

Comparative Study on the Political Philosophy of Rousseau and Marx Through Marx's Communist Manifesto

SHI Min^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Marxism, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 11 February 2015; accepted 8 April 2015
Published online 26 June 2015

Abstract

There are many ideas in common between Rousseau and Marx, Marx illustrated many political thoughts by a philosophy method, and Rousseau also proposed many propositions after he studied the history of political philosophy. On the field of democracy, Marx tried to connect political thoughts between Kant and Hegel, and Rousseau tried to connect his political thoughts with Plato and Aristotle. Both of Rousseau's and Marx's political philosophy can be concluded as products of social cognition.

Key words: Rousseau; Marx; Political philosophy; Social cognition

Shi, M. (2015). Comparative Study on the Political Philosophy of Rousseau and Marx Through Marx's Communist Manifesto. *Canadian Social Science*, 11(6), 98-103. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/7097>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7097>

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, there are two views about the relation between Rousseau and Marx, one is "flatly denied", and the other is entirely "entirely the same". Researchers who hold the first view such as most scholars in Soviet Union argue that Marx's political thoughts come from the German classical philosophy and French Utopian theories; there is nothing to do with Rousseau's political theories. However, researchers who hold the second view such as neopositivism researchers consider that the political

thoughts of Marx are entirely from Rousseau because they have the same value of freedom and equality. They believe Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Law Philosophy* is "a book which permeate with the thoughts of Rousseau's popular sovereignty from the beginning to the end" (WoErpei, 1993, p.16). Duilio Coletti argues that Rousseau's political thoughts is the true source of Marx's, and "after rigorous analysis, there is no new knowledge expect Marx and Lenin's theory of the banishment of the capitalism." (Colletti, 1972, p.185) Actually, both of the two views are partial, there are both connections and differences.

1. MARX'S COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

1.1 Eliminating Private Ownership

The Manifesto said the communist member can conclude their theory into one sentence that is to eliminate private ownership of the capitalist. This proposition is reasonable because, firstly, according to the law of relations of production, it must conform to the level of productive force, the capitalist ownership which has been produced by the productive force in a certain history stage, will be substitute for a more advanced ownership in the progress of productivity force development. This is an objective law of the human society and if it is analyzed in a scale of macro way, this proposition is always true. Secondly, the distinctions between noble and humble only caused by the possession of the external thing such as money, right and other material things are unreasonable, and should be eliminated. Thirdly, in the modern society, the ownership of capitalist has changed its formation and manifestation, the primitive and savage private ownership which is the target of Marx and Engels has substituted for modernized and civilized capitalism. More care of the public benefit and more attention of social equality becomes a guidance of the capitalist development which can also prove the rationality of Marx's view to eliminate the private

ownership. However, there are also several aspects need further study.

Firstly, to eliminate the private ownership, it needs some particular social history conditions, specially the highly developed productive forces. In 1848, the development of the social productive force is far from this condition that was why Engels in his later years acknowledged that: "The history has improved us and the human who has the same opinion like us are wrong, the history clearly manifests that the status of the European social development is far from mature and cannot eliminate the capitalist produce process; history has improved this by the economic revolution. From 1848, the economic revolution went through France, Austria, Hungary, Poland and all the continent of the Europe, especially in Germany; it became the first industrial country. All these developments should base on the capitalist, and it is obvious that the capitalist still has a huge potential for growth." (Marx, 1995, p.23) Even when Engels wrote this introduction in the year of 1895, the victory for proletariat to obtain was till an illusion. The Manifesto asserts that in the mid-nineteenth century, capitalist private ownership will hinder the development of productivity force, however the facts of the history show some opposite phenomenon that after 160 years, capitalist still have its development space. To a large extent, Marx and Engels have made a wrong judgment which took the capitalist with strong vitality as the capitalist in its dying state. Beside this, the practices of many other countries can prove that the method "to collect all the product tools into the organization which has been established by the proletariat" is not feasible. For instance, in the primary stage of China's socialist construction which does not have the ability to eliminate private ownership, president Mao tries to limit and eliminate the development of China capitalist, however, the consequences are not satisfied. And at one point must be made clear is the capitalist should be eliminated in the Manifesto is not all the kinds of capitalist, but only the capitalist which can directly hinder the social development. And for a long period of the primary stage of socialism, the mixed ownership including capitalist ownership should be adopted. More importantly, the elimination of capital ownership should be a natural progress rather than simply discard, this will be a long period, firstly, and the highest attention of the property and the responsibility system should be retained, because this is the reason why private ownership could exist for thousand years. Secondly, the small economy scale, limitation of individual and frequent conflicts between each individual should be eliminated by utilizing mass collaboration, revenue sharing and scale economy of public ownership. So the scientific ownership in the future should be a recombination of private ownership and public ownership, just like what Marx has written in "Capital": "To re-establish a kind of individual ownership on the basis of the joint occupation of product material"

