

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL ISSUES IN CHINESE MARXISM: KEY IDEAS AND CONCEPTS

QUESTÕES FILOSÓFICAS E ANTROPOLÓGICAS NO MARXISMO CHINÊS: IDEIAS E CONCEITOS CHAVE

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Abstract: In the article, on the basis of a detailed study of the ideas of modern Chinese philosophers, a systematic examination of the features of the philosophical and anthropological discourse within the framework of Chineseized Marxism is carried out. Conceptually, for the realization of the set goals and objectives, the work of such theorists and thinkers of Chineseized Marxism as Mao Zedong, Li Jiehou, Li Dazhao, Qu Qiubo are taken into account, and two key philosophical and anthropological questions are also highlighted: the essence of human nature and the meaning of human existence. The opinion is substantiated that modern Chinese thinkers, seeing a dichotomy in human nature - social and natural - focus their attention on the social component, emphasizing that it is relations in society that form the basis of any human activity. It is revealed that in thinking about the nature of man, Chinese thinkers took into account not only the work of K. Marx, but also I. Kant. Considering and thinking about the meaning of human existence, the opinion is proven that in Chinese Marxism, as well as in Soviet Marxism, there is a concept of a "new man" who will live exclusively on the principles and principles of Marxist philosophy. It is proved that the importance of this concept for Chinese Marxism is due to the solution of the question of the role and significance of man in history. It was found that although the emphasis is on the social purpose of human life, we can still find considerations about the existential aspect within the framework of Chineseized Marxism, which is manifested in living for the sake of self-improvement and other people.

Keywords: Chinese Marxism. Man. Human Life. "New Man". Mao Zedong. Philosophical Anthropology.

Resumo: No artigo, com base em um estudo detalhado das ideias dos filósofos chineses modernos, é realizado um exame sistemático das características do discurso filosófico e antropológico no quadro do marxismo chinês. Conceitualmente, para a realização das metas e

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objetivos traçados, são levados em consideração os trabalhos de teóricos e pensadores do marxismo chinês como Mao Zedong, Li Jiehou, Li Dazhao, Qu Qiubo, e duas questões filosóficas e antropológicas fundamentais também são destacadas: a essência da natureza humana e o significado da existência humana. É fundamentada a opinião de que os pensadores chineses modernos, vendo uma dicotomia na natureza humana - social e natural - concentram sua atenção no componente social, enfatizando que são as relações em sociedade que formam a base de qualquer atividade humana. É revelado que, ao pensar sobre a natureza do homem, os pensadores chineses levaram em consideração não apenas a obra de K. Marx, mas também I. Kant. Considerando e pensando no significado da existência humana, é comprovada a opinião de que no marxismo chinês, assim como no marxismo soviético, existe o conceito de um "homem novo" que viverá exclusivamente dos princípios e princípios da filosofia marxista. Está provado que a importância desse conceito para o marxismo chinês se deve à solução da questão do papel e significado do homem na história. Constatou-se que embora a ênfase esteja na finalidade social da vida humana, ainda podemos encontrar considerações sobre o aspecto existencial no âmbito do marxismo chinesizado, que se manifesta em viver em prol do autoaperfeiçoamento e dos outros.

Palavras-chave: Marxismo Chino. Hombre. Vida Humana. "Hombre Nuevo". Mao Zedong. Antropología Filosófica.

1. Introduction

Reflections on the understanding of human nature, the explanation of its key existential, as well as the meaning of existence have always been the focus of philosophical discourse. Eastern philosophizing, in particular Chinese philosophy, is no exception to this. This unique tradition has traveled a long historical path, remaining static in key moments, and dynamically developing, which is especially visible in its modern stage of functioning – Chinese Marxism.

Chineseized Marxism is to use Marxism to solve China's problems and transform China's rich practical experience into theory and combine it with Chinese history and Chinese traditional culture. This can be traced in the context of the disclosure of philosophical and anthropological problems, because now economic problems for China have receded into the background, giving way to moral and spiritual ones. The development of society creates conditions for the development of the individual, and on the contrary, the improvement of a person is a necessary condition for social progress, taking into account this relationship, a specific system of values is created, in which the development of a person is the goal, and the development of society is a means. Therefore, the problem of modernization should be considered in relation to the human problem.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the presented research were the works of theorists and thinkers of Chineseized Marxism (Mao Tse-tung, Li Ta-chao, Li Zhehou,

Qu Qiubai), as well as the work of Ukrainian (Y. Sobolievskyi, G. Vdovychenko), European and American (A Chan, N. Knight, M. Meisner, D. Munro, D. Rogacz) and Eastern (Woei Lien Chong, Xiaoyun Jiang, Shaoxing Wang, Tieh Wang) researchers. However, we cannot find in them a systematic presentation of the features of the philosophical and anthropological discourse in Chinese Marxism. Therefore, the goal was to identify key philosophical and anthropological problems within the framework of Chinese Marxism and reveal their solutions.

