

## Marxist philosophy and its influence on today's world <sup>1</sup>

*A filosofia marxista e sua influência no mundo atual*

Pham Thi KIEN

Associate Professor, PhD

University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City – UEH

E-mail: [kienpt@ueh.edu.vn](mailto:kienpt@ueh.edu.vn)

ORCID: 0000-0001-8024-8679

### Abstract

In the context of the world facing a series of solid problems such as economic inequality, labor exploitation, environmental crisis, as well as the concentration of wealth and power, Karl Marx's thought is once again recognized as an important tool to solve any problem and propose solutions for transformation. The content of Marxism lies in the historical materialist perspective, the economic foundation determines the process of forming political, cultural and ideological institutions, and emphasizes the role of conflict in the content level and consistency in the main meaning for the history of the process. Through the historical materialist methodology and demonstrative analysis, this study focuses on evaluating the arguments put forward by Marx in his critique of capitalism and considering their appropriateness when applied to the current socio-economic context. The results show that the core principles of Marxism still hold value as a compass, helping to identify any work in society and orienting practice activities towards justice and equality.

**Keywords:** *Capitalist Contradictions, Dialectical Analysis, Economic Base*

### Resumo

No contexto de um mundo que enfrenta uma série de problemas graves, como a desigualdade econômica, a exploração do trabalho, a crise ambiental, bem como a concentração de riqueza e poder, o

---

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements: This research is funded by University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (UEH)

pensamento de Karl Marx é mais uma vez reconhecido como uma ferramenta importante para resolver problemas e propor soluções transformadoras. O conteúdo do marxismo reside na perspectiva materialista histórica, onde a base econômica determina o processo de formação das instituições políticas, culturais e ideológicas, enfatizando o papel do conflito no nível de conteúdo e a consistência no significado principal para o processo histórico. Por meio da metodologia materialista histórica e da análise demonstrativa, este estudo concentra-se em avaliar os argumentos apresentados por Marx em sua crítica ao capitalismo e considerar sua adequação quando aplicados ao contexto socioeconômico atual. Os resultados mostram que os princípios fundamentais do marxismo continuam tendo valor como uma bússola, ajudando a identificar quaisquer trabalhos na sociedade e orientando atividades práticas em direção à justiça e à igualdade.

**Palavras-chave:** Contradições capitalistas, Análise dialética, Base econômica

## 1. Introduction

Karl Marx's philosophy has profoundly impacted how we perceive and interact with the world. Marx disrupted traditional philosophical paradigms as a philosopher and revolutionary by asserting that philosophy's purpose extends beyond interpreting the world to actively changing it. This paper delves into the fundamental principles of Marx's philosophy, tracing its historical evolution and assessing its modern-day relevance. By examining Marx's materialist conception of history and his critique of capitalism, we seek a thorough understanding of his contributions and their significance in today's socio-political landscape. Marx's materialist conception of history, also known as historical materialism, posits that material conditions and economic factors are the primary drivers of historical development. According to Marx, the monetary base of society, which includes the forces and relations of production, shapes the superstructure, encompassing culture, politics, and ideology. This framework contrasts with idealist approaches that prioritize ideas and consciousness as the main catalysts of historical change. Marx argued that societal progress results from the dialectical relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, where contradictions within the economic base lead to revolutionary transformations.

Central to Marx's critique of capitalism is his analysis of the modes of production and class relations. He contended that capitalism is characterized by exploiting the proletariat (working class) by the bourgeoisie (capitalist class), who own the means of production. This exploitation manifests in the extraction of surplus value from labor, where workers are paid less than the value of the goods and services they produce, resulting in profit for the capitalists. Marx argued that this inherent exploitation

leads to class struggle, the engine of historical change. He predicted that the contradictions within capitalism would eventually lead to its downfall and the emergence of a classless, communist society. The historical development of Marx's philosophy is rooted in his engagement with earlier philosophical traditions, mainly German idealism, French socialism, and British political economy. Marx synthesized these influences to develop a critique of existing social and economic structures. His collaboration with Friedrich Engels was instrumental in refining and disseminating his ideas through works such as "The Communist Manifesto" and "Das Kapital." These texts laid the foundation for Marxist theory and its application in various historical socio-political movements.

