A review of the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon in China

Na Liu
School of Marxism, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China.

Abstract

Marx and Proudhon had a profound ideological interaction, which lasted for more than 40 years in terms of time; in terms of content, their ideological interaction involved various aspects such as philosophical methodology, socio-economic theories and social reform programmes. Marx's ideological interaction with Proudhon was almost throughout the process of Marx's gradual construction of his scientific theories, and Proudhon was undoubtedly one of the important figures in the process of Marx's ideological formation. At the same time, the criticism of Proudhon was an important part of the development of Marx's thought, and his ideas had an important influence on the development of Marx's thought.

Keywords
Marx; Proudhon; ideological relation; critique.

1. Introduction

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was a French petty-bourgeois thinker and one of the founders of anarchism, and his main ideas had a wide impact on Europe in the nineteenth century. After the establishment and consolidation of the capitalist system, the shortcomings of capitalist society were undoubtedly exposed and various social problems came to the fore. Faced with this background of the times, both Proudhon and Marx were trying to reveal the origin of these problems and to find a way to solve the social problems. In the process of searching for solutions, Marx went through a historical process of accepting Proudhon's ideas from acceptance to criticism and then to full criticism, and it was also in this process that Marx realised the continuous development of his own ideas, especially the gradual formation of the viewpoint of historical materialism, which can be seen that Proudhon was undoubtedly one of the important figures in the history of the development of Marxism.

2. Biography of Proudhon

Born in January 1809 in the suburbs of Besançon, France, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's father was a farmer and craftsman. As Proudhon's family went bankrupt under the ravages of capitalist industry, he had to earn his own living from the age of twelve, working successively as a hotel maid and a typesetter. Later, Proudhon co-owned a small printing house, which was soon closed down due to lack of capital. In 1837, Proudhon was awarded a scholarship by the Academy of Sciences of Besançon for his essay "On the Universal Grammar", and from then on, he moved to Paris to carry out theoretical research. In 1840, Proudhon published What is Ownership to criticise the capitalist system of private ownership, and in 1846, he published The Philosophy of Poverty, which put forward a set of ideas on capitalism and private ownership, and in 1848, when the February Revolution broke out in France, Proudhon wrote The Reform Programme of the Social Problems, advocating the establishment of a people’s bank and the granting of interest-free loans for the transformation of society, and in April, Proudhon founded the newspaper Le Représentant du Peuple in Paris, propagating the reformist programme. In 1849,
as a result of his criticisms of the bourgeoisie in the press, he was arrested and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. In 1849, Proudhon was arrested and imprisoned for criticising the bourgeoisie in his newspaper. While in prison, Proudhon wrote *The General Idea of Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. In his later years, Proudhon continued to preach reformism and anarchism, and in January 1865, he died in France.

3. **The research content of Chinese studies on the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon**

China academics currently focus on *The Philosophy of Poverty* and *The Poverty of Philosophy* to systematically discuss and analyse the differences between the main views of Proudhon and Marx within the fields of political economy, socialism, and philosophy, with Yang Hongyuan, Zhu Jindong, and Yu Yuanpei as the main representatives. Regarding the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon, relevant studies in the China academic circles mainly focus on the following aspects:

