

A Study on the Motivations behind Marx's Late-Life Writing of the *Anthropology Notebooks*

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Abstract: Marx's intellectual development underwent multiple stages and several significant transformations. In his later years, he shifted his focus from a critique of capitalist political economy to an engagement with the history of "ancient societies." In particular, the composition of the "Anthropology Notebooks" is regarded within academia as an important theoretical "turn," provoking widespread scholarly discussion: Why did Marx, prior to the completion of "Capital", dedicate substantial effort to the study of primitive and pre-capitalist social formations? This paper argues that such a "turn" should not be interpreted as a deviation from Marx's original theoretical trajectory, but rather as a deepening and extension of the logic inherent in historical materialism. The "Anthropology Notebooks" exemplify an expansion of Marx's social theoretical horizon, with the primary theoretical motivations arising from three dimensions: first, changes in the historical context; second, the development of his theoretical system; and third, the exigencies posed by contemporary social realities. As an integral component of Marx's social theory, an inquiry into the motivations behind the writing of the "Anthropology Notebooks" holds significant theoretical value for advancing a comprehensive understanding of his theories on social formations, communicative relations, and the concept of civilization.

Keywords: *Anthropology Notebooks; Historical Materialism*

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, with the publication of partial translations of the "Anthropology Notebooks" and the continuous emergence of related research findings, Marx's late-life notebooks have become a focal point of academic study and debate regarding his works. The "Anthropology Notebooks" are widely recognized as one of Marx's writings that has provoked the most controversy and divergent interpretations. Scholars generally regard the period from 1873 to 1882 as Marx's late years, during which the writing of the "Anthropology Notebooks" embodies the culmination of his lifelong theoretical reflections. David McLellan briefly noted in his "Karl Marx": A Biography that "in the last ten years of his life... Marx showed a keen interest in the then-emerging field of anthropology and was enthusiastic about the works of Lewis Morgan... Particularly captivating to Marx in Morgan's writings were the democratic political organizations of primitive tribes and their communal ownership of property."^[1] What, then, accounted for Marx's profound interest in the rise of anthropology? What motivated him to excerpt nearly 400,000 words of notes from multiple anthropological works between 1879 and 1882? This question has long attracted significant attention from scholars both domestically and internationally, giving rise to extensive discussion and debate.

The "Anthropology Notebooks" (also known as the "Ethnology Notebooks" or "Marx's Notebooks on the History of Ancient Society") are a collection of excerpted notes completed by Marx between 1879 and 1882. These notes encompass his close reading and compilation of five anthropological and ethnological works: Lewis Morgan's "Ancient Society", Kovalevsky's "The Commune Land Ownership", Maine's "Lectures on the Early History of Institutions", Firth's "The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon", and Laboulaye's "The Origins of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man". Regarding the motivations behind the writing of the "Anthropology Notebooks", scholarly opinions vary widely. Some Western scholars argue that Marx undertook this project to refine his study of the pre-capitalist stages of history and possibly aimed to construct a systematic anthropological work. Soviet scholars tend to view his research as an effort to explain the economic forms of pre-capitalist societies. Many Chinese scholars emphasize that the "Anthropology Notebooks" reflect Marx's theoretical endeavor to deepen historical materialism and respond to issues of Eastern social development. There are also perspectives suggesting that this represents a "rupture" in Marx's thought or a "deviation" from

his political-economic research.

It is noteworthy that Marx did not turn to anthropological research on the premise of abandoning his critique of political economy. In letters to B  p and Danielson written in 1871 and 1872, he explained his motivation for withdrawing from the political-historical stage in his later years, namely, to complete the third volume of "Capital". This indicates that Marx's anthropological studies continued to serve his overarching critical project of political economy. The field of anthropology was far removed from the capitalist political economy on which Marx was then working. Just as Marx's early intellectual trajectory shifted from the Young Hegelian idealism to Feuerbach's humanist materialism and then to historical materialism, his engagement with a new domain of thought was inevitably shaped by the problems he confronted at that time. Therefore, this paper approaches the reasons behind Marx's late-life writing of the "Anthropology Notebooks" from a historical perspective, examining three dimensions: changes in the era Marx lived in, the development of his theoretical system, and the demands of contemporary realities. It is precisely the intersection of these motivating factors that endowed Marx's late thought with greater practical orientation and further enriched and expanded his theoretical framework of historical materialism.

