

The Ideological Origin and Construction Process of the People's City Concept of the Communist Party of China

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Abstract: The concept of the People's city, an original idea of the Communist Party of China, has a rich ideological origin and development process. Although the classic Marxist writers did not directly put forward the concept of the people's city, they profoundly revealed the alienated phenomenon of capitalist cities wantonly exploiting the proletariat by looking into the tragic living conditions of the lower classes, and sketched a beautiful picture of communist cities. The concept of a people's city is also rooted in the fertile soil of China's fine traditional culture. After the founding of the Communist Party of China, it introduced and absorbed Marxist urban theory and the reasonable core of traditional Chinese people-oriented thought. Based on decades of experience in urban management and construction, it ultimately proposed the concept of a people's city: "The people build the city for the people and the city serves the people." This innovative concept has also become the core development philosophy and value orientation of the Communist Party of China's urban work.

Keywords: the communist party of china; people's city; urban work

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1. Introduction

As an important carrier of human civilization, the development concept of a city profoundly reflects a country's value pursuit and the fundamental purpose of the ruling party. The people's city concept of "The people build the city for the people and the city serves the people" is an original and landmark theoretical achievement formed by the Communist Party of China in its century-long urban work practice. It is not only rooted in the theoretical fertile soil of Marxism, but also inherits and promotes the genes of China's fine traditional culture, and more importantly, it embodies the Communist Party of China's profound insight into the laws of human urban development. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of Chinese cities, research on this concept has increasingly become a hot topic in the academic circle. An in-depth exploration of the ideological origin of this concept can not only reveal the historical inevitability of its formation, but also provide theoretical guidance for the connotative development of Chinese cities in the new era.

2. The urban Theory of Marxist classic writers: The theoretical Foundation of the People's City concept

Although the classic Marxist writers did not directly put forward the concept of "people's city", through a profound

analysis of capitalist cities, they constructed a systematic critical theory of cities and the conception of future urban development, providing a fundamental theoretical basis for the people's city concept of the Communist Party of China.

2.1. Critique of Alienation in Capitalist Cities: Revealing the Capital Logic of Urban Development

The essence of a capitalist city is a spatial carrier for capital accumulation. Marxist classic writers hold that the alienation of capitalist cities is manifested in three dimensions: First, the alienation of spatial exploitation. Urban space is divided by capital into the "comfort zone" of the bourgeoisie and the "isolation zone" of the proletariat, and space becomes the material carrier of class oppression^[1]. In "Das Kapital", Marx pointed out: "The faster the capital of an industrial or commercial city accumulates, the faster the loss of exploitable human resources will be, and the worse the temporary accommodation arranged for workers will be." Engels also profoundly revealed the tragic living conditions of the lower-class workers and the common people in capitalist industrial cities in his articles such as "Letters from the Wupperper Valley" and "The State of the British Working Class". He believed that neither the British workers as individuals nor as the entire class could think, feel and live like human beings^[1]. Even to this day, in the cities of developed Western countries, there are still widespread urban diseases that are difficult to cure, such as "fashlums" and "class regionalization". The second is the alienation of urban functions. The production function of a city overpowers its living function, and the survival needs of people give way to the demand for capital proliferation. Cities should have been symbols of the progress of human civilization, but they have become tools for capital to exploit the proletariat. The "materialistic logic" of urban development has replaced the "human-oriented logic". The third is the alienation of the urban-rural relationship. Capital plundered rural resources through the "scissors gap", forming an unequal structure of "urban centralization" and "rural marginalization". In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels believed that under the background of the urban-rural opposition in modern capitalist conditions, as cities gradually grew stronger, cities eventually defeated rural areas, making rural areas increasingly submit to the rule of cities^[2]. It is evident that these criticisms provided theoretical weapons for the Communist Party of China to understand the essence of cities and establish a "people-oriented" urban development orientation.

