

# Commonality and Differences: Comparison on Community Thoughts of Marx and Whitehead

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**Abstract:** Based on the real world, Marx and Whitehead respectively constructed the social community reflecting the historical materialism and the universal community concerning the overall existence of nature. Because they are the expression forms of holistic dialectics, theory of organism and process relationship thinking, they have many commonalities. Under the principle of new subjectivity, they show the value dimension of seeking harmonious coexistence and ecological justice. According to their own philosophies and theoretical purport, Marx's philosophy of changing the world appeals to realistic criticism, while Whitehead's philosophy of explaining the world emphasizes system reconstruction. Around the goal of harmony and civilization of realizing real and peaceful community, there are many differences in their community category in constituent elements, ultimate form and realization path that cannot be ignored.

In China, "The community of human and natural life" and "the community of human destiny" are the contemporary elucidation and expression of the Marxist thought of community, so it is necessary for us to re-explore Marx's thought of community, and by comparing it with other ideological resources, broaden the theoretical horizon. Whitehead reconstructs organic cosmology under holism in a constructive post-modern way of process-relation thinking, and community constitutes the core category of his natural philosophy. Thus, the concept of Whitehead community has reference significance to understand Marx's thought of community. As a matter of fact, Marx and Whitehead, who saved the dialectics, did have the commonality in many dimensions in the thought of community contained in their philosophies, such as the problem of the progress of civilization, the overall view based on the unity of nature and history, or the dialectics of totality. Marx's social community emphasizes the practice or historical dialectics including natural dialectics, while Whitehead's cosmic community highlights the natural dialectics that includes social dialectics. A comparative study of the both will not only help to deepen the understanding of their respective philosophies, but also provide theoretical resources for reference for the interpretation of the concept of community in the new era.

Therefore, we shall discuss as followings issues: (1) The Attribution of Marx and Whitehead's Thought of Community: Social Civilization and Cosmic Civilization; (2) The Connection between Marx and Whitehead's Thought of Community: The Methodological Correspondence between the Standpoint of Organic Theory and the Holistic Dialectics; (3) Differences between Marx's and Whitehead's Community Thoughts: Realistic Criticism and Conceptual Critique.

We believe that Comparative studies of the thoughts of Marx and whitehead community will helps to clarify the concept, promote the fusion and eco-civilization construction. And more importantly, facing humanity's common crisis of modernity, and facing the conflict between man and nature and survival challenge, it is necessary to promote the deep dialogue on the community between the two great philosophers who have deeply criticized modernity.

**Key words:** Marx; Whitehead; community; theory of organism; holistic dialectics; cosmology; eco-civilization

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### **Part 1. The Attribution of Marx and Whitehead's Thought of Community: Social Civilization and Cosmic Civilization**

"Community" is the core category of Marx's new materialism and Whitehead's new organic cosmology. Because the question that Marx's philosophy examines and answers emphatically is the possibility of human liberation, it must examine the form, structure and operation mechanism of the organic community in which people live. Whitehead's philosophy sees the world and the whole universe as the research object, regards the universe as a large community composed by many small communities such as "combination" and "community", and tries to reveal the cosmic order in which the community forms, evolves and moves towards harmony. That is to say, the object of their philosophical researches, the way of questioning and the purview of their theory determine the direction of their community thought, that is, the realization of social civilization and cosmic civilization.

Marx focused on the liberation and freedom of human beings and discussed how to move from "illusory community" to "real community".

Carl Marx distinguished three kinds of communities, namely, (1) Natural Community in traditional society; (2) Illusory Community in modern society; (3) Real Community in the future society. He thinks that any individual existence and development can not get rid of his community. However, in the class society, the community is only tool or measure for class dominating, so with the class extinct, forming the community of free individuals, contradictions between human beings and nature, man and man, as well as individual and species can arrive at a solution. Individuals getting freedom and whole development has to be in the real community in which the public ownership is set up and sublimate human alienation.

Whitehead, on the other hand, devoted himself to universal peace and civilization, trying to find and establish the harmonious order of the universal community.

In the philosophy of organism, Whitehead points out, organism or living body rather than substance constitutes the universe; the organism is a community constituted by actual things, and actual thing is a complex what is generated by actual occasions concrescence. From Whitehead, the conception of community is his core factor for interpreting the world and the universe. The universe is the biggest community that is formed by numerous communities. The organic characteristic of

the universe is realized by community. For realizing cosmic civilization, Whitehead investigated the issue of social civilization, moreover, he emphasized when any member in social community all can enjoy adventures, arts, truth, beauty and peace, then the society would be civilized society.

## **Part 2. The Connection between Marx and Whitehead's Thought of Community: The Methodological Correspondence between the Standpoint of Organic Theory and the Holistic Dialectics**

Marx and Whitehead based on the position of holism of organism, follow the dialectics of totality, beyond the previous dualism of metaphysics of substance, and use this kind thinking of process, connection, dynamic, to understand whole world and universe. Therefore, their character of theory lies in their ideas of community that constitutes the convergence of philosophy of Marx and Whitehead on the methodology.

### **(1) Extensive unity: the principle of integrity demonstrated by "union" and "nexus"**

In Marx's eyes, the whole world is a unity, and man is an integral existence interconnected with nature and society. In Whitehead's view, the universe is not an abstract thing that exists in isolation, but a complex organic wholeness of "nexus" from concrescence of many actual occasions.

Undoubtedly, Marx and Whitehead's community contains the principle of totality.

**(2) The combination of processes: the process thinking embodied in "world history" and "events"** Both Marx and Whitehead believe that the community is not a constant existence, but a gradual process of development. Marx connected the community with the social modes, which reflected the progress of the social community facing the world history. Whitehead, on the other hand, explains the dynamic change process of the cosmic community based on the flow of events from the perspective of process ontology.

