disposable income, yuan	Monthly disposable income, yuan	Share, %
Highest	95 055	7921	20
Upper-middle	50 220	4185	20
Middle	32 195	2683	20
Lower-middle	20 442	1704	20
Lowest	9215	768	20

Note. Compiled on the basis of National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China data.

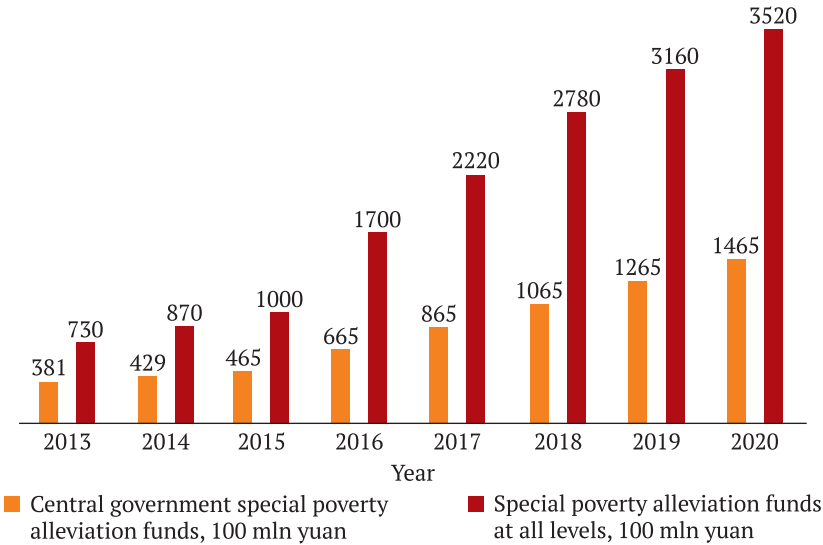


Fig. 1. Statistical data on fiscal allocations for poverty alleviation.
Source: White paper on China’s practice of human poverty alleviation
(https://www.sohu.com/a/459460196_161795)

As illustrated in fig. 2 and 3, China's urban population and urbanisation rate have continued to rise in the new era, reaching nearly 70 % by 2023. Simultaneously, the country's industrial structure has undergone profound upgrades and transformations, with the service sector expanding significantly. By 2020, the service industry had already surpassed both the primary and secondary sectors, accounting for more than 50 % of the total economic output.

This indicates that China's modernisation process is marked by profound social transformation, structural

adjustments, and economic shifts. «In particular, since the onset of the new era, China has steadfastly pursued reform and opening-up, integrating comprehensive and in-depth reforms while consistently adhering to a development-driven approach. By prioritising economic development as the driving force for both economic and social progress, China is undergoing a fundamental transition from a traditional agrarian society to a modern industrial and commercial society. This transformation, in essence, embodies a broader theory of social restructuring and reform» [20, p. 128].

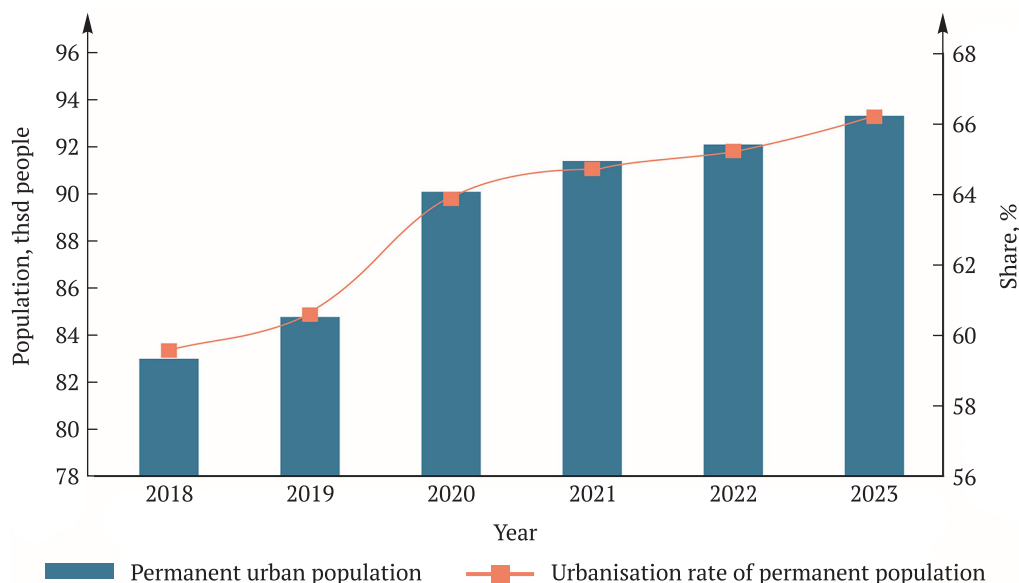


Fig. 2. Statistical chart of China's urban population and urbanisation rate in 2018–2023.
Source: Current status and environmental analysis of China's flat glass industry: policies and technologies supporting green and low-carbon market development (<https://www.chinabaogao.com/market/202404/704305.html>)