2. Changes in the Historical Context

Engels, in his commentary on the French socialist Bri  re-Javelle, emphasized: "Javelle in many places absolutized Marx's individual arguments, whereas Marx himself regarded these arguments as relative, valid only under certain conditions and within a specific scope."^[2] This evaluation reveals an important fact: Marx's theoretical framework was always rooted in concrete historical contexts and bore distinct temporal conditionality. Whether in the writing of "Capital" or the compilation of the "Anthropology Notebooks", his work was inseparably linked to the significant social transformations of his time.

2.1 The Expansion of Capitalism and the Intensification of Social Contradictions

In the "Anthropology Notebooks", Marx pointed out: "In the 1870s, world history entered a new era; Western European capitalism passed through its revolutionary crisis and began what is called a period of peaceful development."^[3] At the end of the nineteenth century, Europe and the wider world were undergoing a period of profound social restructuring and significant political upheaval. The various social phenomena and issues emerging in Western Europe at that time can be summarized into three main aspects.

First, the Industrial Revolution and the intensification of "social problems". The Industrial Revolution led to rapid development of social productive forces. Beginning in the latter half of the 18th century, the Second Industrial Revolution fueled a rapid expansion of capitalism. By the 1830s, Britain had largely completed its Industrial Revolution, followed by rapid economic development in other continental European countries such as France and Germany. During this period, traditional manual labor was replaced by more efficient large machinery, factories emerged, and social productive forces developed at an accelerated pace. As Marx pointed out in the "Communist Manifesto": "The bourgeoisie, during its rule of less than a hundred years, has created more productive forces than all preceding generations together."^[4] At the same time, rapid urbanization far outpaced the development of urban infrastructure. Factory workers lived in overcrowded housing, leading to public health crises and the frequent outbreak of infectious diseases. As a result, the "living conditions of the working class" became a focal concern for governments and intellectuals across countries. The inherent flaws of capitalism led to widespread exploitation of workers: long working hours, low wages, rampant child labor, and lack of social insurance. These conditions gave rise to numerous labor unions and large-scale strikes. Beginning with the Lyon workers' uprising in France in 1831, the Chartist movement in Britain in 1836, and the Silesian textile workers' revolt in Germany in 1844, a wave of revolutionary upheavals swept across Europe in 1848. These movements represented demands not only for political freedom but also for economic equality and social security. During this period, the proletariat emerged as an independent political force on the historical stage, and the contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie became apparent. The struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in Europe's developed countries emerged as the principal social contradiction and the core driving force of historical progress. In summary, the period during which the Anthropology Notebooks were compiled and written coincided with a time of intense capitalist upheaval and an uncertain future.

Second, the revolutionary situation of the proletariat was complex and volatile. The year 1830 also