2.2. Conception of Urban Development in the Future Society: Pointing towards "The Free and all-round Development of People"

The free and all-round development of human beings is the core value goal of Marxism. Urban development follows its own laws. Humans need to appropriately apply these laws on the basis of understanding, respecting and conforming to them, so that they can benefit people. Lenin once pointed out: "Cities are the centers of people's economic, political and spiritual life, and the main driving force for progress."^[3] While criticizing capitalist cities, Marxist classic writers also sketched out the picture of future communist society cities. In "The German Ideology", Marx and Engels believed that eliminating the opposition between urban and rural areas is an important feature of communist society. In the future, cities will surely break the spatial isolation dominated by capital and achieve "urban-rural integration". This integration is not merely about "cities eliminating rural areas" or "rural areas eliminating cities", but rather about eliminating the essential differences between urban and rural areas in production, life, culture and other aspects through the highly developed productive forces, transforming the confrontational contradictions between urban and rural areas into non-confrontational ones, and making cities a spatial form of "free people's union". In "On the Housing Problem", Engels further pointed out that the urban housing problem in the future society will no longer be the product of capital speculation, but a public undertaking of "society providing housing for its members", emphasizing the "public attribute" and "equal enjoyment" of urban public services. The ultimate goal of urban development is to meet people's needs and promote their free and all-round development. This core value is highly consistent with the original aspiration and mission of the Communist Party of China to "seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation", and has become the theoretical source of the "for the people" value orientation of the People's city concept.

3. The Modern Transformation of Traditional Chinese People-Oriented Thought: The Cultural Foundation of the People's City Concept

The theoretical innovation of the Communist Party of China has always been rooted in the fertile soil of China's fine traditional culture. Although the concept of a people's city is fundamentally guided by Marxism, it has also absorbed the reasonable core of traditional Chinese people-oriented thought and achieved modern transformation through the transformation of Marxism, forming a value orientation for urban development with Chinese characteristics.

3.1. The core connotation of traditional people-oriented thought and its connection with cities

The traditional Chinese people-oriented thought, with "the people as the foundation of the state" at its core, emphasizes that rulers should take the interests of the people as the fundamental. This provides a distinct cultural background for the formation and development of the Communist Party of China's concept of a people's city^[4]. Valuing the power of the people and pooling their wisdom was the governance wisdom of the ancient Chinese ruling class. The Book of Documents states, "The people are the foundation of the state; when the foundation is solid, the state is at peace." Mencius also advocated, "The people are the most important, the state and the state come second, and the ruler is the least important." Xunzi also emphasized, "The ruler is like a boat." A commoner is like water. "Water can carry a boat; water can capsize it." Although these ideas served the feudal autocratic ruling order, their emphasis on the "people" and pursuit of "benefiting the people" contained simple yet valuable people-oriented wisdom. The connection between traditional people-oriented thought and urban development is reflected in three aspects. First, the "benefiting the people" orientation of urban functions. Ancient cities, as political, economic and cultural centers, focused on "convenience for the people" in their construction, emphasizing that convenient transportation and spatial order should serve people's lives. The second is the goal of "stabilizing the people" in urban governance. Successive rulers have stabilized urban order through measures such as building water conservancy projects, rectifying markets, and establishing relief institutions, embodying the governance logic that "stabilizing the people is the foundation of the world." The third is the concept of "complementarity" in the urban-rural relationship. Although the Confucian thought of "emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce" has historical limitations, its propositions of "focusing on the foundation and promoting agriculture" and "not allowing merchants in the market" contain a simple consciousness of opposing excessive exploitation and pursuing urban-rural coordination. In conclusion, the people-oriented cultural tradition of respecting and caring for the people provides advanced ideological guidance for the Chinese Communists and lays a solid foundation for them to form the concept of a people's city.

3.2. Modern Transformation of People-Oriented Thought under the Guidance of Marxism

The Communist Party of China has critically inherited the traditional people-oriented ideology. Through the Marxist class analysis method and the view of mass history, it has achieved a fundamental transformation from "making decisions for the people" to "making decisions by the people", and endowed it with new connotations of "people-oriented nature". This transformation is particularly evident in the urban concept. The first shift is from "elitist dominance" to "people as the main body". Under the traditional people-oriented ideology, urban construction and governance were dominated by the rulers or the gentry class, with the people being passive recipients. However, the concept of a people's city emphasizes "the people build the city for the people", transforming the people from "objects of governance" to "subjects of governance". Through mechanisms such as grassroots self-governance and citizens' participation in decision-making, Guarantee the public's rights to be informed, to participate, to express opinions and to supervise in urban planning, construction and management. Secondly, there is a shift from "partial benefits for the people" to "comprehensive benefits for the people". The "benefits for the people" in traditional people-oriented thinking is mostly limited to the survival level and has a "blessing" nature. However, the "benefits for the people" in the concept of a people's city covers all-round needs such as material, spiritual, cultural and ecological aspects. Through the equalization of public services such as education, medical care, employment and social security, it achieves "all-round development of people". It embodies the development