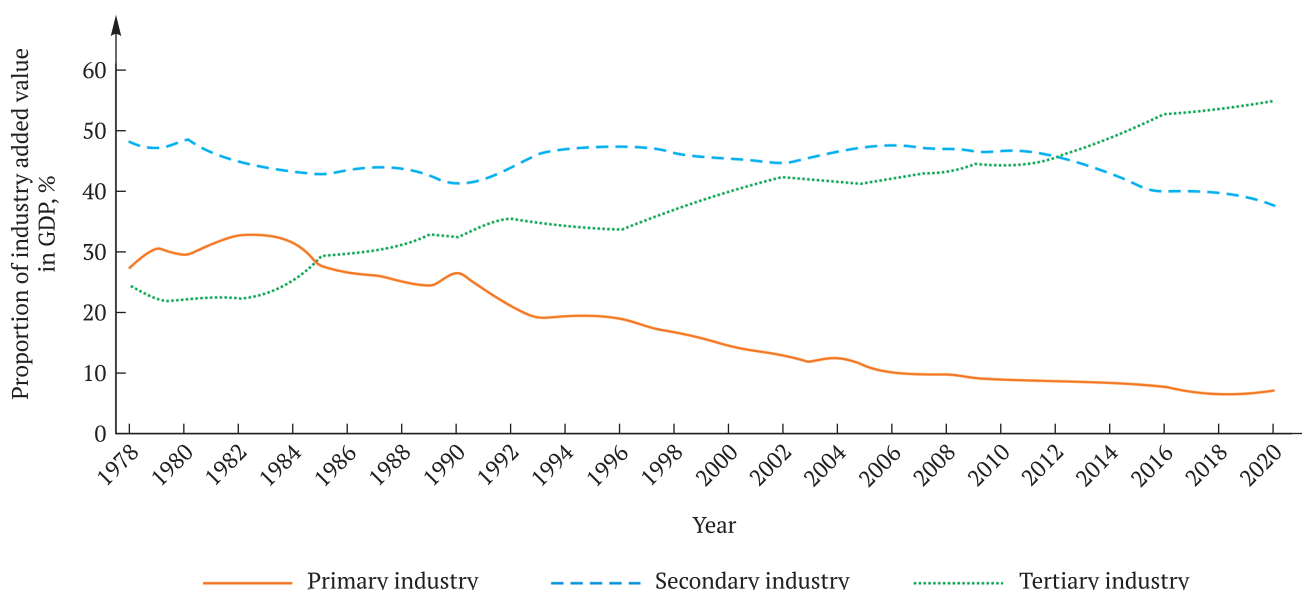


Fig. 3. Trends in China's industrial structure in 1978–2020.
Source: Development patterns and transformation directions of China's industrial structure in the digital era (https://www.sohu.com/a/456409601_455313)

In practice, this philosophy is evident in China's push for urban-rural integration and the improvement of its social security system. In recent years, China has significantly increased investments in rural areas, narrowing urban-rural income disparities, reflecting the profound implications of social transformation. For instance, through targeted poverty alleviation policies during the battle against poverty, the Chinese government resolved the basic livelihood issues of hundreds of millions of impoverished people, embodying the materialisation of economic equality. Additionally, the urbanisation process has been bolstered by reforms to rural land systems and the improvement of rural infrastructure, significantly enhancing the quality of life for rural populations and laying a solid foundation for urban-rural integration. These practices demonstrate the systematic and practical dimensions of social transformation on multiple levels.

Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese people have advanced reform and opening-up by leveraging changes in production relations to stimulate productivity and drive economic and social progress. While there are distinctions between these efforts and neo-Marxism's advocacy for economic equality and social transformation, they address the same fundamental issues of social development. Therefore, the series of practices and associated ideologies promoting economic equality and advancing social transformation in contemporary China can be regarded as manifestations of neo-Marxism in a Chinese context.