marked the beginning of an even more radical political transformation: the English and French working classes began to emerge as independent and self-conscious political forces, while nationalist movements arose in many European countries. By the mid-nineteenth century, from France to the eastern borders of the Austrian Empire, from Scandinavia in Northern Europe to Sicily in Italy, uprisings against autocracy, demands for freedom, and struggles for national independence and liberation erupted, lasting for two years. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 spurred constitutional reforms in countries such as Britain, France, and Germany, but these reforms soon stalled and compromised under resistance from social order advocates and vested interests. Marx and Engels actively participated in various workers' organizations and engaged in the movements through the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (New Rhineland Newspaper). They produced numerous texts related to the 1848 revolutions, such as "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850", "The Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany", and "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte". In his speech on free trade, Marx argued that the so-called "freedom of trade" championed by the bourgeoisie was essentially the freedom of capitalists to exploit workers and the freedom of capitalist states to amass wealth at the expense of other nations. Marx asserted that defending capitalism solely on the grounds of "freedom and property rights" failed to address the deeper issue of class inequality. Between 1850 and 1871, Italy and Germany achieved unification through force and diplomacy; various Eastern European nations sought to break free from the rule of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The formation of nation-states intensified debates around "state intervention" and "citizens' rights," while also entailing oppression of minority peoples and colonies. In France, from March 18 to May 28, 1871, the Paris Commune—the first proletarian government—was established but lasted only 72 days before being violently suppressed by the bourgeoisie. Over 100,000 proletarians were arrested, exiled, or killed. Moreover, ideological divisions existed among proletarian representatives, and the revolutionary movements in various countries faced bottlenecks and stagnation. The path to developing socialism remained uncertain and awaited practical exploration.

Third, the emergence of imperialism and colonial expansion. Concurrent with the disintegration of feudal modes of production on the European continent, significant changes occurred in the external environment. Among these, Marx regarded the opening of new sea routes and the formation of the world market as the most impactful. ^[5] The opening of new sea routes laid the foundation for the formation of the capitalist world market. In the second half of the nineteenth century, countries including Britain, France, and Germany ventured to Asia and Africa to establish colonies and plunder raw materials. The emergence of the world market brought European modes of production into direct contact with diverse social formations across the globe. "The new products imported from these regions, especially the large influx of gold and silver into circulation, completely altered the relationships between classes and dealt a heavy blow to feudal landownership and the laboring classes." ^[4] Accompanying the discovery of the New World, the major colonial powers, driven by their own interests, began systematic studies of the colonized countries, conducting extensive geographical explorations and ethnographic investigations. European academia saw an influx of ethnographies and field reports on Aboriginal Australians, Native Americans, African tribes, and South Asian village communities, leading to significant advancements in modern anthropological research. It was within this broader context that Marx was able to persist in his studies, gathering these "cross-cultural" texts at institutions such as the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in order to test his historical materialist hypotheses regarding the "primitive commune" and "clan systems."

The industrial upheavals, the rise of nation-states, and global colonial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century all triggered Marx's reflections on broader social formations. He recognized that focusing solely on capitalist society was insufficient to fully explain the origins of these phenomena and could not reveal the comprehensive trajectory of human social evolution. Consequently, he turned to a more genealogically significant study of primitive societies, thereby expanding his understanding of the fundamental nature of "social relations." Together, these factors constituted the historical context in which Marx "stepped beyond economics" and entered the field of anthropology.

2.2 The Rise of Eastern Societies

From the historical background of Marx's excerpting activity, the center of world historical development in the second half of the nineteenth century gradually shifted from Western to Eastern civilizations, bringing about profound changes in the traditional global political and economic order. Revolutionary struggles in Eastern countries increasingly reached a climax. With the further expansion of the capitalist world system, the traditional Western Europe-centered political and economic order was progressively dismantled, and the focus of world history began to extend eastward. The developments in Eastern societies became an increasingly significant variable influencing the evolution of the global order.

Under the dual pressures of Western cultural impact and internal crises, these non-Western countries were compelled, on the one hand, to integrate into the global market system, and on the other, to pursue national self-reliance and renewal through reforms or nationalist resistance. This marked a major transformation in the traditional world political and economic structure dominated by Western Europe. The revolutionary movements in Eastern countries and the changes in the Eastern world influenced the overall transformation of the global order. The dynamic changes in Eastern societies during this period led Marx, in his later years, to devote considerable attention to studies of Eastern civilizations. This focus became a key reason for Marx's exploration of primitive societies in the East.