Taking into account the developments and research on this topic, in our opinion, it will be conceptual to single out the following problems:

- 1) the essence of human nature;
 - 2) the meaning of human existence;
- Let's consider each of them in more detail.

2. Results and Discussion

The essence of human nature: nature vs society

First of all, it should be noted that the key basis for the understanding of human nature in Marxism was K. Marx's classic statement about the human essence (German: Wesen; Chinese: penhsing or penchih), which we can see in his "Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach": «The essence of a person is not an abstraction that resides in each individual, but it is a set of social relations». This provision means that the forms of ownership of the means of production and the level of technology of one or another historical period inevitably introduce a person into various kinds of dynamic social relations. We can say that the human essence changes because from one historical period to another both the types of social relations in which people are and the nature of their production activities change.

It should be noted that in Marx's position there is an implicit distinction between the social nature of man (his true nature), which is subject to change, and the animal nature, which encompasses other activities in which he directly participates. However, the work of key thinkers in modern China focuses almost exclusively on the social nature of man, prone to change, and ignoring biological phenomena is supported by the convergence of some elements of Marxism and Confucianism on the question of the split self.

Therefore, we can determine that the most important feature of the Maoist approach to the problem of the essence of man is its emphasis on huge differences in the social environment and, therefore, in the social nature of even people of the same class. In

other words, certain transformations give the quality of uniqueness to each object (if we speak in terms of natural law), and this is true for both people and inanimate objects. As Mao Zedong emphasized: «Each form of movement contains its own special contradiction. This specific contradiction constitutes that special essence that distinguishes one thing from another...Thus, it can be seen that when studying the characteristics of various kinds of contradictions...we must not be subjective and arbitrary, but must analyze it concretely. Without specific analysis, there can be knowledge of the specifics of any contradiction»¹. The nature of individuals is subject to this law. Therefore, as the founder of Maoism correctly stated: "even today we must be aware of the difference between specific people: the concept of a person is devoid of content; it lacks the specificity of male and female, adult and child, Chinese and foreigner, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary."²

Accordingly, the social nature of man belongs to mental phenomena in China; it encompasses all mental activity, both affective and cognitive. Often the content of social nature is reduced to value beliefs and guidelines that fall under the concept of "thinking", and in this case it is said that social nature (class nature) also controls other psychological phenomena³. The tendency of Maoism is that the connection between the social nature of man (thought) and the economic basis (so essential in the Marxist definition of social relations that constitute the essence of man) is sometimes vague, sometimes non-existent and never so necessarily connected, as in the classical understanding of Marxism. This is caused by three factors:

- «First, in official political statements, the emergence of a certain type of thinking is not necessarily connected to any specific social relations, and, moreover, extended participation in social relations is not always mandatory. For example, a bourgeois intellectual can acquire a proletarian nature (labor mind) by working with the peasants, and in some cases it is enough for him to spend a short period of a year with them;
- Second, in the case of workers, political education alone (without changing social relations) is enough to cause a change in social nature (that is, a change in thinking and class);
- Thirdly, a distinction should be made between "class origin" and "class contagion". The latter refers to the constant susceptibility of all persons to some thoughts

¹ Mao Tse-tung (1964). On Contradiction. Peking: Foreign Language Press, p. 27.

² Mao Tse-tung (1969). Speech in Hangchow on 21 December 1965, quoted in "*Mao Tse-tung tui wen-ko chih-shih hui-pien*" (Collection of Mao Tse-tung's Directives during the Cultural Revolution), Tsu-kuo (China Monthly) (Hong Kong), No. 66 (1 September 1969), p. 42.

³ Wang, T. (1959). Ch'ing-nien ying-kai tsen-yang fa-chan ko-hsing? (How should young people develop their personalities?). Peking: Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien ch'u-pan she, p. 29.

of another class»⁴.