Neo-Marxism's concepts of socialised mass production, industrial sovereignty, and the industrialisation of geopolitical governance seek to redefine the relationship between industrialisation, the socialised mass produc-

tion system, and state power, asserting that industrial strength surpasses governmental authority or even equates industrial power with political power, serving as the driving force behind the geopolitical structuring of state governance. While these ideas may appear abstract, they find tangible expression in contemporary China.

As illustrated in fig. 4 and 5, China's R&D investment has steadily increased since the initiation of reform and opening-up. After surpassing Japan around 2008, the gap between China's R&D spending and that of the US has been progressively narrowing. Meanwhile, the number of high-tech enterprises in China has surged. As of September 2023, the total number of strategic emerging industry enterprises exceeded 2 million, while the number of high-tech enterprises reached 400 thousand by 2022. According to the 2023 Global unicorn list published by Hurun Research Institute, China had 316 unicorn companies, ranking second worldwide. Notably, 124 Chinese manufacturing enterprises made the list, surpassing the US in this category.

Clearly, as China rapidly transitions from a traditional agrarian society to a modern industrial and commercial economy, it has not entirely conformed to neo-Marxist notions of industrial sovereignty or the industrialisation of geopolitical governance. However, the impact of industrialisation and the socialised mass production system on the government and the state has undeniably intensified. As China's socialist market economy continues to expand and industrial structures undergo continuous upgrades, «the socialised mass production system is evolving with increasing precision and complexity in its internal division of labour, becoming ever more dependent on technological innovation as a key driver of growth» [21, p. 60].

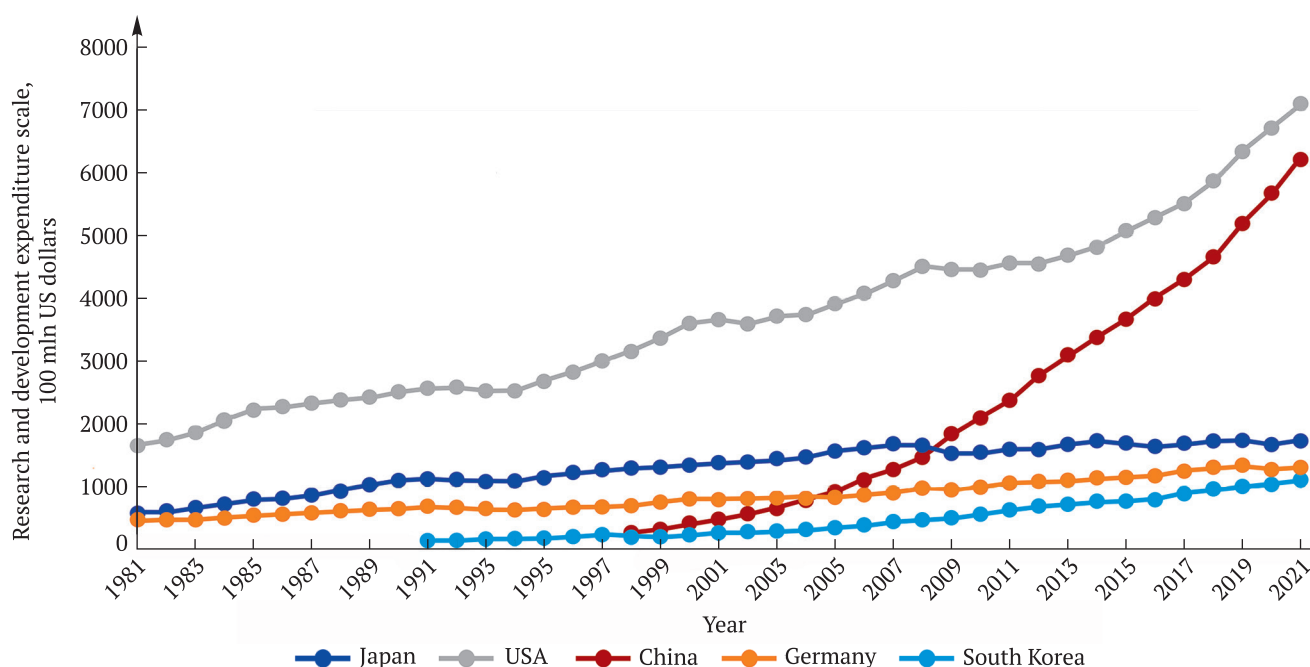


Fig. 4. Trends in R&D expenditure among the world's five leading R&D countries in 1981–2021.