Eastern societies embarked on a process of "passive modernization" during the second half of the nineteenth century. Japan, Russia, and China each initiated modernization efforts in this period. Following the "Black Ships" incident in 1853, Japan rapidly launched the Meiji Restoration, abolishing the feudal domains, establishing a modern military and industrial system, and becoming the first Eastern country to successfully "catch up" with the West. In Russia, the abolition of serfdom in 1861 led to a coexistence of rural communal systems and capitalist factories. After the Opium Wars, China was forced to open treaty ports, prompting the Qing government to initiate self-strengthening reforms such as the "Self-Strengthening Movement." Unlike Western European countries, these Eastern states did not complete capitalist industrialization in the traditional sense. Under the impetus of foreign capital, they explored indigenous paths to modernization, grounded in their own national conditions and responding to capitalist expansion in their unique ways, thereby demonstrating renewed vitality. This partial rise challenged Eurocentric perspectives, raising theoretical questions of the time regarding whether social progress must necessarily pass through a capitalist stage and whether the stages of social and historical development possess universal applicability.

The development of Eastern societies attracted Marx's keen attention, especially the rise of revolutionary movements in countries such as China, which made him acutely aware of profound changes underway in the global historical order. Writing in the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx stated: "The Chinese revolution has thrown a spark into the mine of the industrial system, which is currently overloaded, and will lead to the outbreak of a long-brewing general crisis. This crisis will spread abroad and will be followed by political revolutions on the European continent." [6] This assessment not only reflected Marx's attention to the situation in China but also signaled his reassessment of the role of non-Western societies in the course of world history. As the geographic focus of revolutionary movements gradually shifted eastward, Marx perceived that the evolving realities of the world challenged traditional models of historical development. This prompted him, in his later years, to abandon support for a singular linear model of historical progression and instead to engage in in-depth study of the historical institutions and modes of life of non-Western societies.

Accordingly, in his later years, Marx devoted considerable time to studying Eastern civilizations and the history of primitive societies. He extensively engaged with works on Eastern civilizations and primitive societies, and in his notebooks, he systematically compiled materials on village communal systems, patriarchal relations, kinship-based social structures, communal land ownership, and the integration of state power. Through this research, Marx recognized that Eastern societies had developed unique social formations distinct from the capitalist trajectory of Western Europe. This exceeded the explanatory scope of traditional political economy. While examining the Russian peasant commune and the Chinese patriarchal system, Marx gradually acknowledged that under specific conditions, some Eastern societies could bypass the capitalist stage and transition directly to a higher social form. This important insight later became known as "leaping over the Kautsky Gap"—the idea that non-Western societies, under certain conditions, could skip the capitalist "gap" and proceed directly toward socialism or more advanced social formations.

3. Development of the Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Deepening of Marx's Methodological Approach

Since his time at the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx had consistently been concerned with the overall development of human society. After formulating the materialist conception of history, he continuously enriched and deepened this theoretical framework by responding to the challenges of his time and incorporating contemporary intellectual advancements. In particular, he made significant breakthroughs in analyzing the internal contradictions of capitalist society. It was precisely this profound insight into the laws governing capitalist development that provided a theoretical entry point for his retrospective inquiry into primitive societies and, more broadly, the study of non-capitalist social formations.

The research approach adopted by Marx in “Capital” is often referred to as the “anatomy of the human body” method—that is, uncovering the essential logic of social development by examining its most mature and typical form. This method begins with the result (in this case, capitalist society) and seeks to trace back its historical logic through the analysis of its representative structures. At this stage, Marx had already published the first volume of “Capital” and completed the drafts of volumes two and three, offering a comprehensive and systematic exposition of capitalism’s operational mechanisms on a macro level.

However, the corresponding “anatomy of the ape”—that is, the study of less developed, non-capitalist Eastern societies—remained relatively underdeveloped. The established method of analyzing the “human body” (capitalist society) proved insufficient for explaining the structure of the “ape body” (early or primitive society). In fact, understanding the structure of the “ape body” could become key to fully grasping the developmental trajectory of the “human body.” Consequently, Marx’s late-stage research required a fundamental shift: he was compelled to reexamine the origins of human social development, approaching the problem from the “before”—that is, from the initial stages of social formation—to explore the earliest forms of human social structures and institutions.

