

Modernity and Alienation: Revisiting Marx's Theory in Contemporary Cultural Contexts

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Abstract: Marx's theory of alienation is a profound analysis and criticism of modern social problems. Overreliance on factors such as market economy and technological progress has led to imbalanced relationships between humans and themselves, between humans, and between humans and nature, leading to various forms of alienation. Especially, labor alienation and interpersonal relationship alienation have become the most serious problems in modern society. Moreover, since 1990, the number of family relationships among people has decreased from an average of 20.97 to 10.26, the number of neighbors has decreased from an average of 8.23 to 4.32, the number of colleagues per capita has decreased from 115.99 to 70.53, and the number of friends per capita has decreased from 18.29 to 9.32. In order to address the issue of alienation, society needs to strengthen social education and attach importance to interpersonal relationships, in order to promote fairness and justice, and focus on self realization. Strengthening social education is beneficial for enhancing people's ideological awareness, rational thinking, and self-management awareness, thereby better understanding oneself and others, and improving one's own moral level and social quality. Emphasizing interpersonal relationships is beneficial for managing relationships with others in daily interactions, promoting communication and understanding between individuals, and enhancing trust and friendship between them. Promoting fairness and justice is beneficial for resolving social conflicts, eliminating people's dissatisfaction and sense of injustice, and strengthening social cohesion and stability. Finally, paying attention to self-actualization is conducive to improving people's self-knowledge and personal strength, promoting the all-round development of individuals, and making our lives more fulfilling and meaningful. In conclusion, solving the problem of alienation in modern society requires paying attention to the relationship between individuals and society, people and nature, and insisting on the equal and harmonious development of people and self, people and others, which can build a better society.

Keywords: Alienation Theory; Modernity Issues; Individual Self-awareness; Social Education; Interpersonal Relationships

1. INTRODUCTION

Marx's alienation theory plays an important role in Marxist philosophy. Marx's theory of alienation is based on the real society, closely combining labor and alienation, and deeply revealing the inherent logical irrationality of the phenomenon of alienation (Li & Hou, 2021). Based on this

viewpoint, it can be seen that Marx's criticism of civil society is closely related to the self alienation of workers in the capitalist material production process (Zhu, 2021). This theory was proposed in the historical era of Marx and remains the spiritual treasure trove of humanity to this day (Hu et al., 2021). Since the European Enlightenment, the issue of modernity has gradually emerged as a spiritual dilemma faced by people in modern society, manifested as the emptiness of human values and the lack of sense of existence (Ning & Tian, 2022). Many philosophers have criticized and reflected on this, but simply denying enlightenment rationality is clearly difficult to solve this problem (Li, 2019). In this context, self-awareness, as an important component of consciousness, plays a crucial role in the formation of individual socialization and personality (Wu, 2021). At the same time, social education is also regarded as an important wing of modern Chinese education (Zhou, 2021). Therefore, under the guidance of Marx's alienation theory, it is of great significance to delve into the issue of modernity and discover the bottlenecks in the development of modern society and their solutions. This can help us build a more complete and harmonious modern society on the basis of inheriting and promoting Marxist thought. In short, Marx's alienation theory reveals the problems of modernity and the self alienation of workers in modern society. Through reflection and exploration of these issues, combined with research on self-awareness and social education, it is expected to find effective ways to solve modernity problems under the guidance of Marxist ideology, and help build a more harmonious and perfect modern society.

2. CONCEPT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MARX'S ALIENATION THEORY

2.1 Concept of Marx's Alienation Theory

The theory of alienation is one of Marx's important theories. Currently, the phenomenon of human alienation and objectification still exists in modern social and economic life, and the development of productive forces has not fundamentally eliminated the state of human alienation (Guo & Sun, 2021). Marx put forward the theory of alienation in his *Das Kapital*, which emphasizes the importance of labor to human beings, because labor is an important form of the relationship between human beings and nature and society. In capitalist society, workers face a series of problems, such as unfamiliarity with the production of products, lack of decision-making rights in the production process, alienation from themselves and others,