Source: Has China fallen into the «middle-tech trap» amid the ongoing escalation of US chip sanctions?
(https://news.sohu.com/a/758931104_121124379)

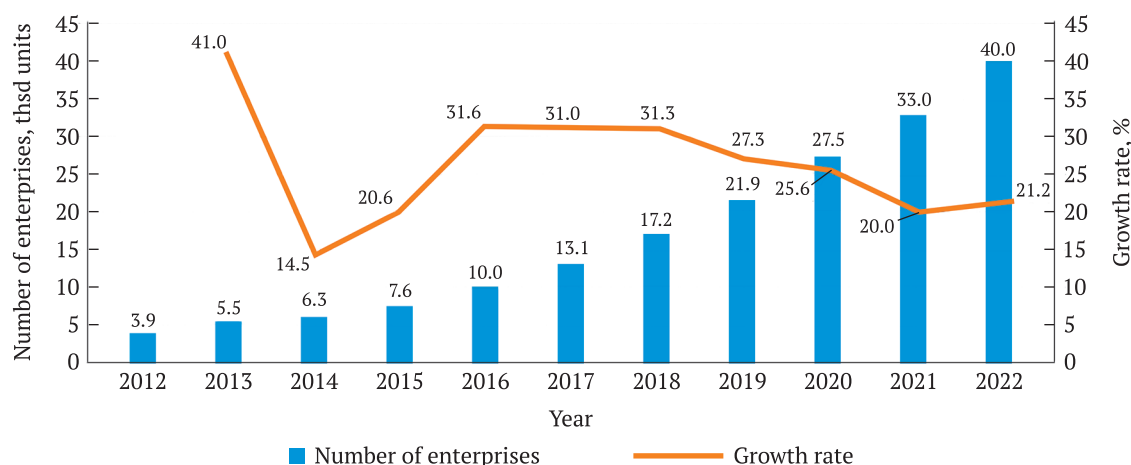


Fig. 5. Growth trends in the number of high-tech enterprises in China in 2012–2022.

Source: Theoretical framework, current status, and recommendations for technology-driven development of emerging industries (https://www.sohu.com/a/801103862_120052222)

Neo-Marxism's view of the government as an industrial organisation or an extension of industrialisation is an overly one-sided interpretation of state functions. However, its recognition of the growing role of the state in facilitating industrial upgrades aligns with China's strong emphasis on technological advancement and industrial modernisation, reflecting a broader convergence between theoretical critique and practical economic transformation.

The neo-Marxist redefinition of the relationship between industrialisation and government offers theoretical insights for China's reforms. According to neo-Marxism, industrial power is not only the core driver of economic development but also a significant force in reshaping social relationships. In China, with the gradual improvement of the market economy system, the role of industrial forces has become increasingly pronounced. For instance, the dominant position of state-owned enterprises in strategic industries and the flexibility of private enterprises in consumer markets together form the backbone of China's economic development. Meanwhile, the government seeks a balance between ensuring fair competition and improving efficiency through strengthened market supervision, optimised resource allocation, and the promotion of industrial clustering. This dual mechanism «government + market» not only continues the traditional Marxist model of state-led economic development but also concretely applies neo-Marxist concepts prioritising industrial forces.

In conclusion, the neo-Marxist theories on socialised production and the transformation of government functions find abundant practical manifestations in China's industrial upgrading and governmental reforms. Through the modernisation of government functions and the scientific guidance of industrial policies, China has not only achieved the optimisation and upgrading of its economic structure but also provided valuable references for global industrial development and government governance. While certain theoretical limitations of

neo-Marxist concepts exist, their profound insights into societal realities and their theoretical frameworks' practical verification in contemporary China fully demonstrate their intellectual value and practical significance in fostering economic and social development.

Neo-Marxism, as a critical and innovative system of thought, places significant emphasis on the principles of humanitarianism and a people-centered approach. This theory focuses on the subjectivity and existential value of the individual, responding to the neglect of individual needs and humanistic concerns in the traditional Marxist practice, which overemphasised collectivism. This intellectual movement emerged amidst profound reflections on the Soviet socialist model in the mid-20th century and has since demonstrated unique value and significance in the practice of contemporary China.