It was at this juncture that disciplinary developments offered Marx a new theoretical avenue for this “anatomy of the ape.” In the 1860s and 1870s, a wave of anthropological research emerged across Europe and North America, producing a wealth of new findings that directly informed and supported Marx’s late investigations into early social formations.

3.2 Anthropological Foundations of Theory

Even before anthropology had been formally established as an independent academic discipline, Marx had already demonstrated a strong interest in the forms of primitive society. In “The German Ideology”, Marx and Engels discussed the earliest division of labor and the associated question of primitive forms of ownership. Later, in works such as “Wage Labour and Capital and Capital”, Marx repeatedly addressed the basic features of ancient social structures. These early theoretical explorations laid the intellectual groundwork for his later systematic investigation into the evolution of human social formations. By the 1870s, as Marx continued the writing of the subsequent volumes of “Capital”, he increasingly recognized a core issue: to truly explain the historical development of human society, the analysis of capitalist society alone was insufficient. In seeking to supplement the treatment of primitive communes and clan societies in Volumes II and III, he became aware that existing European historical sources could no longer sustain the construction of a comprehensive theory of “social formation evolution.” Confronted with the limitations of purely political-economic materials, Marx turned to the then-emerging literature in cultural anthropology and ethnology for broader empirical and theoretical support.

In the nineteenth century, anthropology rapidly developed as an emerging discipline in Europe and gradually established a theoretical orientation centered on social evolution. The publication of Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species” in 1859 extended the influence of biological evolutionism into the humanities and social sciences, giving rise to a historical perspective that viewed human society as evolving continuously from “savagery” to “civilization.” A landmark work of this intellectual stage was Lewis H. Morgan’s “Ancient Society”, published in 1877. As the founding figure of American cultural anthropology, Morgan drew on his studies of the kinship systems of the North American Iroquois to propose a model of social evolution “from clan to state.” He systematically analyzed the historical relationships between forms of marriage, family structures, property rights, and state institutions. This work laid the theoretical foundation for the development of ethnology and anthropology as distinct academic disciplines. Other anthropologists, such as John F. McLennan with “Primitive Marriage” and John Lubbock with “The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man”, similarly attempted to uncover the “primitive forms” underlying modern institutions. In the academic context of the time, anthropologists like Morgan were among the first to bring “primitive society” into systematic theoretical analysis. They offered detailed depictions of the historical processes of primitive social development, disintegration, and the rise of civilization—providing both a wealth of empirical data on pre-state social formations and a widely accepted conceptual framework for understanding the origins of modern society.

In 1879, Russian social scientist Maksim Kovalevsky presented Marx with a copy of “Ancient Society” by Lewis H. Morgan. Marx was deeply inspired by the work, which offered him a new perspective for thinking about the evolution of social formations and led him to engage more seriously with anthropological and ethnological materials. As historian Maurice Bloch noted : “ Marx and Engels turned to anthropology for two main reasons: first, they sought in anthropology evidence to support the

claim that certain principles operating within capitalist society were, in fact, universally present throughout history; second, they hoped that anthropology would provide examples of institutions that differed from, or even stood in contrast to, those of 19th-century capitalist states. In the works of many anthropologists, they found material that served both purposes, but overall, Morgan's work appeared best suited to this dual task."^[7] Morgan's systematic reconstruction of kinship-based societies and his theory of social evolution gave Marx a valuable comparative framework, allowing him to critically examine the historicity and contingency of capitalist institutions—particularly property, the state, and the family.