Marx's philosophy remains relevant in the modern era, as contemporary socio-economic issues often reflect the dynamics he described. The growing income inequality, labor exploitation, and crises within the capitalist system underscore the persisting relevance of Marx's. Furthermore, Marxist analysis has been adapted to address issues such as imperialism, environmental degradation, and globalization, demonstrating its versatility in interpreting and addressing contemporary challenges. By exploring the core tenets of Marx's philosophy, including his materialist conception of history and critique of capitalism, we gain a comprehensive understanding of his contributions. Marx's insistence on the transformative role of philosophy challenges us to engage with the world critically and seek to effect change. His ideas resonate in contemporary socio-political contexts, offering valuable insights into power dynamics, exploitation, and resistance dynamics. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, Marx's philosophy remains a vital tool for analyzing and addressing the systemic issues that shape our lives.

## 2. Literature Review

Marxist philosophy has evolved significantly since its inception. Modern research focuses on three key directions: Marxist philosophy's contributions to the system of human philosophical thought, the analysis of socio-economic forms, and the dialectical path of cognition from sensation to reason and from practice to theory. These research directions illuminate Marx's original contributions and adapt his philosophy to contemporary socio-economic challenges, filling critical gaps in understanding and application.

*Contributions to Human Philosophical Thought*, Marxist philosophy represents a transformative integration of Hegelian dialectics and Feuerbach's materialism, establishing historical materialism as a foundation for understanding societal evolution. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels argue that "consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness" (Marx & Engels, 1845, Vol. 5, p. 36). This assertion shifts the philosophical paradigm from idealism to materialism, emphasizing that material conditions shape human thought and social structures. Marx's historical materialism offers

a scientific framework for understanding history, society, and culture by analyzing the interplay between the economic base and the superstructure - a relevant perspective in addressing contemporary issues like globalization and digital economies. Modern research, such as Elster's (1985) and Foster's (2024) analyses on digital capitalism, expands this foundation by exploring the influence of technology and media on ideological constructs, filling gaps in Marx's original theory regarding the digital transformation of labor and power structures.

*Analysis of Socio-Economic Forms*, Marx's critique of capitalism in *Das Kapital* remains central to understanding socio-economic systems. He meticulously explains how "workers are alienated from the products they create, as these products confront them as alien powers" (Marx, 1867, Vol. 1, p. 85). This alienation is compounded by the extraction of surplus value, leading to systemic exploitation and wealth concentration. Modern research expands on this critique, examining how digital capitalism commodifies data and labor, exacerbating inequality and precarity. The dominance of tech giants like Amazon and Meta illustrates Marx's prediction of capital centralization and its socio-economic implications. Researchers like Harvey (2020) and Fraser (2024) investigate these dynamics, highlighting gaps in Marx's original analysis regarding digital economies, ecological crises, and global labor markets. By addressing these gaps, contemporary studies provide a nuanced understanding of how capitalism's contradictions persist and adapt, affirming the relevance of Marxist analysis in critiquing modern economic systems.

*Dialectical Path of Cognition*, Marx's dialectical method emphasizes the progression of knowledge from sensation to reason and from practice to theory. He asserts that "the question of whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question" (Marx, 1845, Vol. 5, p. 8). This approach underscores the unity of theory and practice, where understanding reality necessitates engaging with and transforming it. As a methodological tool, historical materialism reveals the dialectical relationship between material conditions and human consciousness, providing insights into societal development and change. Contemporary research explores this method in interdisciplinary contexts, such as artificial intelligence and ecological sustainability, addressing gaps in Marx's framework regarding integrating new technologies and environmental imperatives into the dialectical process. By extending Marx's dialectical approach, scholars provide tools for navigating modern challenges while maintaining a commitment to transformative praxis.

The gaps in Marxist philosophy largely stem from its historical context, which did not account for modern developments such as digital economies, globalized labor markets, and environmental crises. Contemporary research clarifies these gaps by incorporating insights into how technology

reshapes labor relations and the concentration of power. For instance, while Marx critiqued the alienation of industrial workers, modern analyses reveal new forms of alienation in the gig economy, where workers experience heightened precarity and disconnection from their labor. Additionally, the environmental dimension of socio-economic systems, largely absent in Marx's work, is now a critical focus, with scholars like Foster (2024) integrating ecological considerations into historical materialism. Significance and Future Applications Marxist philosophy's enduring significance lies in its ability to critique systemic inequalities and inspire transformative action by addressing contemporary issues such as digital labor exploitation, ecological degradation, and socio-economic inequalities (Habermas, J., 1981). , Marxist analysis provides a robust framework for understanding and reforming society. The dialectical method, emphasizing the interconnectedness of theory and practice, remains a powerful tool for analyzing and addressing complex global challenges. In the future, Marx's ideas will continue to inform efforts to build equitable and sustainable systems, reaffirming their relevance in guiding societal transformation (Elster, J., 1985).