Since the onset of China's reform and opening-up, the principles of humanitarianism and a people-centred approach have gradually become key guiding principles in societal development and policy-making. Particularly in the process of modernisation under socialism with Chinese characteristics, the CPC has explicitly proposed a people-centred development philosophy, aligning closely with the humanitarianism advocated by neo-Marxism. In the practice of humanitarianism within policy guidance, the Chinese government has made substantial investments in addressing livelihood issues as part of its goal to build a moderately prosperous society. Notable initiatives include targeted poverty alleviation policies, promotion of urban-rural integration, and improvements in healthcare and educational security systems. These efforts not only reflect the development thought centred on people but also emphasise the importance of individual quality of life and dignity. Moreover, during the social and economic structural transformation, the Chinese government has adhered to the people-centred principle. Since the reform and opening-up, China has experienced a shift from a planned economy to a market economy. While this transition has resulted in significant

economic growth, it has also brought challenges, such as expanding income disparities. Therefore, while prioritising economic efficiency, the Chinese government has consistently emphasised social equity, proposed the expansion of the middle-income group and raising the living standards of low-income populations. This development model, balancing both efficiency and fairness, deeply reflects new Marxism's concept of social transformation centered on the individual. Furthermore, the Chinese government advocates for cultural development and the comprehensive development of individuals. In promoting economic development, China also places great importance on cultural construction and the enhancement of spiritual civilisation. Through the promotion of socialist core values, the cultivation of excellent Chinese traditional culture, and the advocacy for respecting and protecting individual rights, China has gradually built a social value system focused on the comprehensive development of individuals. This practice not only highlights the humanitarian spirit in

Marxist philosophy but also provides a valuable reference for other developing countries worldwide.

In advocating for humanitarianism and a people-centred approach, neo-Marxism has offered important intellectual resources for the reinterpretation and development of Marxist theory. Its emphasis on individual value and social fairness aligns profoundly with contemporary China's socialist modernisation practices.

While neo-Marxism's critique of traditional Marxism as disregarding human existence may not be entirely accurate, its emphasis on human-centred interpretations of Marxism offers theoretical inspiration for contemporary China. It aligns with the principles of reform and opening-up, the commitment to people-centric governance, and the reaffirmation of the CPC's mission to wholeheartedly serve the people. «Consequently, neo-Marxism's advocacy for humanitarianism and people-centric development finds resonance in the emphasis on people-first principles in China's socialist modernisation efforts» [22, p. 26].

Conclusions

Neo-Marxism, as a critical ideological framework, embodies profound reflection and innovation upon traditional Marxist theory. Within its theoretical structure, it emphasises humanism, economic equality, and social transformation, offering a fresh perspective for reevaluating and reinterpreting Marxism. When integrated with China's practical context, neo-Marxism demonstrates its distinctive influence and value in contemporary China.

Firstly, in its critique of the dogmatic tendencies of traditional Marxism, Chinese version of neo-Marxism introduces a philosophy centred on humanism. By highlighting the primacy of human agency and the importance of free choice, this concept has provided ideological inspiration for China's socialist modernisation. Throughout the process of reform and opening-up, the principle of human-centred development has been consistently upheld.

Secondly, the neo-Marxist theoretical propositions on economic equality and social transformation resonate significantly with China's reform practices. Through vigorous promotion of economic restructuring and social transition, China has narrowed the urban-rural divide, raised the income levels of disadvantaged groups, and achieved remarkable results in advancing economic equality. Simultaneously, the CPC has pragmatically applied fundamental Marxist principles, focusing on balancing equity and efficiency. This not only aligns with neo-Marxist economic ideals but also provides a platform for their practical validation.

Furthermore, neo-Marxism, by incorporating elements of Western modern philosophy (particularly Hegelian philosophy, existentialism, and liberalism) has innovatively expanded Marxist methodology. Its emphasis on the practical nature of philosophy and the application of dialectics to social and historical domains offers theoretical tools for addressing the complex social realities of contemporary China. In advancing Chinese-style modernisation, the establishment of a large-scale socialised production system, the acceleration of industrial upgrading, and the adjustment of governmental functions reflect this practical-minded approach.

Contemporary China, through the ongoing sinicisation of Marxism, has continually enriched its theoretical framework, endowing Marxism with distinct Chinese characteristics and contemporary relevance. The innovative thinking of neo-Marxism, which seeks to break away from dogmatism, also offers valuable insights for further developing Marxist theory in China.

In summary, neo-Marxism, as a modern critical ideology, has exerted a significant influence on contemporary China's social development and theoretical innovation. Its multifaceted contributions in the realms of economics, politics, education and philosophy have not only deepened the development of Marxist theory in China but also provided valuable experiences and insights for Marxist practices on a global scale.

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