

Introduction to Hiromatsu Wataru's "relational ontology"

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Abstract: Hiromatsu Wataru proposed that there was a "discontinuity" in the transformation of Marxist thought between 1844 and 1845, mainly manifested as the transformation of early Marxist philosophical thought from entity ontology to relational ontology. In the process of exploring the transformation of early Marxist thought, Hiromatsu Wataru formed the cornerstone of his "relational ontology" – *Versachlichung*. When exploring the leap from alienation to *Versachlichung* in Marxist thought, Hiromatsu attempted to combine Marxist relativism with phenomenology. Based on the logic of the development of "*Versachlichung*", in order to break the epistemology featuring binary opposition of "subjective -objective" since modern philosophy, and understand and transform the world in the way of "limb structure", a key link in the "relational ontology" has been formed.

Key words: Hiromatsu Wataru; relational ontology; *Versachlichung*

1 The structure of "relational ontology"

Hiromatsu Wataru was one of the leaders of Japanese new left-wing movement and a contemporary Japanese philosopher of New Marxism, who has had a great influence on the studies of Japanese Marxism. Hiromatsu Wataru advocated using phenomenological methods to analyze Marxism and returning to its true historical image. Therefore, he recompiled *German Ideology* by reordering the original pages of the manuscript, distinguishing the different handwriting of Marx's and Engels' manuscripts, and reevaluating and revising them. In this way, he attempted to find the initial contexts of Marx's and Engels' writings and explore the most authentic Marxism, thus finally proposing unique insights into Marxist philosophy. Hiromatsu Wataru referred to his philosophical system as the "relational ontology". He describes the characteristics of this worldview as follows: "In the epistemological perspective, it replaces the previous 'subjective-objective' model and is expressed in the form of the 'limb structure'. In the ontological perspective, it replaces the cognition of 'the primacy of entity' in the realm of object, and manifests itself as 'the primacy of relation'. At the level of logic, it means that, as opposed to the assumption of identity and the composition of elements, with the difference as the root category, this is a kind of ontology built on the structure of functional correlation. It is an interactive description of principle as opposed to a causal explanation of principle [1]."

Hiromatsu Wataru's philosophical system can be broadly divided into three aspects: first, the study of Marxist literature; the second is the theoretical exploration of Marxism; the third is to construct his own philosophical system, which is based on the ontology of relativism. He regarded relation as primary and entity as secondary. It is a kind of ontology of relativism, which replaces "entity" with "relation". In the process of forming the relational ontology,

Hiromatsu Wataru creatively developed his own "Versachlichung" and "limb structure", providing new ideas and perspectives for the study of Marxist philosophy, helping us to comprehensively grasp Marxist philosophy, and enabling the academic community to understand Hiromatsu Wataru's philosophical system at multiple levels and in all aspects, as well as his unique interpretation of Marxist philosophy.

1.1 The theory of "Versachlichung"

Versachlichung has a dual meaning for Hiromatsu Wataru himself, with the first meaning being an important key to his understanding of Marx's later ideas. The second layer of its meaning is the methodological foundation of his own philosophical system that he envisioned. Hiromatsu Wataru explained the overall grasp of the process of transformation from early Marxist thought to mature Marxist thought.

Hiromatsu Wataru conducted his study based on two main threads, from one of which he discovered the transformation of Marxism from "alienation" to "Versachlichung". Hiromatsu Wataru pointed out that Marx still did not break free from the framework of Hegelian philosophical theory in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Marx accepted Feuerbach's humanistic ideas, manifesting the "subjective-objective" relationship through the "human" or "human essence", which was later criticized by Steiner. Hiromatsu Wataru believed that Marx abandoned the ideological structure in the manuscript the following year, transcending Hegelian self-alienation of entity-subject with materialist historical ideas such as human labor and division of labor. Also he abandoned the "alienated labor" in the manuscript. It can be said that Marx transcended the "subjective-objective" schema. Furthermore, Hiromatsu Wataru pointed out in the book *German Ideology* that Marx and Engels did not observe "spirit" and "consciousness" from the perspective of internal entity, but understood them as "relation", and as mutual relationship between human and nature, which were understood by Hiromatsu Wataru as things that only exist in "subjective intersubjectivity". The second so-called "object" does not refer to "entity" in reality, but to the relationship behind the "object", which needs to be concretely presented by "object". "Versachlichung" refers to the relationship between things, which is actually the relationship between people. It is also an extension and exploration of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. "What Marx called 'Versachlichung' in the later period is no longer the idea that the subject directly becomes the existence of things, but is related to the inverted view that the social relations between people are like the relations between things, and even like the nature of things [2]".