Between the early 1870s and early 1880s, Marx undertook extensive theoretical preparation in the field of anthropology. From 1879 to 1881, he made systematic use of the resources at the British Museum Library in London to consult, read, and annotate a wide range of works related to ethnology, anthropology, and legal history. From October 1879 to October 1880, Marx closely studied Maksim Kovalevsky's "Communal Landownership": Its Causes, Process of Disintegration, and Consequences. Between April and September 1881, he read Henry Maine's "Lectures on the Early History of Institutions" and N. W. Pearson's (Franz Ferdinand Pfuhl's) "The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon". In 1882, he turned his attention to John Lubbock's "The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man".^[8] It can be said that anthropological research ran through the entirety of Marx's later years. It provided him with valuable firsthand materials for cross-cultural analysis and enabled him to reexamine the internal mechanisms linking social structure and historical change—particularly through the lenses of kinship systems, marriage institutions, inheritance patterns, and forms of religious belief. As such, anthropology occupied a central place in Marx's intellectual trajectory during his final period, significantly enriching and expanding the scope of his historical materialist framework.

Marx also conducted in-depth studies of historical materials on the early social institutions of the Celts and Germanic peoples, as well as on the primitive systems of India and Java, the social institutions of Russian peasantry, and those of the ancient South Slavic societies. Far from being a novice in anthropological research, Marx possessed a high level of scholarly rigor and extensive knowledge in the field, demonstrating deep academic competence and erudition in anthropology.

4. Practical Needs and Real-World Challenges

4.1 Russia's Developmental Needs

At the end of the 19th century, intense debates unfolded within the Russian intellectual community regarding the future of the rural commune (mir). The central issue was whether Russia could bypass the capitalist stage and transition directly to socialism while preserving its traditional communal system. The Populists (Narodniks) advocated using the rural commune as a basis to overcome private ownership and achieve socialism. In contrast, the Westernizers insisted on the inevitability of capitalist development, arguing that industrialization and a market economy were prerequisites for any social transformation. Marx famously mocked this faction as "worshippers of the Russian capitalist system." Due to some Westernizers' misinterpretations and erroneous citations of "Capital"—claiming that Marx believed the rural commune was doomed to extinction—Marx felt compelled to respond personally. To correct these misunderstandings and clarify his position, he undertook a systematic study of the historical development and varied trajectories of rural communes across Eastern and Western countries. In a letter dated March 1881 to the Russian Populist Chasulich and in four unpublished drafts, Marx repeatedly emphasized that the historical development pattern described in "Capital" was "explicitly limited to Western European countries." In his letter to the editors of *The Fatherland Chronicle*, Marx directly confronted Mikhailovsky's misinterpretation, criticizing him for turning Capital's "historical overview of the origins of capitalism in Western Europe" into a "general historical-philosophical theory of development."^[9] Marx regarded this as a rigid and distorted misreading of historical materialism.

Marx emphasized that only through in-depth and meticulous study of specific historical phenomena within their distinct historical contexts, followed by comparative analysis, can one truly find the key to understanding these phenomena. Conversely, "using the general historical-philosophical theory as a universal key will never achieve this goal; the greatest strength of such historical-philosophical theory lies precisely in its being ahistorical."^[10] To demonstrate the practical possibility and historical rationality of the Russian rural commune, Marx conducted in-depth studies of village commune systems in Eastern countries including Russia, China, and India. He pointed out that under specific conditions, Eastern rural communes possess strong continuity and adaptability. Their institutional arrangements—centered on communal land ownership, patriarchal structures, and kinship organization—form an inherent resistance mechanism against the logic of capitalist private property. Although these institutions lag behind

capitalism in terms of technology and productive forces, within particular historical contexts they hold the potential to internally evolve toward higher forms of communal ownership.

Unlike Western European capitalist societies, where the abolition of private property and transition to socialism “must occur through revolution,” Marx argued that some Eastern societies might achieve socialist transformation through endogenous mechanisms while maintaining the commune system. They would not need to traverse the so-called “Coffin’s Gap”. This judgment not only profoundly addressed theoretical debates specific to the Russian context but also fundamentally challenged Western-centric developmental views. It significantly enriched and expanded the explanatory power of historical materialism, steering it toward a social evolution theory capable of accommodating multiple pathways across different civilizations.