Firstly, research on Proudhon and his thought and theory. The research on Proudhon has not received more attention because of the publication of Chinese translations of Proudhon’s *What is Ownership* or Marx’s *The Poverty of Philosophy* and other major works. Chen Hanchu’s *Proudhon and Proudhonism*, edited by Nankai University, is an early introduction to Proudhon and his thought in China. The book gives a brief introduction to Proudhon’s life and life experiences, economic ideas, political ideas and his struggle with Marxism, but it lacks theoretical depth and research, and belongs to historical intellectual reading. Earlier works on Proudhon’s thought include *The Philosophy of Proudhon* published by the Shanghai Free Bookstore in 1929 and *The Doctrine of Proudhon* published by the Chongqing Academic Research Society in 1941, but both lack theoretical depth. In contrast, since the reform and opening up, there have been many new developments in the study of Proudhon’s thought in China. There are research results that explain Proudhonism from a holistic perspective, introduce its theoretical points, analyse and reveal its theoretical characteristics and roots, and summarise the current situation of Proudhon studies at home and abroad. *The Past and Present of Proudhonism* traces the history of the emergence and development of Proudhon’s thought, and reveals the several “resurrections” of Proudhon’s thought in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in France and some other European countries. The author points out that the repeated return of Proudhon’s thought stems from its complex and unusually wide-ranging character. At the same time, Proudhon’s discussion of issues such as how workers can escape from poverty and the way in which he approached these issues are very much in tune with the way Westerners think today. The solution of many problems within capitalist society within the existing framework of capitalism is undoubtedly in line with the needs of today’s Western society, and this is the root of Proudhon’s enduring influence. "On Proudhon and his Anarchist Political Thought" provides a more specific exploration of Proudhon’s anarchist political thought. "On the Characteristics and Roots of Proudhon’s Anarchism" summarises the characteristics of Proudhon’s anarchism in comparison with other anarchisms, i.e. the protection of small private ownership, reformism and opposition to violence. The author also points out that these characteristics of Proudhonian anarchism are determined by the specific social and historical conditions and ideological and theoretical roots of its emergence, as well as by the whole system of Proudhonian thought. "Overview of Proudhonian Studies in France" is a comprehensive review of the studies of Proudhon in France.

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introduces the recent situation of Proudhonian studies in France. Proudhon studies in France are more active than in China, and have made much progress. In particular, the "Friends of Proudhon" group compiled and published the second edition of the Complete Works of Proudhon, which corrected the errors and omissions in the 1868 edition of the Complete Works of Proudhon and added detailed introductions and annotations. Among other things, Professor Bier Hopmann also compiled a full catalogue of Proudhon's surviving manuscripts, essentially clarifying the amount of Proudhon's unpublished written material. In addition, Chengzhong has made a comparative study of the biographies of Proudhon, pointing out the credibility and characteristics of the various biographies of Proudhon. He also introduces some new points of view, pointing out that "Marx's writing of The Poverty of Philosophy was not so much an active attack on Proudhon by Marx as a counterattack on Proudhon's attack". "Proudhon in the Eyes of Chinese Scholars--Review of Domestic Proudhon Research" summarises and evaluates the domestic Proudhon research in three stages, points out the main problems and theoretical achievements of domestic Proudhon research, and at the same time introduces the Chinese translation of foreign Proudhon research literature, which makes us have a more comprehensive understanding of the domestic Proudhon research at present. It also introduces the Chinese translation of foreign literature on Proudhon, giving us a more comprehensive understanding of the current domestic research on Proudhon. "Marxism and Proudhonism" briefly introduces the original ideology of Proudhonism and its essence, and reviews the ideological exchanges and polemics between Marx and Proudhonism. Yang Hongyuan also focuses on communism in "A Different Look at Communism and Social Revolution: A Re-Examination of the Ideological Encounter between Marx and Proudhonism", which examines the origins and basic principles of communism, its feasibility and means of realisation, and describes the encounters between Marx and Proudhon around this issue.