1.2 The theory of "limb structure"

The "limb structure" theory is a core concept in Hiromatsu Wataru's *Being and Meaning* (I) (II) volumes, and it is also a theoretical tool for epistemology and practice in Hiromatsu Wataru's philosophical thinking. The "limb structure" theory overcomes Husserl's three-dimension schema of "consciousness object, consciousness content and consciousness function", breaks through the binary opposition of "subject-object" since modern philosophy, and gives birth to the "limb structure" theory. Whether from the perspective of understanding the world or from the perspective of transforming the world, "limb structure" is intertwined and runs through it. In terms of understanding the world, from an objective perspective, it has a dual nature of "what phenomena are associated with and what meanings are recognized". From a subjective perspective, it has a dual nature of "knowing individuals and knowing humans". In terms of the practical world, it has a dual nature of "where it is and the value of meaning" from an objective perspective, and a dual nature of "capable individuals and human beings in positions" from a subjective perspective. Hiromatsu Wataru analyzed the theoretical veil of "limb structure" from various perspectives, including sociology, philosophy, linguistics, and psychology, based on his theoretical, political, economic, and philosophical views. The fundamental theoretical origins of "limb structure" are not only influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, but also from Saussure's structuralist linguistics and Heidegger's structuralism.

2 Textual research on the *German Ideology*

Hiromatsu Wataru conducted a text comparison of four versions of *German Ideology*, which are D. Ryazanov's version, V. Adoratskij's version, G. A. Bagaturija's edition and new East German edition. He believed that each of these four versions had its own strengths, but there were also varying degrees of errors, so he rewrote the *German Ideology*. Hiromatsu Wataru's *German Ideology* fills the gap in the literature comparison of Marxism; and it is an important theoretical achievement of comparative studies in the entire classic Marxist literature. This is the first time that the true context in which Marx and Engels founded historical materialism has been restored in this way. Returning to the historical contexts of Marx through the use of literature plays a crucial role in clarifying the theoretical obstacles that arise in the study of literature and texts.

Hiromatsu Wataru came to an important conclusion through his compilation of the research dynamics in *German Ideology*, stating that Engels played a leading role, and that the thoughts of young Marx lagged behind Engels. There are two reasons why Hiromatsu Wataru concluded that Engels' thought was greater than Marx's after research. Firstly, Hiromatsu Wataru compared the thoughts of young Engels and young Marx around 1840. He believed that Engels' thought at this time was ahead of Marx's, and this was indeed the case before 1844. However, Hiromatsu Wataru did not further realize that after 1844, young Marx had surpassed Engels through a transformation in thought. Although Marx and Engels had maintained a long-term friendship and cooperation relationship, Marx was the dominant person. Secondly, as is well known in *German Ideology*, it was dictated by Marx and written by Engels, resulting in a large amount of Engels' handwriting in the manuscript. But Hiromatsu Wataru believed that Engels' handwriting in the text proved that historical materialism was first proposed by Engels. The above two reasons cannot fully support Engels' dominance in the theory. However, Hiromatsu Wataru's studies of Marxist literature not only laid a solid foundation for his theoretical reexploration of Marxism, but also had a widespread influence among Marxist researchers in Japan and around the world.

3 Conclusion

In the long history of Marxism development, Japanese Marxism was born in the 1960s and is an independent Marxism school. Japanese Marxism has relative freedom in literature research and text interpretation, and is closer to the original version of Marx and Engels' manuscripts and works. Hiromatsu Wataru went through a process of incubation, formation, and breakthrough under specific social and historical conditions in Japan, gradually forming his own philosophical characteristics and unique connotations. Hiromatsu Wataru began to attempt to study Marx's works from first-hand literature, reconstructing Marxist philosophy according to the original appearance of Marxism as much as possible. On the basis of Marxist philosophical theory, Hiromatsu Wataru compatibly absorbed Mach's new scientific view, Husserl phenomenology, and modern Western philosophy to construct a highly distinctive philosophical system named "relational ontology". This philosophical achievement not only became a representative of Japanese Marxism, but also had a great impact on its development process.

By interpreting Marxism in a unique way, Hiromatsu Wataru's philosophical theory laid the foundation for the development of Japan's new Marxism. The "relational ontology" understands the process and transformation of the development of Marxist philosophy through a new theoretical system, that is, the process from "alienation" to "Versachlichung" and the process from "substantialism" to "relativism", which opened up new perspectives for the academic community to study Marxism and Marxist philosophy. With the development of Marxism and the continuous deepening of theoretical research, Japanese Marxism has occupied an indispensable historical position. Hiromatsu Wataru's philosophical thought of "relational ontology" has enriched Marxist philosophy, opened up new perspectives and cognition in the history of Marxist development, and made theoretical innovations. Therefore, comprehensively clarifying the

internal logical relation of "relational ontology" has made outstanding contributions to the development history of Marxism and the studies of Marxist philosophy.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

[1] Hiromatsu W. 2003. *The Outpost of the World Picture of Things*. Translated by Zhao Zhongming and Li Bin. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2.

[2] Hiromatsu W. 2002. *Archetype of Historical Materialism*. Translated by Deng Xiyi. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 36.