### 3. Method

This study employs dialectical and historical materialism as its primary research methodology to analyze Marxist philosophy's formation, development, and contemporary relevance. Historical materialism, which views history as a series of socio-economic stages shaped by the dialectical interaction between the economic base (infrastructure) and social superstructure, serves as the analytical foundation. Materialist dialectics, emphasizing contradictions, change, and interconnectedness, explores the dynamic evolution of Marxist philosophy and its application to current issues. These methods provide a comprehensive framework for examining the impact of Marx's ideas on modern socio-economic and political systems. The general research method involves comparative and contextual analysis of primary texts, such as Marx's *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, alongside contemporary literature on global economic inequality, labor exploitation, and systemic power dynamics. Research results are expressed through a dialectical synthesis of Marxist theory with modern empirical realities. The study demonstrates Marxist philosophy's enduring capacity to address systemic contradictions and guide transformative social movements by analyzing these developments. The results also show how Marxist philosophy continues to influence critical disciplines, such as sociology, political economy, and cultural studies, and provides a theoretical basis for analyzing inequality and envisioning alternatives to capitalism.

### 4. Results and Discussion

**4.1 Karl Marx's Contributions to Philosophy: Unveiling Capitalism and Charting a Path to Social Transformation**

Relevance in the Digital Age Karl Marx's critique of capitalism remains a robust framework for understanding the exploitative mechanisms of contemporary society, which have evolved significantly since the industrial era. Through his analysis, Marx highlighted the inherent contradictions of capitalism, particularly the alienation of labor, exploitation, and the concentration of wealth, which are still evident in the digital age. His insights provide a critical foundation for analyzing how modern technological advancements have transformed the dynamics of exploitation and inequality.

The Industrial Era In Marx's era, capitalism was defined by the direct exploitation of industrial labor. The factory system served as the epicenter of production, where workers were alienated from their labor, the products they created, and their human essence. Marx argued that under capitalism, "the worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range" (Marx, 1844, Vol. 3, p. 36). This process of alienation resulted from labor being reduced to a commodity, sold on the market for survival, while capitalists appropriated the surplus value generated by workers. As Marx observed, "Labor is external to the worker; it does not belong to his essential being" (Marx, 1844, Vol. 3, p. 72). Additionally, Marx identified capitalism's systemic tendency to concentrate wealth in fewer hands, leading to growing inequality. He warned that this process would ultimately destabilize society: "The development of modern industry cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products" (Marx & Engels, 1848, Vol. 6, p. 490). These critiques remain relevant in analyzing the structural issues of capitalism in both Marx's time and today.

The Digital Evolution of Capitalism Contemporary capitalism has adapted to the digital age, introducing new mechanisms of exploitation that extend beyond the industrial framework Marx critiqued. In today's "digital factory," labor exploitation is not limited to physical work but encompasses intellectual and emotional labor. Digital platforms, algorithms, and artificial intelligence now play central roles in production, creating a new layer of alienation. Workers are often subjected to constant surveillance, performance metrics, and precarious employment conditions, particularly in gig economies. Unlike the physical factories of the industrial era, digital platforms commodify not only labor but also data. Marx's concept of alienation remains applicable in this context. He argued that under capitalism, "the product of labor confronts the laborer as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer" (Marx, 1867, Vol. 1, p. 85). Today, this alienation manifests in how digital technologies extract and monetize personal data, often without users' explicit consent. Workers and consumers contribute to wealth creation through interactions with these platforms, blurring the line between labor and consumption.



Concentration of Wealth in the Digital Age: The digital era has also exacerbated the concentration of wealth, echoing Marx's warnings about capital accumulation. He observed that "capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of nature, its negation" (Marx, 1867, Vol. 1, p. 929). In contemporary society, tech giants such as Amazon, Google, and Meta control vast resources and economic power, concentrating wealth in the hands of a few corporations. This phenomenon has intensified global inequality, as a small fraction of the population holds disproportionate wealth and influence while the majority face economic precarity. Relevance and Implications: Marx's critique of capitalism offers a vital lens through which to understand the contradictions of modern economies. While industrial capitalism primarily exploits physical labor, digital capitalism commodifies creativity, knowledge, and personal data, further alienating individuals from work and social relationships. The growing disparity between the wealthy elite and the working majority underscores the enduring relevance of Marx's analysis of inequality and exploitation. Marx's framework provides practical tools for social critique and activism. His theories inspire movements advocating for fair labor practices, data rights, and economic justice by exposing capitalism's systemic injustices. Marx's insights into capitalism's exploitative nature remain central to contemporary debates, from labor rights campaigns like the Fight for \$15 to calls for regulating tech monopolies. Marx's critique of capitalism transcends his time, evolving with the changes in economic and technological systems. His analysis of exploitation, alienation, and inequality continues to illuminate the structural issues of modern capitalism, particularly in the digital age. By combining historical materialism with a dialectical approach, Marx provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and challenging the injustices of capitalist society.