and loss of freedom and dignity. These problems have led to the alienation between workers and their own labor content and production process, causing them to lose control over their own labor and influence over social production. Other forms include that workers lost their free control of their time and ability, and were deprived of ownership and control of Means of production, so they were forced to be employed by capitalists. This leads to the separation of workers from the natural environment, themselves, and society, and weakens their creativity and sense of participation. The issue of alienation not only exists in capitalist countries, but also in other socialist countries (Li, 2021). Ma's theory of alienation holds an important position in the history of philosophical development (Luo, 2022), and Marx's theory of alienation highlights the importance of human labor for social development, providing an important theoretical basis for workers' movement and ideological liberation. Its purpose is to fundamentally change the capitalist mode of production and social relations. This theory still holds significant significance in contemporary times and can help us understand and solve many social problems in modern society (Wei et al., 2023; Wei, 2024).

2.2 Characteristics of Marx's Alienation Series

The historical logic generation, complete content, and unity with practice of Marx's alienation theory demonstrate its distinct integrity (Li, 2022). Marx's theory of alienation was widely developed and improved later on. Western Marxism extended it to the destruction of capitalism on the physical and mental health of workers, as well as on the natural environment. French sociologists combine it with modernity and cultural criticism, emphasizing the oppression and deprivation of individual freedom and identity in modern society. Postmodernism criticized and reinterpreted it, believing that alienation is a common phenomenon in all societies. In addition, some feminists and racists combine alienation theory with gender and race issues to explore the oppression and exploitation of women and ethnic minorities by capitalist production methods. These developments provide important insights and insights for us to deeply understand and solve modern social problems. Marx developed the theory of labor alienation by subsuming the speculative view of spiritual alienation and the humanistic view of alienation. Marx believed that natural division of labor was a social and historical reason for labor alienation, and eliminating labor alienation needed to rely on the development of productive forces rather than just circling around the object of subsuming labor and the return to human nature (Qiu, 2023). The characteristics of

Marx's alienation series are shown in Figure 1.