(Marx, 1995, p.289). Secondly, according to the theory of communist party, their aim is to realize the all-round development of human being, and to eliminate the capitalist ownership is just a means and the latter should be subject to the former. So only to conclude the party's theory as a means to build socialism is unreasonable. Engels acclaimed in his later years that if to describe the characteristic of future society in one sentence, no one is much better than the sentence in the "Communist Manifesto": "The development of all the individuals should be based on the development of each individual." (Marx, 1995, p.56) And this sentence can further represent the theory of party than "to eliminate capitalist ownership".

1.2 History of Classes Struggles

The Manifesto tells us from the history that can be recorded by the literalness, all the history of the society is the history of classes' struggles. During the struggles, some classes win and some classes lose. To explain the history through this view is the method of historical materialism, otherwise, to adopt the opposite view to explain the history is the method of historical idealism. How to accurately understand this proposal? Firstly, the conception of class struggles should be clarified. As a general understanding, conflicts of classes can be divided into two categories, one is antagonistic conflicts another is non-antagonistic conflicts. Classes' struggles particularly refer to the antagonistic conflicts which mean the conflicts exist in the fundamental interests of each class. The conflicts between capitalist and proletariat are antagonistic, as well as the conflict between the mass and the terrorist who seriously harm the society, however the latter is a most special condition and should not be amplified. It cannot be considered that as long as there are classes and conflicts, there are classes' struggles. Now we can make a concrete analysis of this proposition. On one hand, it has the historical rationality and objective basis. In 1848, capitalism was in a status of primitive savage development especially in the country of England, France, Germany and Italy. The capitalist exploits the proletariat ruthlessly, and the life of the proletariat was miserable so the conflicts between these two classes occurred frequently. On the other hand, this proposal is still questionable. Firstly, this proposal clearly highlights the distinction, antagonism, conflicts and neglects the aspects of unity, cooperation, interact. However, the rationality of this proposition can only exist in the special history period of classes contradiction and in a peaceful period, this proposal has some deviation, because class is the distributive product, the distribution and the cooperation are the two side of one coin, they cannot be independent from each other. The same relationship of cooperation and complementation could exist between the different classes, which mean all the classes have their reason to exist in a special history period. So only to emphasize the

contradiction and ignore the unity is partial in the theory and harmful in the practice. In the modern society, both the employers and the employees are needed. Between them, there are not only the contradictions of the property occupation, income inequality, distribution unfairness, but also the complementation which can reflect from the work opportunities provided by the employers for the employees which can release their potential of labor and the profit produced by the employees which can manifest the perfect management ability of the employers. The right policy should be adopted, and the policy should be designed on the basis of the entire individuals' interests, within the framework of the law, and the government should try to encourage both labor and capital to make profit. Secondly, the contradictions between slaves and slave owners, peasants and landowners, workers and capitalist are not entirely irreconcilable. For an example, in the social transformation period when the feudal systems are replaced by the capital system, workers and the capitalist are confronted with the same enemy, there is uniformity between these two classes, and the united front could come into being. It can be concluded that the history of human society is filled with the un-agonist conflicts and agonist conflicts between different classes, rather than only the agonist conflicts of the classes, otherwise, it is not available to understand the prosperity and stability in the history.

Beside these two propositions, there are still other proposals need to be reconsidered in the Manifesto, such as "the ruling thought of any historical period is nothing but the ruling class ideology". To sum up, this is a fact judgment which accord with the history development, and not a value judgment according to which we should build the human thoughts. In the primary stage of the socialism, even in the guidance of Marxism theory, the culture of a nation must be diverse, and in the mature period of the socialism or the period of Communism, there should not be any guidance theory or ideology theory for the social construction, all the thoughts should exist with harmony.