The second is the study of the book The Poverty of Philosophy. The Poverty of Philosophy is Marx's theoretical work that openly and exclusively criticises Proudhon, thus the study of the book The Poverty of Philosophy has become a breakthrough for academics to study the relationship between Marx and Proudhon's ideas, while academics usually believe that The Poverty of Philosophy marks the public introduction of Marx's historical materialism. "Poverty of Philosophy and the Formation of Historical Materialism" examines the role of Poverty of Philosophy in the process of the establishment of the materialist view of history, pointing out that Poverty of Philosophy not only scientifically formulated the basic viewpoints of historical materialism, but also was publicly published at the time when the writing was completed, thus becoming a sign of the birth of historical materialism, and the beginning of a new era in Marxist philosophy, making the great change in the history of human thought from possibility to reality. Huang Nansen and others edited A History of Marxist Philosophy, the first volume of which devoted a large part of the book to the theoretical results achieved by The Poverty of Philosophy in terms of the materialist conception of history and Marxist economics. The second volume discusses the process of the creation of Capital in a fuller discussion of Proudhon's role in the study of Marxian economics and links The Poverty of Philosophy to other important works of Marx. In 1997 there was a short-lived upsurge in scholarly research on The Poverty of Philosophy. As the year coincided with the 150th anniversary of the publication of The Poverty of Philosophy, scholars convened a symposium in Nanjing to commemorate the anniversary of the publication of The Poverty of Philosophy. The experts discussed the research situation of The Poverty of

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Philosophy, its position in the history of Marx's thought, and the significance of the scientific methodology it implies. The experts agreed that The Poverty of Philosophy is a very important work of Marx, but it has not been given due attention in Chinese academic circles. For this reason, the seminar proposed a theoretical task of in-depth study of the book. Between 1997 and 1998, academics published a number of articles on The Poverty of Philosophy, discussing some of the theoretical points contained in the book, such as the concept of wage labour and the method of social criticism. Zhang Yibing in "The Initial Joining of Historical Materialism and Political Economy-Proudhon and Marx's <Poverty of Philosophy>" 10 elaborates on Marx's historical materialism and political economy in The Poverty of Philosophy, suggesting that Marx's newly-established historical materialist perspective in The Poverty of Philosophy in examining bourgeois political economy not only getting rid of the humanistic philosophical constructs, but also identifying the correct premises for the study of political economy and transforming the cognitive attitude towards classical economics. Zhu Jindong's "Proudhon's Reaction to Marx's Poverty of Philosophy"11, Tang Zhengdong's "What Did the Criticism of Proudhon Bring to Marx? --Discussion of the Poverty of Philosophy's Position in the History of Ideas"12 and so on also focus on the study of the significance in the history of philosophy of the relationship between Marx and Proudhon and the evolution of their ideas in The Poverty of Philosophy and The Philosophy of Poverty. Li Xiaoguang believes that The Poverty of Philosophy lays down the two Marxist theoretical cornerstones of the materialist view of history and the doctrine of surplus value, so that the edifice of scientific socialism is also basically established; The Poverty of Philosophy is not only a classic work of the materialist view of history of Marxist philosophy, but also an important classic in the presentation of the ideas of Marxist political economy.13 Yang Hongyuan pointed out that The Poverty of Philosophy not only explained the three organic components of Marxism in a more systematic way, thus marking the first public appearance of the new worldview of Marxism, but also laid down the basic framework and analytical perspective of Marx's comprehensive liquidation of Proudhon.14

Thirdly, there is a study on the stage division of the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon. In his doctoral thesis Marx and Proudhon15, Zhu Jindong studied the interaction and theoretical relationship between Marx and Proudhon based on the perspective of the history of ideas, proposing that Marx accepted Proudhon's ideas as a socialist before 1846, and then broke with Proudhon in The Poverty of Philosophy in 1846. The article is divided into six historical periods, based on the development of the main theoretical-ideological relations between Marx and Proudhon during the same period: first, the ideas of Marx and Proudhon in his youth before 1841; second, the period from 1842 to May 1846, when Marx accepted Proudhon as a socialist; and, third, the period from June 1846 to February 1848, when the first polemics between Marx and Proudhon took place; fourth, from February 1848 to June 1856, the period of the French Revolution and post-revolutionary analyses of the revolution by Marx and Proudhon; fifth, from July 1857 to 1867, the period of Marx's in-depth theoretical critique of Proudhon; and sixth, post-1867, Marx's encounters with Proudhonists. Chen Zheng16 taking the path of generation and evolution of Marx's historical materialism as the main line, the ideological relationship