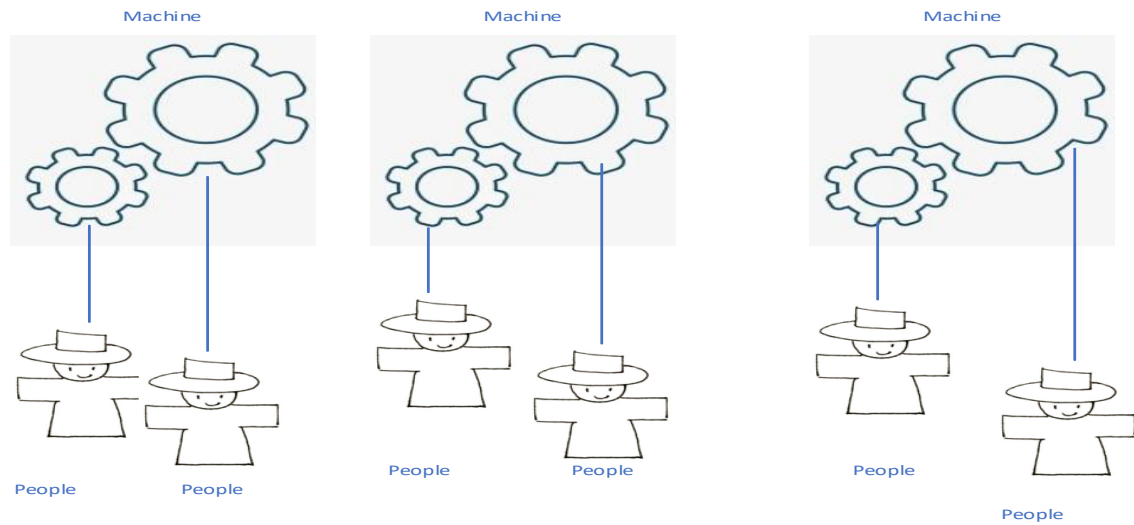


Figure 1: Characteristics of Marx's Alienation

Marx completed a leap from the theory of alienated labor to the materialist view of history (Hou, 2022). Through the combination of Marx's alienation theory and Figure 1 analysis, it can be seen that machine control of humans refers to the gradual transformation of the role of workers from the main decision-maker to the executor of machines in capitalist society with the rapid development of machines and technology. The continuous improvement of machine efficiency and productivity has led to the gradual weakening of human roles, and the work content of workers has become increasingly simple and mechanized, lacking necessary creativity and imagination. The result of machine control over humans further exacerbates the phenomenon of worker alienation in capitalist society. The labor content of workers has become unfamiliar and uninteresting, and they have lost control and decision-making power over the entire production process. They lack a sense of control and identification with their work, which in turn leads to alienation and separation from their work, the natural environment, and society.

3. ALIENATION OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MODERN SOCIETY

3.1 Popularization of Social Media and Virtual Socialization

Marx's analysis of modernity is in the *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx's description of the characteristics of capitalist society illustrates the basic characteristics of modernity in capitalist society (Wang, 2019). The popularization of social media and virtual socializing is an important aspect

of the alienation of interpersonal relationships in contemporary society. With the popularization of the Internet and social media, people can easily communicate and share photos and information with people from different places through social media platforms. Since the Enlightenment, the complex contradictions inherent in modernity have been perceived and pondered by social theorists (Jing, 2019).

Advantage: It allows people to participate in activities, play games, discuss issues, express opinions, exchange items, and more online. In addition, virtual socializing can also allow people to connect with different groups, expanding the breadth of social circles. **Disadvantage:** It lacks authenticity and intimacy. Virtual socializing often lacks true emotional connection and communication, and people cannot establish true emotional connections through face-to-face communication, which is more prone to misunderstandings and conflicts. Virtual social networking can also lead to people being wrapped in their own Comfort zone in the social circle, only interacting with some similar people, and selectively ignoring people who are different from themselves. The lack of diversity and inclusiveness in this virtual social circle leads to an increase in the degree of alienation in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, virtual socializing can easily lead to issues such as identity fraud, false advertising, and information leakage. Sometimes, the threat of virtual socializing can even lead to adverse events such as fraud and online violence, seriously affecting people's mental health. The disconnect between virtual socializing and real life can also have adverse effects on people's psychological and social growth. The virtual social form diagram is shown in Figure 2.