1.3 Thoughts of Ruling Class

In the Manifesto, a sentence can be found that: "The ruling thoughts of any period are nothing but the thoughts of the ruling class." There are several aspects should be paid attention. Firstly, this proposition refers to the classical society which both exists the ruling class and the ruled class. Due to the complete occupation of the productive materials in the aspects of economy, politics and spirits, the ruling class can easily organize the theorists to compile their own thoughts which can maintain social stability. However, this is just a judgment of fact, which conforms to the reality of classical society history, but, it is not a judgment of value, that means this proposition should not be praised and advocated. If the monism of the ruling thought has been promoted, the only result should be the cultural autocracy which is an exploitation of

individuals' cultural rights and a deception combined with false public interests. In contemporary world, democracy has been a trend of the development orientation, and with the help of the technology, all information can be transferred swiftly and rapidly, in this condition, all the behaviors to positive affirm the ruling class thoughts should be nothing but the remnants of feudalism. In the modern society, the conception of the ruling thought should be changed, it must represent the interests of all the individuals not only the main classes or stratum and be compatible with all the reasonable ideals, and the essence of these thoughts should be common value. This means to confirm the leading role of Marxism theory cannot rely on the forcible indoctrination but the value of truth and the strength of justice. The experience of the failure of Soviet regime should be learned, the main reason of its collapse is the occupation of the property, power, and truth by the minority. The ideology of Soviet has already been separated from the will of its nation before the regime dissolution, and the division and conflict of the ideology is the precursor of the regime perdition.

Beside the three propositions, there are also many other points which are worthy to be reconsidered. For example, Marx said: "The character of communism is not to eliminate the general ownership but the ownership of capitalist." Many researchers complain that to submit the property of one's own by the way of hard work is not justice. However, they have made some mistake in this sentence. To eliminate the capital ownership doesn't equal to eliminate the private property.

2. COMPARE WITH ROUSSEAU

2.1 Theory of Nation

The theory of nation and country is an important part of the political theory. The differences and the most distinctive aspect of Rousseau's theory is his proposition which opposes to explain the origin of the country and law by simply violence theory. He says: "The relationship of the slavery is formed by the interdependence and the need for each other, so one cannot be slaved by another before he cannot live without the person who wants to enslave him." (Rousseau, 1962, p.108) The theory of social contract is not a scientific worldview or history view, however, the rational elements exist it is the view that a special social relation is the premise of the slavery. Under a natural state, all men are free and equal and isolate, without any connection with the society. With the development of the private ownership, the inequality of human nature has been substituted for the inequality of property, and the further development of the inequality of property can give rise to the huge gap between the rich and poor. In order to reconcile the conflicts between the rich and the poor, law and country have come into being. Just like Rousseau has said: "Society and law can

give new bondage to the weak and give new power to the rich, they eliminate the freedom of potential permanently and make sure the freedom cannot be restored, they also permanently confirm the law which can protect the private property and unequal right.” (Rousseau, 1962, p.128) Rousseau does not limit himself with the view of politics; he tries to understand the origin of the state through the view of social economy and the material life status. He has discovered that the rich need more protects by law than the poor, the products of the country to do more good to the rich than to the poor. In a sense, Rousseau has discerned that country is the product of the class antagonism and a new method controlled by the ruling class to oppress and exploit the oppressed class, however, he still explain the country with the theory of social contract, he does not find out the true objective foundation of the state origin.

The same as Rousseau, Marx discusses the term of state through the view of social economic relation and life style, but what differences are the real country origin Marx has revealed is based on the distinction of the state and the civil society which has been proposed by Hegel. Marx objects to Hegel’s method to illustrate the difference between civil society and state from the aspects of ethics spirit. Marx takes the civil society and the state as the different field of the human life, civil society is the material field and the economic foundation of the human life; the state is the political field in the human life which has been determined by the civil society. Marx further points out that both civil society and state are the products of the development of private ownership and classes, in the late primitive society, with the development of the productivity and distribution, the private ownership and the classes come into being, the private interests and the general interests gradually split and opposite to each other, in order to coordinate the social contradiction, there need a public organization which can represent the interests of the whole society, and the name of this organization is state. From the external form, state can reflect all individuals’ interests; however, it substantially contains various conflictions between different classes and stratum (Marx, 1995, p.245). State as an imaginary community is based on the distribution, and to meet both the needs of class ruling and social management.

Rousseau only proposes the hypothesis about the state origin which is based on the philosophy theory of social contract; however, Marx tries to propose the scientific theory of state origin on the basis of archaeological results, scientific facts, and new historical materialism. Marx’s thoughts of state origin go beyond the theory of confliction and integration; it is a unity of the theories about conflicts and integration.