4.2 Theoretical Needs of the Proletariat

The defeat of the Paris Commune marked a low point for the international proletarian revolutionary movement. During this period, proletarian forces worldwide suffered setbacks, revolutionary enthusiasm waned, and divisions emerged within workers’ movements, making the prospects for revolution uncertain. Existing revolutionary theories struggled to adequately explain the coexistence of capitalist expansion alongside non-capitalist societies, creating an urgent need for new theoretical guidance to address the evolving social contradictions. Marx deeply realized that his existing critique of capitalism alone was insufficient to fully grasp the complexity of this situation and the actual conditions facing the proletariat.

The cross-cultural materials in the “Anthropology Notebooks” provided him with resources to break free from entrenched modes of thinking. By closely examining various institutional arrangements in non-capitalist societies—such as communal land ownership, clan relations, and customary norms—he recognized that the forces stabilizing and transforming societies extend beyond markets and contracts to encompass more complex social structures and institutional forms. This expanded Marx’s theoretical horizon, overcoming the limitations of traditional economic determinism.

This process demonstrates Marx’s acute sensitivity to the interplay between theory and practice. Rather than rigidly adhering to earlier theoretical frameworks, he embedded his theory within historical, contemporary, and cross-cultural contexts. Thus, the “Anthropology Notebooks” not only represent scholarly research but also serve as a significant attempt by Marx to reimagine the path toward socialism in reality.

5. Conclusion

When Marx wrote the “Anthropology Notebooks”, he had just completed the first volume of “Capital” but did not immediately proceed with writing the second and third volumes, instead slowing down his pace. At that time, Marx sought to demonstrate that institutions such as private property, the state, and the family were not eternal or natural but products of historical development. To support this historical materialist theory, he needed abundant historical materials on primitive societies and pre-capitalist social formations. On this point, Engels clearly stated in the preface to the first edition of “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”: “It was none other than Karl Marx who intended to relate Morgan’s research findings to the conclusions drawn from his — within certain limits, I may say our shared — historical materialism, and only in this way to fully elucidate the significance of these findings.”

^[11] Engels pointed out that “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” can be seen as fulfilling Marx’s wish by supplementing the scholarly achievements in Marx’s “Anthropology Notebooks”: “to explain Morgan’s research findings and their significance in connection with the conclusions drawn from materialist historical studies.” ^[11] Therefore, Marx’s late-life turn to writing the “Anthropology Notebooks” was neither a mere shift of academic interest nor an abandonment or interruption of his work on “Capital”. On the contrary, it reflects a further deepening of historical materialism in his later years. The publication of the “Anthropology Notebooks” once again demonstrated that Marxism is not a closed, static “system” that requires no development, but rather an open and evolving doctrine that continually develops and enriches itself in response to the changing times.

In the last decade of his life, Marx demonstrated through his extensive “Anthropology Notebooks”, all manuscripts of the second volume of “Capital”, approximately 1.2 million words of “Historical Notebooks”, as well as other works and correspondence, how he continuously absorbed the essence of diverse scientific research to enrich his own theoretical framework. Marx’s late-period thought reached a new stage. The “Anthropology Notebooks” are not merely a collection of documentary texts but a

continuation of his lifelong theoretical inquiry, marking a significant transition in historical materialism from a “Eurocentric” perspective toward a theory of “multiple developments.” They provide rich theoretical resources and practical inspiration for later scholars to understand non-Western social institutions, expand the applicability of historical materialism, and rethink the paths of social relations and civilizational evolution. Studying the “Anthropology Notebooks” is not only about filling the “late phase” gap in Marx’s thought but also about posing new questions and responses to Marxist social theory within the context of 21st-century global history and plural modernities.

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