philosophy of “putting people at the center”. The last aspect is the transformation from “hierarchical order” to “equal sharing”. Traditional urban spaces are strictly hierarchical, reflecting a distinct feudal autocratic hierarchical system. However, the people’s urban concept pursues “spatial justice”, promoting the equal opening of urban public resources to all residents by removing physical and institutional spatial isolation, and achieving the shared goal of “making life better in the city”. These transformations have enabled the traditional people-oriented ideology to break free from the shackles of feudalism and become the cultural nourishment for the concept of a people’s city, embodying the theoretical innovation logic of combining the basic principles of Marxism with the fine traditional Chinese culture.

4. Practical Exploration of the Communist Party of China’s Urban Work: The Historical Formation of the People’s City Concept

The concept of a people’s city did not emerge out of thin air. Instead, it is a theoretical achievement that the Communist Party of China has gradually summarized, refined and elevated through its century-long urban work practice, going through various periods of revolution, construction and reform. The practice at each stage provides experience accumulation and a practical basis for the formation of the concept.

4.1. The Period of the New Democratic Revolution: The Initial Exploration of Urban Work and the “People-oriented” Foundation

In the early days of the founding of the Communist Party of China, cities were important battlefields for the Party’s revolutionary struggles. Under the semi-colonial and semi-feudal social conditions, cities were not only the bases where imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism oppressed and exploited the people, but also the regions where the proletariat concentrated. The urban work during this period centered on “mobilizing the masses and seizing power”, but the “serving the people” orientation it contained laid the foundation for the later concepts. During the Agrarian Revolutionary War, the Communist Party of China carried out initial governance practices in the cities of the Central Soviet Area. The Party has safeguarded workers’ rights and interests by promulgating the Labor Law, and has stipulated an eight-hour workday, a minimum wage standard, and established labor insurance, attempting to change the cruel exploitation of workers by capitalists. The Party attaches great importance to improving the lives of citizens, building public facilities, rectifying urban hygiene, cracking down on speculation and profit, stabilizing prices, and striving to make cities “cities for workers, peasants and soldiers”. The Party has also explored mechanisms for mass participation, mobilizing citizens to take part in urban management through organizations such as trade unions and poor farmers’ groups, embossing the working approach of the “mass line”. In Yan ‘an, the Communist Party of China not only supported the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression but also improved the lives of citizens by organizing handicraft cooperatives, establishing supply and marketing cooperatives, and developing the textile industry, thus forming a “military-civilian co-construction” urban development model. The practice during this period initially revealed a simple consciousness that “urban construction relies on the people and urban development is for the people.”^[2] “At that time, the Communist Party of China had actually completed a significant transformation from the capitalist “material-based” logical thinking to the socialist “people-oriented” logical thinking from the perspective of urban development. At the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee decided to shift the focus of its work from rural areas to cities and put forward the requirements that “great efforts must be made to learn how to manage and build cities ^[2]” as well as the need to restore and develop urban production to improve people’s lives. This has made sufficient ideological and organizational preparations for the future construction of people’s cities.

4.2. The Period of Socialist Revolution and Construction: The Tortuous Progress and Ideological Accumulation of Urban Practice

In the governing discourse system of the Communist Party of China, the working class is the leading class of the People’s

Republic of China, the most solid and reliable class foundation of the Party, and the most advanced main force among the people. After seizing cities and achieving national victory, the Communist Party of China put forward the fundamental policy of relying wholeheartedly on the working class in urban work^[5]. In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, urban development centered on "serving industrialization", but always adhered to the principle of "people's livelihood orientation". The Communist Party of China gives priority to the development of public undertakings. In newly-built industrial cities, residential buildings, schools, hospitals, parks and other facilities are constructed simultaneously to ensure that "workers can go to work nearby and their children can attend school conveniently". Second, we will promote the public ownership of housing. By confiscating the properties of bureaucratic capital and renovating private housing, we will gradually establish a welfare housing distribution system, transforming urban housing from a "capital commodity" to a "public good". Third, it advocates that "the working people are the masters of the country", and through organizations such as the workers' congress and the residents' committee, enables citizens to participate in factory management and community affairs, reflecting the status of "the people as the main body". However, urban development during this period also had limitations. Due to the influence of the idea of "emphasizing production over living", some cities encountered problems such as "factories occupying living areas" and "lagging infrastructure". These lessons have made the Communist Party of China realize that urban development must balance the relationship between production and life, speed and quality, and further clarify the value boundary of "serving the people". The development of things is the unity of progressiveness and tortuousness. Despite the twists and turns, the urban practice during the socialist construction period still reached an important consensus, that is, urban development must be subordinate to the interests of the people, rely on the strength of the masses, take into account production and life, and avoid the "one-way" tendency of industrialization. These consensus points provide a historical mirror for the development of urban concepts after the reform and opening up.

4.3. New Era of Reform and Opening Up: Conceptual Innovation in the Wave of Urbanization

The new period of reform and opening up and socialist modernization drive is the historical stage when China's urbanization development is the most rapid. The number of cities increased from 193 in 1978 to 657 in 2012, and the urbanization rate rose from 17.9% to 52.6%. During this process, the Communist Party of China has constantly adjusted its urban development strategies, absorbing the vitality of the market economy while adhering to the bottom line of "people-oriented" principles, and promoting the systematic improvement of the concept of a people's city. From the 1980s to the 1990s, urbanization was characterized by "delegating power and invigorating vitality". Through the pilot projects of "special economic zone cities" and "coastal open cities", the constraints of the traditional planned economy system on urban development were broken. During this period, Deng Xiaoping put forward that "development is the hard truth", emphasizing that urban development should "enable some people and some regions to become prosperous first, and ultimately achieve common prosperity". In practice, urban construction, on the one hand, activates the urban economy through market-oriented reforms, and on the other hand, strengthens social security to prevent the spread of "urban diseases". Since the 21st century, as urbanization has entered an accelerated period, the concept of "people-oriented" has gradually become clear. In 2007, the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to "follow the path of urbanization with Chinese characteristics, and promote the coordinated development of large, medium and small cities and small towns in accordance with the principles of integrating urban and rural areas, rational layout, land conservation, complete functions and leading small towns with large ones", for the first time incorporating "people-oriented" into the urbanization strategy. However, urbanization during this period also faced new challenges: some cities encountered problems such as "reliance on land finance", "excessively high housing prices", "environmental pollution", and "unequal public services", and the contradiction between the profit-driven nature of capital and the "people-oriented nature" of cities became prominent. In response to these issues, the Communist Party of China has put forward the scientific approach of "balancing all aspects" and "scientific development", emphasizing that urban development should pay more attention to people-oriented principles and people's livelihood, laying the groundwork for the ultimate formation of the concept of a

people's city.

5. Conclusion

Adhering to the people-centered urban development concept is a valuable historical experience accumulated by the Communist Party of China on the basis of a profound understanding of the laws of urban development. The formation of the people's city concept of the Communist Party of China is not accidental, but an inevitable result of the combination of Marxist urban theory with China's specific reality and with the fine traditional Chinese culture. From the criticism of capitalist cities by classic Marxist writers to the modern transformation of traditional Chinese people-oriented thought. From the initial exploration during the revolutionary period, to the tortuous progress during the socialist construction period, then to the ideological innovation after the reform and opening up, and finally to the official establishment of the new era that "the people build the city for the people and the city serves the people". This concept is deeply rooted in history while also responding to the demands of The Times, embodying a high degree of unity among theoretical logic, historical logic and practical logic. As an original and landmark theoretical achievement of the Communist Party of China, the concept of the People's City not only provides fundamental guidance for the high-quality development of Chinese cities, but also contributes Chinese wisdom to the global urban development with its value core of "people-oriented", practical path of "co-construction and sharing", and development vision of "urban-rural integration". On the new journey of fully building a modern socialist country, adhering to and developing the concept of people's cities will surely drive Chinese cities towards a more livable, resilient and intelligent direction, and enable the people to enjoy a greater sense of gain, happiness and security in urban life.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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