### **(3) The growing organism: the principle of the inherent relationship implied by universal connection and "prehension"**

Marx emphasized to understand the world and study problems with the vision of universal connection and development. His philosophy is the philosophy of relation. Whitehead insists on the relation realism, which believes that relation lies in the dynamic generation process of events. Both of them regard the world and the universe as an organic whole, and their community is one based on internal relations.

### **(4) The community of logical integration: the "by-product" of historical materialism and the conceptual support of organic cosmology**

Marx's thought of community was formed in the study of the development of human society and permeated in the establishment process of historical materialism. In this regard, some scholars described the community as the "by-product" of Marx's historical materialism, which vividly illustrated the agreement between the community and historical materialism. But the thought of community is not just a "by-product". As the theoretical result of Marx's exploration of the law of social development, it comes into being in harmony with historical materialism and is rooted in historical materialism. In the civil society community, individuals originally as classes become non-free class members, together with the monetary and capital communities, forming the false community form of the bourgeois state. The change of the form of community is a textual object placed by Marx in the development process of world history. Marx not only saw the decisive role of ownership in the formation and change of the community, but also saw that the community was the necessary condition for the transformation of historical materialism from the abstract concept to

the concrete practice.

Whitehead, based on the categories of system, process, creative progress into novelty, and individual unity of experience, realizes the purpose of organic philosophy to express "the cosmology of inner consistency".

### **(5) Community of Methodological Congruence: The Sublation Path of Total Dialectics and the Expression Form of Process-Relationship Thinking**

Marx opposed the atomized individual and the isolated static metaphysical method, and his social community revealed the elements that constituted the social totality and the relations among them by holism and organism. The society as a wholeness is not a simple collection of individuals, but a community of people and social relations. The relationship between people in the society as a wholeness generates the essence of people, and individual practice promotes the development of the society as a wholeness.

Whitehead based on process-relationship principle to express the wholeness of prehension, feeling each other intrinsic relations between the actual entity and other actual existence with a series of new concepts, emphasized the development of organic universe community and dynamic flow, and the social civilization as a link in the universe civilization, so the overall view or dialectics of totality is the dialectics of nature contained the social dialectics.

The philosophies of Marx and Whitehead are based on the community, which are in line with the turn of modern western philosophy from entity to body. they carry the holism, total dialectics and process-relation thinking mode based on the subjective perceptual practice, so surpass the traditional western metaphysics which takes the entity and its attributes as the cognitive path, as well as the direct objective representation thinking and isolated, closed and static epistemological defects brought by the modes of thinking such as reductionism, binary opposition and mechanism.

### **Part 3. Differences between Marx's and Whitehead's Community Thoughts: Realistic Criticism and Conceptual Critique**

The commonality of Marx and Whitehead's community thoughts makes them possible to compare the two. However, due to the differences of the two people's philosophy, their community thoughts have undeniable differences, especially in the theoretical ways and the focus of the categories. Marx's philosophy takes changing the world as its purpose, pays attention to the reality, examines the structural elements and functions of the social community based on realistic human beings and production practice in the field of social history, reveals the historical forms and characteristics of the community, with a view to answering the trend of human civilization.

While Whitehead highlights the philosophical mission of the world and regards the goal of philosophy as a system of thinking based on the interpretation and revision of concepts. He learned from the whole universe as the object of study to reconstruct the cosmology, took actual entities as the ultimate atomic realities and subjects, analyzed their feelings and prehension of empirical activities, and explored the formal structure of the cosmic community and the secrets of the universe civilization in the path of Concrecence.

The revelation of these differences as followings helped to promote the in-depth dialogue between Marx and Whitehead on community issues.

(1) Realistic Man and Actual Entity: The Internal Elements of the Community between Marx and Whitehead;

(2) Practice and Experience: A Logical Clue to the Development of Marx and Whitehead Community;

(3) Ideal Society and Ideal Universe: The Ultimate Form of Marx and Whitehead Community Goals;

(4) Unification of Subject and Object and Subjectivity: The Principle of Interpretation of the Relationship from the Perspective of Marx and Whitehead's Community;

(5) Realistic Revolution and Adventure of Ideas: The Approaches to the Realization of the Community Ideals of Marx and Whitehead.

In a word, as the theoretical result of Marx's exploration of the law of social development, community is born in harmony with historical materialism and social organism theory. As a unique perspective of Whitehead's metaphysical system, community provides support for elucidating the core concept of organic cosmology. Marx's social community takes human liberation as its fundamental value standpoint, which is the expression form of his holistic dialectics. Whitehead emphasized that the existence should be understood in terms of the community which exists and comes into being in it, but not in the abstract (otherwise it is the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness"), which is the key point to grasp his philosophy of organism and thought of process relation. It can be said that some of the consistency of Marx and Whitehead's philosophy is reflected in the commonality of their thought of community, therefore, the thought of community is a necessary dimension to study the commonality of their philosophy. As the latest theoretical achievements of the sinicization of Marxism, "the community of man and nature" and "the community of human destiny" are the inheritance, development and contemporary elucidation of Marx's thought of community. The organic holism contained in Whitehead's thought of community reveals the inner relationship of co-existence and co-prosperity of man, nature and society in a larger community from the metaphysical level, which has reference value for the profound understanding of the two community ideas.

Comparative study of the thoughts of Marx and whitehead community not only helps to clarify the concept, promote the fusion and eco-civilization construction. And more importantly, in the face of humanity's common crisis of modernity, facing the conflict between man and nature and survival challenge, it is necessary to promote the deep dialogue on the community between the two great philosophers who have deeply criticized modernity.