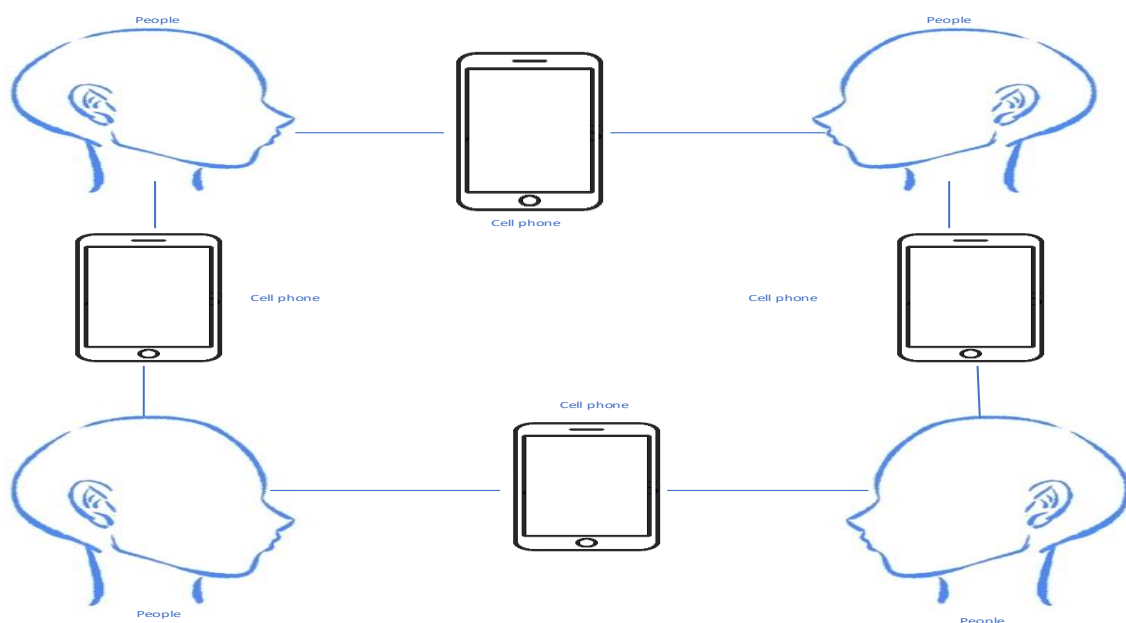


Figure 2: Virtual Social Form Diagram

People's individual consciousness is increasingly strengthening, which constitutes the social and psychological basis for the prevalence of individualism (Yan, 2021). From the analysis in the previous text and Figure 2, it can be seen that virtual social interaction is undoubtedly a major manifestation of the alienation of interpersonal relationships in modern society. People need to fully understand the pros and cons of virtual socializing and actively seek solutions to balance the development of virtual and real socializing, while maintaining social convenience and reducing the degree of alienation in interpersonal relationships.

3.2 Urbanization and Social Isolation

Urbanization refers to the migration of population from rural areas to cities and the expansion of urban scale. With the accelerated development of urbanization, the economy, culture, environment, and other aspects of cities have been greatly improved, providing better conditions and guarantees for people's production and life. However, at the same time, urbanization has also brought some negative issues, one of which is social isolation. Social isolation refers to the isolation and detachment between individuals and society. Urbanization has exacerbated the problem of social isolation, with the following reasons and manifestations: 1) Population density increase: Urbanization leads to an increase in population density in cities, resulting in smaller living and working areas for people, while the distance between people significantly increases, making communication more difficult. 2) Social distancing: Urbanization has accelerated the pace of people's lives, and busy lifestyles have made people more concerned about personal interests and self actualization, while neglecting the importance of social relationships. The alienation of social relations and the widening gap between people exacerbate the problem of social isolation. 3) Social polarization intensifies: Urbanization has further widened and widened the gap between social classes, making the relationship between people more indifferent, which has led to the intensification of social isolation, especially many people at the bottom of society are facing the risk of exclusion and marginalization. 4) Online socializing replaces face-to-face communication: Urbanization has further intensified people's dependence on the internet, causing more and more people to meet their social needs through online socializing, while neglecting the importance of face-to-face communication. Although online socializing can bring some convenience, it can also create barriers and feelings of alienation between people. To alleviate the problem of social isolation, various measures need to be taken. For example, improving

public service levels, improving environmental quality, safeguarding residents' rights and interests, strengthening the construction and management of social organizations, promoting volunteer activities, implementing community responsibility system, building community activity platforms, encouraging and organizing various forms of social activities, etc. In addition, the government should also strengthen supervision and management of the urbanization process to avoid negative impacts and ensure the sustainability of urban construction and development. The state of social relations in different periods is shown in Figure 3.