Therefore, it is quite logical that one of the leading philosophers of the second half of the 20th century. Li Jiehoun (李泽厚; 1930-2021) began to define the nature of human activity in comparison with determinism on the one hand and voluntarism on the other. In the 1980s, Lee came up with a philosophical anthropology (his "theory of subjectivity" or "practice") that moves between two poles: on the one hand, humanity differs from animals in its ability to shape its habitat into a purposeful way that means that subjectivity is real if humanity can really control its destiny to a large extent. On the other hand, human control over nature is subject to certain limitations, which are largely determined by the level of technology and social organization in a particular society at a certain time, which explains the widespread appeal of Maoist voluntarism in China by maintaining faith in the transformative power of human will without aid of science and technology⁵.

Because of this, the Kantian concept of "thing-in-itself" poses a serious challenge to the project of "(anthropological-)historical ontology", which was synonymous with the name of Li Jiehoun. Lee's radical reinterpretation of Kant's critical philosophy, which places the conditions of the possibility of knowledge and experience in historical and social evolution and thus seeks to allow for a form of human self-determination, brings us face to face with the close connection between the epistemological/ontological and normative dimensions of the concept things in themselves. Lee's anthropological ontology, the basis of his approach to modernity, is the basis of his efforts to transform Kant's dualistic theory of subjectivity into a monistic, materialist theory of subjectivity. His theory is original and atypical of Chinese Marxist debates. Therefore, it is not surprising that a recent study of Chinese Marxism does not say anything concrete about Hegel's role in Chinese Marxism⁶.

Therefore, in summary, we can say that when considering the issue of the essence of human nature, modern Chinese thinkers basically take into account the work of both Marx and I. Kant, while emphasizing the social component of the individual.

The meaning of an individual's being: between social and existential

At the same time, reflections on the nature of a person are necessarily connected with reasoning about the meaning of his existence. One of the results of the appeal to

⁴ Munro, D.J. (1971). The Malleability of Man in Chinese Marxism, *China Quarterly*, No. 48 (October-December), pp. 613-614.

⁵ Chong, W. L. (1999). Combining Marx with Kant: The Philosophical Anthropology of Li Zehou, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 49, No. 2, "Subjectivity" 主體性: Li Zehou and His Critical Analysis of Chinese Thought (Apr., 1999), p. 122.

⁶ Chan, A. (2003). *On Chinese Marxism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury

traditional spiritual culture and at the same time a new stage of Chineseization of Marxism is the concept of "Man is the basis". Human liberation is the fundamental task and ultimate goal of Marx's philosophy. As Chinese scientists write, "in the end, the goal of socialist reform is the liberation of man. The direct goal is the liberation and development of creative forces, and the ultimate goal is to stimulate the free and comprehensive development of a person. Human development means the modernization of a person, that is, the transformation of a simple person into a "new" one that meets the requirements of the time and is able to use the achievements of modern human civilization. Without an advanced social system, without the general progress of society, there was no question of comprehensive development of human freedom."⁷ .

Accordingly, forming the idea of a "new man" in Marxism (both Soviet and Chinese), the problem of changeable and fluid in human existence arises. After all, it was precisely the idea of the changeability of human nature both in China and in the Soviet Union that ultimately led to the emergence of a new man, which becomes educationally effective as the principle of malleability (k'o-suhsing) of human nature.) A change of vocabulary is appropriate here. The term "mutability" refers to the human capacity to change in response to social and natural forces, as described by Marx and Engels. According to Soviet and Chinese analysis, this capacity for change is purposefully channeled by educators and propagandists to social ends; in this case, it is more appropriate to call it "pliability" or "plasticity". In any case, in both countries it meant a tendency to underestimate the static elements in Marx's view of human nature and to emphasize changeability»⁸.

In this context of philosophical and anthropological reflection, Chineseized and Soviet Marxism are particularly close. In particular, one of the leading Soviet thinkers, A. Deborin, notes the following in one of his works: "The essence of society at its current stage (under the prevailing conditions of the working class) is reduced to the purposeful and systematic construction of socialism, in the sense of the development of productive forces, which aim to conquer nature by man, and in the sense of changing the nature of people, we are faced with the need to create a new man... All our institutions must be adapted to "shape" the characters of people in the corresponding communist spirit, the communist worldview and its corresponding concepts must be approved and ideas...A new

⁷ Wang Shaoxing, Jiang Xiaoyun. Socialism with Chinese characteristics. Monthly information-analytical journal «*Observer*», 2003, no. 11. http://www.rau.su/observer/N11_2003/11_12.htm