between Marx and Proudhon in four periods, namely, the initial encounter between Marx and Proudhon's theories during the period of the Rheinishe Zeitung, Marx's affirmation and criticism of Proudhon during the period of Paris, Marx's public criticism of Proudhon after the founding of the fundamentals of the materialist conception of history, and Marx's full-scale critique of Proudhon in the manuscripts of Das Kapital and related texts, has been historically, the relationship between the two ideas has been sorted out. On the whole, there is a consensus in the academic community that Marx's attitude towards Proudhon went through a process of acceptance (praise) to criticism and then to full-scale critique.

Fourthly, research on the content of Marx's critique of Proudhon. Marx's critique of Proudhon is one of the more researched issues in the academic world around the ideological views of Marx and Proudhon, in terms of the content of the research, scholars mainly focus on Marx's critique of Proudhon's philosophical methodology, socio-economic theories, and social reform programmes and other three aspects of the study, specifically, Xu Quanlin analyses Marx's critique of Proudhon's abstract humanist conception of history, pointing out that Marx criticised Proudhon's erroneous understanding of the origin of value, competition and equality founded on the abstract humanistic view of history, emphasised the social and historical nature of human needs, initially elaborated the Marxist view of competition and equality, and constructed the materialist view of history. Yang Yunyun and Liu Tongfong examined Marx's premise criticism of Proudhon's historical consciousness, arguing that Marx considered and dialectically criticised Proudhon's historical consciousness holistically, affirming the theoretical significance of Proudhon's historical consciousness and revealing the premise limitations of Proudhon's historical consciousness at the same time. Some scholars have also analysed Marx's critique of Proudhon from the perspective of economics, such as Huang Nansen's A History of Marxist Philosophy which discusses the process of the creation of Das Kapital and fully explores Proudhon's role in Marx's study of economics, and Tang Zhengdong's Smith to Marx: A Historical Interpretation of the Methods of Economic Philosophy etc. Yu Peiyuan and Fu Changyi point out that as early as in the Philosophical Manuscripts of Economics of 1844 Marx began to search for a realistic historical basis that was in principle different from Proudhon's through his criticism of the real situation of the proletariat, the historical development of capitalism, and the concrete reality of the socialist and communist movements. On the basis of the affirmation of Proudhon's critique of ownership, Marx also saw dialectically that Proudhon's concept of absolute equality is abstract and ahistorical human nature therefore the theory of Proudhon's critique of ownership needs to be further studied. Yang Hongyuan studies Marx's critique of Proudhon's theory of "free ownership", pointing out that in The Poverty of Philosophy, Marx launched a preliminary critique of Proudhon's theory of "free ownership" and defined ownership as a historical and temporary product. With the deepening of his critique of political economy, Marx made a realistic and surreal analysis of ownership, and thus was able to comprehensively criticise Proudhon's theory of ownership, which fully reflects the transformative and transcendental