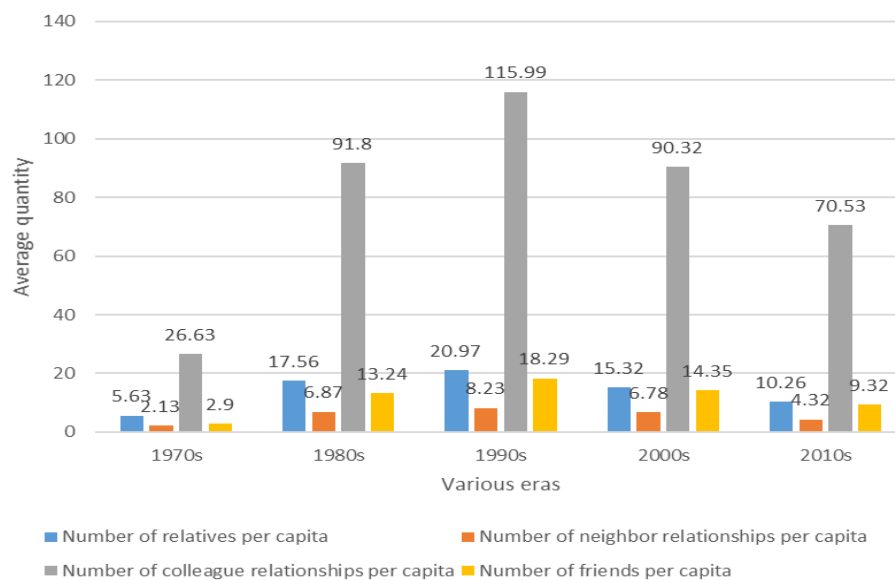


Figure 3: Number of Per Capita Relationships in a Certain Area from 1970 To 2010

From the data in Figure 3, it can be seen that during the period of rapid urbanization in 1990, the number of family relationships among people decreased from an average of 20.97 to 10.26, the number of neighbors decreased from an average of 8.23 to 4.32, the number of colleagues per capita decreased from 115.99 to 70.53, and the number of friends per capita decreased from 18.29 to 9.32. At the same time, various data in the process of urbanization have caused people to become estranged from their relatives and neighbors. In order to meet their social needs, people have turned to finding jobs and relationships within their circle of friends. Based on the above analysis combined with Figure 3, it can be seen that urbanization may lead to the alienation and fragmentation of family, neighborhood, and social relationships. People's social networks have become increasingly extensive but also increasingly inadequate in depth, which may bring various negative impacts to society. Therefore, it is necessary to propose and take effective measures to avoid these problems and strive to alleviate the negative impact of urbanization on us.

4. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL EDUCATION AND ATTACH IMPORTANCE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

4.1 Strengthening Social Education

Social education is not limited to training job skills and businesses, but more importantly, it cultivates people's correct understanding of society and their integration into society, giving them a sense of social responsibility and a life attitude (Jia & Wang, 2019). Strengthening the cultivation and development of interpersonal relationships can help people treat themselves and others more rationally, enhance mutual understanding and respect, and establish healthier and more positive interpersonal relationships through education in interpersonal relationships, training in social etiquette and skills, and strengthening psychological counseling in interpersonal relationships. In addition, social education should also focus on cultivating awareness among families, neighbors, and communities, making people more concerned about their communities and those around them, and enhancing their awareness of community cooperation and sense of responsibility. Moreover, enhancing self-awareness is also a very important way to improve, as self-awareness is an individual's understanding of themselves and their relationships, and its development affects an individual's mental health and personality improvement (Wang, 2020). The specific method is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Characteristics and Functions of Strengthening Social Education Methods

It can be seen from the analysis in Figure 4 that strengthening social education is one of the important ways to solve the problem of modern Social alienation. By strengthening the cultivation and development of interpersonal relationships, focusing on the training of social etiquette and communication skills, and strengthening the psychological counseling of interpersonal relationships, people can build a more healthy, harmonious and stable social environment.

4.2 Emphasize the Construction of Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships have become one of the major problems faced by young students (Hu & Dai, 2021). In modern society, the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships have become increasingly important. With the rapid development of urbanization, people are facing increasingly complex social environments and relationships, and they need to pay more attention to the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. The government needs to encourage and support people to pay attention to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships through various policies and measures, and improve their interpersonal communication skills and qualities, in order to establish healthy, harmonious, and stable social relationships and achieve common development of individuals and society. Firstly, the government can improve people's interpersonal skills and qualities through education and training. In schools and society, relevant courses and activities can be offered to teach basic skills and methods of interpersonal communication, such as communication skills, social etiquette, emotional management, etc. The government can also encourage and support social organizations and enterprises to carry out relevant training and activities to improve people's interpersonal skills and qualities. Not only the government, but also social organizations and individuals need to work together to strengthen interpersonal relationships. Social organizations can promote communication and exchange between individuals through various forms of social activities; Individuals can continuously improve their interpersonal skills and qualities, and focus on understanding, respect, and trust in social interactions, thereby establishing a deep and broad network of interpersonal relationships. In addition, the media and the internet can also play a positive role. By reporting positive interpersonal relationship cases, positive and healthy social values can be advocated and disseminated, thereby helping people better establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Therefore, only when all aspects of society share their responsibilities can they jointly promote the

development of interpersonal relationships. The roles and methods of each level are shown in Figure 5.