⁸ Munro, D.J. (1971). The Malleability of Man in Chinese Marxism, *China Quarterly*, No. 48 (October-December), p. 612.

culture based on atheism, materialism and communism can only be built by overcoming and reworking the old culture—the whole sum of knowledge and skills we inherited from the bourgeois system...The cultural revolution is inextricably linked with the industrial - a technical revolution, which is part of a cultural revolution, perceived in the broadest sense of the word. As technological progress advances, we will, of course, rise in the cultural sense as well. The new socialist technology will create the material conditions for the development of a new psychological type, a new person who will be alien to all the vices inherent in the person of the capitalist era⁹.

As a result, in the Ukrainian SSR researches of M. Khvylovy gained special importance in the understanding of the "new man". As G. Vdovichenko emphasizes: "Philosophical and anthropological problems are important for the philosopher's two cycles of works "Quo Vadis" and "Thoughts Against the Current" (1925). It is in these works that the philosophical anthropology of the national thinker is represented by such a key concept as "public figure". Incidentally, this can also be traced in the further development of Ukrainian Soviet philosophy, in particular, in the context of the scientific works of V. Shinkaruk ("The role of artistic culture in the formation of a new person", 1971) and V. Kutsenko "The formation of a new person" (round table "Questions of philosophy" (1975)) etc.¹⁰.

It should also be noted that the formation and development of the concept of the "new man" is closely related to the question of the role of the individual in history, because the very existence of a new type of man will enable the implementation and implementation of the key principles and ideas of Chinese Marxism.

In general, in both types of Marxism (both Soviet and Chinese) we see attempts to understand the role of the individual in history. First of all, it must be emphasized that each individual living in society pursues his own specific values and, guided by them, acts in such a way as to achieve their realization. And although these goals and actions are so diverse, different and contradictory that it is impossible to take them all into account, nevertheless, behind this mass of individual goals and actions lies some common essence.

So, both Chinese and Soviet Marxism asserted that within one specific historical society, people are included, regardless of their will and desire, in a peculiar system of material relations that constituted their social existence. As a result, they are connected in a

⁹ Деборин, А. (1927). Марксизм и культура, *Революция и культура*, №1, с. 14

¹⁰ Rudenko, S. V. & Turenko, V. E. (2019). Formation and development of the philosophical anthropology studies in Soviet Ukraine, *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research*, №16, с.149.

certain way for each formation with each other and with the means of production. Production relations organize people, stimulate their activities, give rise to certain connections and dependencies between social groups. It is common interests, reflected in consciousness, more or less conscious, that unite people, stimulate them to fight for the realization of certain social goals.

At the same time, if we turn specifically to the consideration of this issue in the context of Chinese Marxism, Jiang Bojiang's opinion about the relationship between the general and the particular differed from Mao Zedong's position. In particular, the latter in "Problems of Strategy in the War of Chinese Independence" (1936) argued that since "each historical stage has its own special characteristics, the laws of war also have their own characteristics, and they cannot be mechanically applied to another stage"¹¹. As a result, for Mao, the laws describing the Soviet revolutionary war could not be freely applied to China's unique historical experience, and this point was certainly ancillary to his political agenda during the Sino-Soviet split.

Bojian's dialectical approach assumes that different particularities do not negate the application of general laws. The scientist, however, does not explain how it is possible for a necessary and strictly general law to be induced from a finite set of cases. The statement that historical particulars "quite often" obey general laws also suggests that there are certain specific features that are beyond the reach of laws, which seriously calls into question the generality of the latter¹².

Thus, historical materialism does not deny the role of consciousness or interests in the historical process, where "nothing is done without a conscious intention, without a desired goal." He simply rejects, as Lenin emphasized, the inappropriate idea about the absolute freedom of man to create history at his own discretion and arbitrariness. Nothing happens in history without the active activity of people, guided by interests, regulated by consciousness and will. But the interests themselves have an objective basis: they are determined by social beings. Therefore, the problem logically lies in the connection between the necessity of historical laws and the freedom of individuals who act in history.

As Bojian admits, historical materialism cannot mechanistically impose some impersonal laws on people, but instead must "dialectically" recognize the "creative role of the subjective factor" in history. No "scholarly socialist" can deny that history was made by the people, namely the oppressed masses and their leaders. However, the latter managed

¹¹ Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (1967). V.1. Peking, Foreign Languages Press, p.181.