2.2 State Function

Rousseau’s first work is to strictly distinguish the conception of “state” and “government”; he proposes

that the two organizations have different functions and meanings. He considers the state is representations of the public will, however, government is mediation between the public and the sovereign and it is responsible for enforcing the law, maintaining the social order, and political freedom. The state exists for itself but government exists for the sovereign. So Rousseau argues that: “the person who has the administrative power is not people’s master but people’s servants, they can be authorized or recalled as long as the people want to.” (Rousseau,1998, p.88) Rousseau believes the aim of the government is to rationally use the power to benefit all nations otherwise, the government is illegal. But at the same time the government community should has the character of independence and flexibility, should has some quality which is radically different form the state community, and can encourage all the members to cooperate to complete government’s goal. In *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Marx has pointed out the same view that we should distinguish the government and the state, because “the government and the state are parallel, but the government is a false state. It is just a formalism of state, and in this organization, people’s interests and the private interests come into conflict.” (Marx, 1995, p.342)

Next, Rousseau criticizes the oppression and enslavement in the feudal society, the human alienation from the society and the state and provides an ideal solution which is to establish a democratic republic state on the basis of the true contract theories. According to Rousseau, the fundamental characteristic of the state is its possession of sovereign, it cannot be divided and it is more important than the individual. The main duty of a state is to protect the benefits of its members’; its main functions are legislation, nomination, and supervision. The state can limit, change or recall the power it has authorized to the government at any time. However, the problem is Rousseau has not radically distinguished the state from civil society, in his view; the civil society is a political society or a political country which is opposed to the natural status. That’s why Rousseau’s theories about the state and the government functions are lack of contexts.

Marx does not analyze the term of state and its functions like Rousseau in aspects of abstraction. Marx uses the method of new materialism and proposes duality theories of the state functions which have radically surpassed Rousseau’s theories about the state functions. According to the view of class analysis, Marx has discerned the state functions of class ruling and oppression. He points out that the general interest of the state has represented is a kind of special interest which is covered by the illusion of general interests, it is the interests of the ruling class and it determined the classic nature of a state. Marx discovers that no matter the initial stage of a state that generates with the social

development or a primary stage which generated after the new class overcomes the old class, objectively, the state is influenced by different classes and stratum's will which determines that the state must meet the different needs from different classes and protect their basic profits. This means a state does not only has the function of oppression, but also has the function of reconciliation of the social contradictions, and the latter is the basis of the former. "The political ruling is based on the social functions of a state, and political ruling can only exist in the progress of implementing social functions." (Marx, 1995, p.341) So Marx concludes that a state has dual functions, first is the tool of class ruling and class oppression, the second is the tool to coordinate different needs and avoid the disillusion of the country.

2.3 State's Development and Its Perish

Doesn't like the classic politician who takes the government as a primary consideration, Rousseau believes the government is a derived products of the sovereignty and an intermediary between the individuals and the sovereign. Rousseau's conception of government has the same meaning to the conception of modern state. He believes the fewer functions the government has the better life the individuals can obtain. This means more development of the democracy, the more strict and perfect the social control on the state, so that the state can only represent the will of all the individuals and cannot pursue its own profits.

Marx has inherited Rousseau's basic principles about the government and state and surpassed the limitations of Rousseau's political liberation, proposed the liberation of all human beings, because Marx believes with the development of productivity, the government and the state will perish, "in order to overcome the conflicts between the public interests and the private interests, the state must eliminate itself." (Marx, 1995, p.269) Marx has explicitly pointed out that the laboring class should create a new association in which there were no classes and classes' conflictions in the progress of the social development to substitute for the sovereign in the old civil society. What Marx wants to cancel is not the general state; it only refers to the state which has the characteristics of the class ruling and class oppressions. In Marx's view, through the proletariat revolution, the government which is used for oppression will be eliminated; the rational functions of the old regime should be inherited by the new class. When the class ruling has been canceled, the political state will also not exist anymore, so the object of the revolution is not to eradicate the state itself, but the violent organizations.

It is important that when we distinguish government from the state, we should not focus all the attentions to their theories, we must pay attention to the background of these theories; otherwise, our research cannot grasp both the true value and the objective history. Rousseau lives in the period of late feudal autocracy and early capitalism,

the new social economic relations are in the embryonic state. That is why the Rousseau's social contrasts can be manifested as "a rational state" in his social practices. However, Marx lives in a period of free competition of capitalist; he clearly discerns that the bourgeoisie thinkers including Rousseau who proposes the "equal requirements" and the "rational state" are nothing but the equality and freedom of commodities and their owners, what they really want is just capitalist democracy republic.