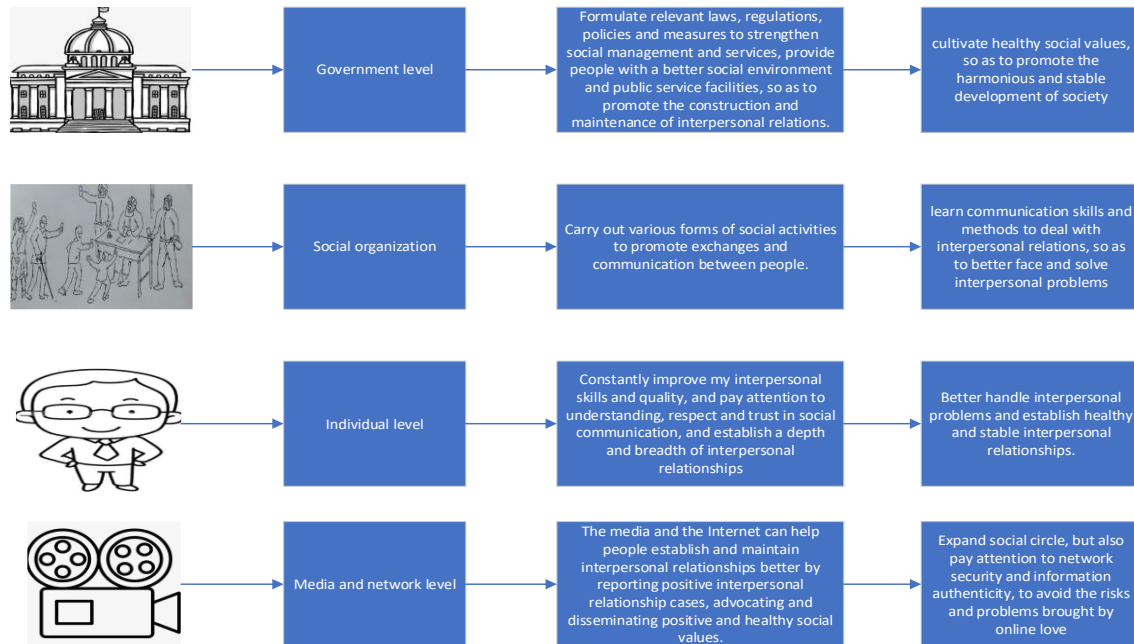


Figure 5: Ways and Effects of Improving Interpersonal Relationships at Various Levels

Based on the above analysis combined with Figure 5, it can be seen that strengthening the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is of great significance for individuals and society. Good interpersonal relationships can bring many benefits, such as enhancing personal social skills and emotional intelligence, improving work efficiency and quality of life, reducing stress and anxiety, and so on. At the same time, good interpersonal relationships also contribute to social harmony and stability, promoting common development of society. Therefore, the government, social organizations, individuals, media networks, and families all need to work together from different levels to promote the development of interpersonal relationships and create a positive, healthy, and harmonious social atmosphere. A healthy self-awareness and interpersonal relationships can promote individuals to have a correct understanding, perceive themselves, and further improve themselves, helping individuals to continuously experience happiness and unleash personal and social values (Peng, 2019).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Through in-depth exploration of the issue of modern alienation, as well as exploring paths and methods to solve the problem, this article proposed

specific measures to address the issues of urbanization, social isolation, and alienation of interpersonal relationships. The importance of implementing these measures lies in building a positive, healthy, and harmonious social environment, improving individual self-awareness and quality of life, and achieving fairness, justice, and social stability. Looking ahead, this effort needs to be continuously developed and improved to promote the progress and development of society and humanity. At the same time, people need to understand and pay attention to other issues in modern society, such as environmental pollution and Resource depletion, and strengthen cooperation and coordination among all mankind to achieve common prosperity and development.

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