¹² Rogacz, D. (2022) The struggle for memory: Jian Bozan on historical materialism. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, No 19, p.106.

people thanks to the operative recognition of the objective conditions of one or another time. In other words, outstanding personalities always act within the given limits of their class, level of development of productive forces, etc., so that none of them can oppose historical laws.

Adhering to Plekhanov's solution to this problem, Jian Bojian argues that although these laws and stages are necessary, the emergence of certain individuals is largely contingent. If there had been no, say, Napoleon or Lenin (or Mao), some other leader would have emerged, and the same inexorable processes would have taken place. On the contrary, it cannot be ruled out that without these people all the changes would not have happened as quickly as all the outstanding personalities are able to slow them down. This solution was consistent with Qu Qiubo's arguments, but was later ignored by Mao, whose radical anti-individualist approach culminated in the Cultural Revolution.¹³

In this context, it would be appropriate to note that for Tzubo, "prominent personalities of history only seem to go beyond class and "freely" choose their own social position; but it is also the result of causal laws governing class and class struggle. The thoughts and impulses of great personalities in history are the forerunners of the thoughts and impulses of their class and the masses. Moreover, the solution of problems generated by a particular epoch, such as the problems of a particular form of class struggle, is limited by the possibilities of that epoch, and is not the result of the "freely" chosen intentions of a great personality. Therefore, the great personalities of history, and Qu here includes Marx and Lenin, can only be considered as historical instruments of society or class; they arise only on the basis of the needs of the struggle generated by the introduction of new technologies in the economic base, and class struggle".¹⁴.

In what sense, then, can Qu claim that humans play a role in the unfolding of historical drama? After all, the logic of his position on determinism seems, on the face of it, to suggest that humans have virtually no capacity to effect social change. Despite his assertion that history is made by people (their will, motivation, thinking, actions, personality), they themselves are depicted as a function of broad historical forces, particularly the development of technology in the productive forces and the result of forms of class struggle. And yet, despite this apparent radical reduction of human agency in Qu's philosophy of history, his rejection of fatalism and endorsement of determinism does have a certain logic that he no doubt used as intellectual support for his dramatic political career.

¹³ Rogacz, D. (2022) The struggle for memory: Jian Bojian on historical materialism. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, No 19, p.109.

¹⁴ Qu Qiubai (1988). *Shehui zhixue gailun* [Outline of Social Philosophy], *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, pp. 307-308.

However, it should not be forgotten that although the thinker denies the possibility that "prominent personalities" create history, he does not reject the idea that they really play an extremely important role in the perception and articulation of deep structural changes taking place in the economic sphere of society. This in itself is extremely important, because without this understanding of the historical process, the mass of people (nation, class) could not respond coherently to the achievement of their collective interests. Qu did not underestimate the potential of leadership, "outstanding personalities", to respond to economic and social change and to articulate an alternative vision that is based on the opportunities revealed in these changes. As Qu notes, "great personalities" are necessarily an instrument of the history of a certain era or class.¹⁵

However, it should be emphasized that Chinese philosophers did not consider purely social moments as the goal and meaning of human existence. The figure of Li Dazhao is particularly noteworthy in this context. In particular, he writes: "The purpose of human life is to develop one's own life, but there are times when the development of life requires the sacrifice of life. This is because there are times when passionate sacrifice can expand the beauty of life beyond normal development...Usually tragic melodies make for the most haunting music. Life for the sake of higher achievements always consists in ardent sacrifice."¹⁶

3. Conclusions

Thus, having carried out a general and critical review of philosophical and anthropological issues in Chineseized Marxism, we can draw the following conclusions:

1) Modern Chinese thinkers see a dichotomy in human nature - social and natural. Taking into account not only the work of K. Marx, but also other Western philosophers, in particular I. Kant, the Marxist philosophers of China focus on the social component of human nature, which is key for the individual.

2) Chineseized Marxism (as well as Soviet Marxism) also has the concept of a "new man", whose goal in life is to exist exclusively on the principles and values of Marxist philosophy. The formation and functioning of this concept is due to broad discussions about the role of man in history.

¹⁵ Knight, N. (2005). *Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923–1945*. Springer Netherlands, p.59-60.

¹⁶ Meisner, M. (2014). *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, Harvard University Press, p.7.

3) Although Chineseized Marxism emphasizes the social purpose of human life, it also contains considerations about the existential aspect, which manifests itself in living for the sake of self-improvement and other people.

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