2.4 Theory of Democracy

Democracy is the unremitting pursuance of the human life, and it is the most important part of Rousseau's political theory. Marx's democracy theory of the proletariat and scientific socialism has something in common with Rousseau's bourgeoisie democracy, but there is still some significant difference between them. In order to reflect the public will, to guarantee individual freedom and equality, Rousseau proposes a public sovereignty with revolution. He believes the sovereignty of the nation and the people are two aspects of the same thing, the total will of the society must be the public will of all the individuals. Based on this promise, Rousseau proposes four principles. The first is the untransferable of the sovereign, because what can be changed is the power, not the sovereignty which represents the entire nation's will. The second is the indivisible of the sovereign, because the division of the sovereigns is closely connected to the function of the law and the position of the individual. Rousseau resolutely denies the theories of the separation of powers. He argues that the separation of the three powers is just misunderstood the relation between the nation and the government. They consider the product which has been derived from the sovereigns as the element which consists of it. The third is the un-represent of the sovereigns which means Rousseau does not agree the representative system. Senators cannot exercise legislative power on behalf of the nation; they just can represent the individuals to exercise the administrative power. The fourth is the supreme of the sovereigns. Rousseau believes the sovereigns are constructed under the public will, which can formulate or abolish the law. In *Social Contract Theory*, Rousseau endows the law a unique meaning, he argues the legislative power must belong to the entire nation and the legislator must have a high quality of morality. However the terms of the public will, sovereign, and law have not been clearly defined in Rousseau's works. So many of his ideas have been adopted by the government and deduct into new political thoughts to limit other's political rights such as the period of Jacobins' dictatorship.

Marx has made some changes to basics of Rousseau's political theories, and the method he uses most frequently is his historical materialism. Through this method, Marx discovers that the "public will" of each individual in the classical society is impossible, to grasp and exercise the

right by the entire individual in a nation is impossible neither, the “public will” of Rousseau can only represent the will of the capitalist. After criticizing the limitations of all the capitalist political theorist, Marx proposes another kind of democracy named proletarian democracy. Marx argues that the liberation of the political is not the liberation of the humanity, the capitalist democracy is not a true democracy, because all the rights and powers they give to the working class, peasants class or other individuals are all with a limitation purpose, the capitalist try to maintain their exploitation position. Marx believes that the true democracy constructed after the proletariat revolution can accelerate the development of the political society, and the political country will be vanished at last. Because the proletariat democracy is also a product in the transitory stage of the social development, it will evolve and be criticized in the long run.

Another comparative field of Rousseau and Marx worthy to analysis is the theory of public servant. Rousseau illustrates that the will of the sovereign must be the will of the public, and the sovereign will has the absolute authority to decide all the public affairs. Rousseau has made a comparison between the term “public will” and the term “people’s will”. He explains that the “public will” emphasizes on the interests of the public, however, the “people’s will” emphasizes on the profit of the private individuals. Only the “public will” can guarantee the nomad development of the society, and protect the freedom and the equality of the individual. So to submit to the “public will” the individuals are submitting to their own will at the same time. In *civil war in France*, Marx provides a new formation of the servant named commune, which is the government of the proletariat, and a product of the struggle between the producer and the occupant. Marx illustrates that the commune is a new form of the democratic county, which represents and protects the interests of the working class; the country and the office members are the servants of the whole people. It is obviously that Marx’s democracy theory has a strong influenced by the

Rousseau’s. However, all the illustrations of Rousseau are in the limitation of the bourgeois revolution, and it can be concluded as a liberation of politics which has been surpassed by Marx’s theory of the economy and humanity liberation.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the definition and illustration of the national sovereign are the most meaningful part in Rousseau’s political theory, Marx has inherited and criticized Rousseau’s limitation and created a political theory with more extensive, historical, practical basis. In Marx view, to discuss the political issues without considering the individual’s social practices is impossible to discover the essence of the political phenomenon. However Rousseau has analyzed these questions only in the pure theoretic way, which made him sink into the dilemma of the capitalist limitation.

REFERENCES

- Colletti, L. (1972). *From Rousseau to Lenin*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.
- Marx. (1995). *Capital*. Beijing, China: People’s Publishing Press.
- Marx. (1995). *Communist manifesto*. Beijing, China: People’s Publishing Press.
- Marx. (1995). *The French class struggle from 1848 to 1850*. Beijing, China: People’s Publishing Press.
- Marx’s *Collected Work (Vol.1)*. (1995). Beijing, China: People Press.
- Marx’s *Selected Work. (Vol.2)*. (1995). Beijing, China: People Press.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1962). *Discourse on the origin of inequality*. Beijing, China: Commercial Press.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1998). *On social contrats*. Wordsworth Editions Ltd.
- WoErpei, D. (1993). *Rousseau and Marx*. China: Chongqing Press.