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nature of his thought. Later on, Yang Hongyuan\textsuperscript{24} also takes the ideological encounter between Marx and Proudhonism as a starting point, presenting the transcendence and methodological significance of Marx’s thought in the process of criticising Proudhonism. Li Shumei\textsuperscript{25} points out that Marx endorsed Proudhon’s practical understanding of man’s relationship with man and man himself, but argued that Proudhon’s idea of equality, like the philosophy of self-consciousness of the Young Hegelians, had not yet reached the theoretical height of Feuerbach’s elimination of alienation and realisation of man’s class nature, and that they both sought forms of human emancipation within the alienation of man’s class nature. Chen Ting\textsuperscript{26} from the perspective of anti-poverty theory, it is argued that Proudhon’s theory is known as petty bourgeois socialism, while Marx founded scientific socialism. In a certain sense, both theories arose from answering the question of the co-existence of wealth accumulation and poverty accumulation in capitalist society, and both were theories aiming to get rid of poverty in capitalist society. Despite the fact that in the early days, Marx affirmed Proudhon’s concern for the reality of labour poverty, his critique of private property and his efforts to seek a solution to modern poverty, the two were fundamentally divergent and antagonistic in their fundamental anti-poverty stance, viewpoints and methods. Huang Xuesheng\textsuperscript{27} analyses Marx’s critique of Proudhon’s anarchist ideology, arguing that Marx’s critique of Proudhon’s anarchism is reflected in the theoretical foundations, ideological and political lines of historical materialism and scientific socialism versus historical idealism and vacuous bourgeois socialism, the proletarian standpoint versus the petty-bourgeois standpoint, and social revolution versus social improvement, "human society" versus free society, and so on. Li Huiming and Cheng Biao\textsuperscript{28} compare and contrast the differences between Marx and Proudhon on the issue of labour, arguing that Proudhon, starting from a critique of labour as the basis of ownership, seeks to establish and build a convention for the maintenance of social equality and justice; whereas Marx uses the issue of labour as a breakthrough, focusing on the real human being and its historical process of development, exposing the exploitation of workers by capitalists under capitalist relations of production, and found the key to unlocking the contradictions of human history and existence. Wang Guang\textsuperscript{29} studied Marx’s critique of Proudhon’s view of fairness and justice, pointing out that although Marx attached great importance to Proudhon at that time, he never fully agreed with his ideas, and that there were deep differences between Marx and Proudhon on major issues such as the goals and ways of social revolution.

Fifthly, there is a study on the influence of Proudhon on the development of Marx’s thought. Yang Hongyuan\textsuperscript{30} argues that it was while criticising Proudhonism that Marx achieved a systematic reflection and integration of the three components of his system of thought, namely, the materialist conception of history, political economy and socialist doctrines, thus marking the first public appearance of his new worldview. Chen Zheng\textsuperscript{31} argues that Proudhon has an important reference role in the path of generation and evolution of Marx’s historical materialism. Tang Zhengdong’s "What did the critique of Proudhon bring to Marx? --The Poverty


\textsuperscript{27} Huang Xuesheng. Marx's Critique of Proudhon's Anarchist Thought and Its Significance[J]. Teaching and Research,2023(01):45-55.


of Philosophy: A Discussion of its Status in the History of Ideas"32 points out that Marx's criticism of Proudhon, on the one hand, highlights the good use of the philosophy of historical materialism in the field of economics that he had already developed in The German Ideology, thus making this criticism of his highly relevant, but on the other hand, it also reflects the fact that in the study of economics, Marx had already developed a philosophy of historical materialism that had been used in the field of economics. On the other hand, it also reflects that Marx was not yet able to clearly construct a specific historical theory of historical materialism on the premise of lagging behind in the level of economics research, and that in his criticism of Proudhon he followed the line of thought that he had already developed in his criticism of Feuerbach and others, which to a certain extent affected his understanding of the deeper content of the capitalist relations of production. Qian Kun 33 points out that during the development of Marx's thought, Marx's evaluation of Proudhon and his writings changed with the development of his own thought, which went through a process from affirmation to negation. This process of ideological transformation reflects Marx's constant approach to the materialist concept of history after obtaining background support in economics, and through which he launched a comprehensive critique of classical political economy and transcended it, ultimately forming a mature Marxism.

4. Research Review

Generally speaking, China academics are paying more and more attention to the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon. In terms of specific content, Chinese research on the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon has already produced certain results, which mainly focuses on the differences between the two in the philosophy of political economy, dialectic, anti-poverty, socialist programme, and the concept of equality, etc., and the holistic research on the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon needs to be in-depth, and the Chinese translations of the relevant works of Proudhon need to be increased. The overall study of the ideological relationship between Marx and Proudhon needs to be deepened, and the number of Chinese translations of Proudhon's works needs to be increased.