#### ***4.2 Base and Superstructure: Marx's Framework for Understanding Historical and Social Development***

At the core of Marx's theoretical innovation lies his groundbreaking contribution to understanding the formation and development of human history through socio-economic forms. This perspective, known as historical materialism, is considered a second great innovation in human history, following Darwin's theory of evolution. Marx asserted that the "base," comprising the economic infrastructure, including the relations of production and productive forces, fundamentally determines the "superstructure," which encompasses social institutions such as politics, law, and culture (Marx, 1859, Vol. 29, pp. 19–43). In his analysis of capitalist society, Marx explained that the relations of production, based on private ownership and labor exploitation, create political and legal systems designed to protect the ruling class's interests. He observed, "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life" (Marx, 1859, vol 29, p. 21). This

argument shifted the focus from idealistic approaches that viewed ideology or culture as the primary drivers of social change to a materialist framework where economic factors are foundational.

Marx emphasized that contradictions within the economic base, particularly between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor, are the primary forces driving social transformation (Marx, 1867, vol 1, pp.59). These contradictions create systemic instability, ultimately leading to socio-economic system collapse or transformation when the contradictions become irreconcilable. This framework explains the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism and envisions a classless society as the culmination of this trajectory. Marx's insights remain relevant in modern society as the economic base shapes the superstructure. For example, corporate lobbying influences political policies, reflecting the superstructure's dependence on economic interests. Simultaneously, the superstructure affects the base, as laws, cultural norms, and political systems either reinforce or challenge capitalist production modes. Marx's dialectical approach provides a dynamic tool for understanding how these interactions perpetuate capitalism's contradictions, such as economic inequality and labor exploitation. Thus, his theory remains essential for analyzing socio-economic systems and guiding transformative social movements.

#### ***4.3. Integrating Theory and Practice: Transforming Awareness into Action for a Better World***

Karl Marx's philosophy profoundly unified the theoretical cognition system by linking sensory perception, rational understanding, and practice into a coherent process. This framework, grounded in historical materialism, emphasizes the interplay between theory and practice, or praxis, as central to understanding and transforming nature and society. Marx argued that human cognition develops through interaction with the material world, stating, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1859, Vol. 5, pp. 1–3). This perspective situates human thought as a product and a driver of material conditions, integrating sensory experience with rational analysis and practical application.

Marx's theory of praxis highlights that cognition does not end with theoretical understanding but must be realized through action. He emphasized this relationship in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, asserting, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1845, Vol. 29, pp. 19–43). This insight underscores that theoretical knowledge gains meaning when applied to transform social realities. Marx's dialectical approach further refines this process by explaining that thought evolves through contradictions and their resolution, mirroring the development of material conditions. This unification of theory and practice is evident in Marx's analysis of social phenomena. For instance, his critique of capitalism explained the exploitation inherent in labor relations and provided a theoretical basis for revolutionary action. Social movements, from the



19th-century industrial workers' struggles to modern labor rights campaigns like the Fight for \$15, have drawn on Marx's framework to expose systemic injustices, organize collective action, and advocate for change. Similarly, Marx's approach to natural human cognition integrates sensory perception and reason, demonstrating that understanding nature involves empirical observation and theoretical synthesis. Marx's theoretical system represents a comprehensive method for cognitive development, where sensory perception informs reason, and reason is validated and expanded through practice. This dynamic process allows for the continuous refinement and application of knowledge, making Marx's contributions pivotal in understanding and shaping human thought, social phenomena, and natural processes.

#### ***4.5 The Evolution of Marxism: From Classical Philosophy to Neo-Marxist Critiques in Contemporary Society"***

Modern Marxism, particularly in the form of neo-Marxist philosophy, represents an evolution of Karl Marx's foundational ideas, adapted to analyze contemporary socio-economic and cultural issues. While classical Marxism focused on the economic base's primacy in shaping the superstructure and the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat as the engine of social transformation (Marx, 1867, vol 1, p.929), neo-Marxist thought extended this framework to include cultural, ideological, and psychological dimensions. Influential neo-Marxist philosophers such as Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School critically examined how culture and media reinforce capitalist power structures by shaping ideology and consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer's "culture industry" analysis illustrates how media and consumerism perpetuate alienation and suppress revolutionary potential (Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M., 2000). Today, neo-Marxist philosophy addresses issues like globalization, digital capitalism, and the gig economy. For instance, the dominance of tech giants in controlling data and digital platforms vividly reproduces Marx's warnings about the centralization of economic power. Neo-Marxists discuss how these developments exacerbate alienation, as gig workers experience heightened precarity and disconnection from labor products and social relationships. Scholars like David Harvey and Nancy Fraser expand Marxist analysis to encompass ecological crises and intersectional injustices, highlighting capitalism's systemic contradictions in perpetuating inequality and environmental degradation.

Marxist philosophy's enduring value lies in its ability to uncover capitalism's inherent contradictions, such as the overaccumulation of wealth by a minority while creating widespread poverty and inequality. Capitalism cannot resolve these contradictions despite adjustments without undermining its core profit motive. As Marx argued, "Capitalist production begets its negation" (Marx, 1867, Vol. 1, p. 929). The infrastructural role of economic production continues to determine the superstructure, as

laws, policies, and culture reflect and sustain capitalist priorities. This framework underscores the working class's role as a transformative force capable of reshaping society through collective action, as Marx envisioned in his call for praxis (Marx & Engels, 1848, Vol. 6, pp. 482–519). In the future, Marxism remains indispensable for addressing systemic inequities and envisioning alternative socio-economic models. Its analytical tools offer a critical lens for understanding exploitation, inequality, and alienation, inspiring social justice and reform movements. As long as capitalism persists in its contradictions, Marxist theory will provide a blueprint for transforming society toward equity and sustainability.

### Conclusion

Karl Marx's philosophy, centered on the critique of capitalism and the vision of a revolutionary transformation toward a classless society, remains a cornerstone in understanding socio-economic and political structures. The article analyzes Marx's core principles, such as the materialist interpretation of history, the dialectical relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, and the concept of labor alienation. It also highlights the relevance of these ideas in explaining contemporary phenomena, such as economic inequality, labor exploitation, and the concentration of capital in a globalized and technologically driven society. Since Marx's time, the socio-economic context has evolved significantly. The industrial capitalism of the 19th century, characterized by factory labor and direct exploitation, has transformed into a more complex system involving digital economies, global supply chains, and platform-based labor. The alienation Marx described is now amplified in the gig economy, where work is fragmented, precarious, and mediated by technology. Additionally, the commodification of data and the dominance of tech corporations illustrate new forms of capital accumulation and inequality, expanding on Marx's original analysis. Despite these changes, Marxist philosophy retains enduring relevance. Its focus on exposing systemic contradictions, such as the overaccumulation of wealth and persistent poverty, provides a robust framework for critiquing capitalism's failures. The dialectical method offers tools to understand and address evolving socio-economic challenges, making Marxism a flexible and adaptive system of thought. In the future, Marx's philosophical ideas can become a reality through social movements, progressive policies, and systemic reforms prioritizing equity and collective well-being. By addressing alienation and fostering inclusive economic systems, societies can operationalize Marx's vision. His philosophy inspires efforts to build a just world by uniting theoretical understanding with practical action, affirming its transformative potential in addressing humanity's most pressing challenges.

## References

- Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (2000). Enlightenment and antisemitism. *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 51(2). <https://doi.org/10.18647/2278/JJS-2000>
- Elster, J. (1985). *Making Sense of Marx*. Cambridge University Press.
- Engels, F. (1884). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.
- Fraser, N. (2024). *Capitalism, Ecology, and Social Justice*. Academic Press.
- Foster, J. B. (2024). *The Dialectics of Ecology: Socialism and Nature*. NYU Press.
- Habermas, J. (1981). *The Theory of Communicative Action*.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2020). *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell.
- Marx, K. (1844). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works* (Vol. 3, pp. 229–346).
- Marx, K. (1845). *Theses on Feuerbach*. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works* (Vol. 5, pp. 1–3).
- Marx, K. (1859). *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works* (Vol. 29, pp. 19–43).
- Marx, K. (1867). *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (Vol. 1).
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1845). *The German Ideology*. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works* (Vol. 5, pp. 1–211).
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Collected Works* (Vol. 6, pp. 482–519).



KIEN, Pham Thi. Marxist philosophy and its influence on today's world. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol.22, n.1, 2025, eK25008, p. 01-11.

Received: 8/2024

Approved: 12/2024

: