

# Differences and Connections between Nations and States——On the basis of Marx and Engels' works

Yu Huang<sup>1</sup>, Ying Chen<sup>2\*</sup>

1. Institute of Nationalities, Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu, China

2. Sichuan Police College, Luzhou, China

\*Corresponding author Email: 123464245@qq.com

**ABSTRACT.** *The nation and the state do not always exist. They have their own laws of generation, development and extinction. According to the exposition of classical Marxist writers and the judgment of historical materialism, the two belong to the concept of society and history category. In the process of history evolution, the duality of tribes inevitably develop into two parallel things-nation and state. As the two are the society and history products accompanying the same period, there are certain connections in the formation and development process.*

**KEYWORDS:** *The nation and the state, Differences and connections, Classical works*

## 1. Introduction

The nation and the state appeared at a certain stage of social development. The development of productivity in primitive society was marked by the great division of labor in the society which promoted the development of social production. Subsequently, new things, such as product exchange, class differentiation and private ownership appeared. Clan and tribal organization system linked by blood relationship disintegrated, which developed into two parallel things, one is the nation which is a community of people based on region, the other is the state which is a political organization based on region and property. According to Marx and Engels, from the perspective of social division of labor, the generation of the state can also be considered as a major social division of labor for humans, but a political division of labor. Therefore, the state has a strong political attribute when it appeared. The nation evolved from the tribal community, which is a new community of people, thus showing cultural attributes. Therefore, it can be said that these two things appear at the same time, but have different attributes.

## 2. The Basic Understanding of Marxism on the Origin of the State

### ***2.1 Enlightenment of Enlightenment Thinkers on Marxist View of State***

In the long Middle Ages, the state was always regarded as the creation of God's will. The bourgeois Enlightenment made people no longer believe in God, but in science and people themselves. "Machiavelli, Campanella and the following Hobbes, Spinoza, Gustav Hugo Glausius, Rousseau, Fichte and Hegel have all looked at the state from the perspective of human beings. They have drawn out the natural laws of the state from rationality and experience rather than theology." However, bourgeois enlightenment scholars look at the nature of the state from the perspective of the so-called "abstract people". Therefore, the general conclusion they have drawn is that the state is based on human rationality, and the essence of the state is the self-development of human rationality. The "natural human rights" thought of bourgeois enlightenment scholars is to look at the essence of the state from the essence of Christian society, which is still to establish the bourgeois position and make religion as the basis of the state.

Marx and Engels' early understanding of the state has not yet got rid of the shackles of this concept, but Marxism's understanding of the state soon surpassed bourgeois enlightenment thinkers and began to make a qualitative leap in ideology. In 1841, Feuerbach's book *The Essence of Christianity* had a profound impact on the Marxist founders' understanding of the state problem from the perspective of freedom and rationality. Feuerbach's materialistic basic view is that nature does not exist depending on any philosophy. It is the foundation on that we human beings which are the products of nature depend on. There is nothing besides nature and human beings. The highest existence created by people's religious fantasy is only an illusory reflection of people's inherent nature. Marx and Engels grasped the nature of the society from the subjective activities of human beings, which is fundamentally different from the modern bourgeois enlightenment thinkers who explained the social nature produced by the state from abstract individuals.

To sum up, the answers to the question of the origin of the state can be summarized into three types: firstly, the state is the embodiment of God's will and the origin of the state is the inspiration and creation of prophets; secondly, the state is the embodiment of human rationality, so it is bound to fabricate the story of social contract; thirdly, Marxism, which bases the state on society material life considered that the state originated from the contradictory movement in society material life. Marxism defined the society before the state as the primitive society period. Understanding people's society living conditions and society contradiction movements of the primitive society period is of great significance to understanding Marxism's theory of the origin of the state.

### ***2.2 Marxist View of State under Historical Materialism***

According to Marxism, the state is an objective existence of the society. The state has not always existed. It is a product when the society developed to a certain stage. Before class society, human society experienced a long primitive society, when the productive relationship was natural and equal based on primitive public ownership. Society was made up of clans, tribes or tribal alliances based on blood ties. Due to

the development of production and the generation of surplus products, private ownership sprouted in the process of occupying surplus products and means of production. As a result, classes were formed due to differences and inequalities in possession. The nature of the relationship between people has changed. The primitive commune system has not adapted to the new productivity development and the changes in social relations. The state is partly reforming the organs of the clan system, partly excluding them by setting up new organs, and finally all replacing them with real organs of state power. That is to say, the state appeared along with the irreconcilable class contradictions.

The fundamental purpose of the generation of the state is to protect the common interests. With the expansion of production and the refinement of the division of labor, conflicts and contradictions of interests among different classes have intensified, and the state has become a tool of class rule. Engels believed that the state came into being from the need to control class opposition and also from the conflicts among these classes. Therefore, the social basis for the generation of the state is the generation of class and class struggle. Engels mentioned the common people and *populus Romanus* when he talked about the formation of the Roman state in *Family, private ownership and the origin of the state*. They are not classes in the strict sense, but they are opposite social stratification with different rights and obligations and different social status. It is the struggle between them that led to the formation of the state. On the basis of in-depth study of various basic problems of the state, scientific analysis of the basic reasons of the generation and the laws of development and change of the state, and generalization of the common characteristics and role in social life of different types of states, Marxist classical writers have defined the state as: "The state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. The state is a machine by which one class oppresses another class and forces all subordinate classes to obey one class. "

### **3. The Basic View of Marxism on the Formation of Nation**

#### ***3.1 Marxism's Basic Understanding of the Formation of Nation***

Nations are inevitable when the society develops to a certain stage. They have not always existed in the history of human development. Nations are the result of economic development and social division of labor. Engels studied the social organization sequence **before** the nation appeared in general sense, namely clan-phratry- tribe- tribal alliance- nation and state. Therefore, he said in his book *Dialectics of Nature*: "Tribe developed to nation and state." In order to adapt to the natural environment, humans continuously understand and transform the world, the material foundation has also developed one after another. The increase of surplus products has created the possibility of private ownership. The ancient clan kinship system could not meet the needs of the development of productivity any more. The human marriage system was also changing to adapt to the inheritance of property

and the development of private ownership. The basic conditions of the clan system are that the population was small, the division of labor was purely natural and only had the difference between men and women, which is compatible with the level of human productivity and economic development at that time. The social division of labor and the development of productivity have both made the social norm of clan kinship system fail. New productivity require a harmonious social relationship with it. The clan was going to decline and the nation and the state took its place. To sum up, according to Marxism, the generation of a nation is the result of social development, the inevitable result of the decline of clans and tribes in the primitive society of humans, and the product of the development of material production, class generation and development.

### **3.2 Marxism's Basic Understanding of the Concept of Nation**

Although Marx and Engels did not directly define "nation", their research on nation mainly focuses on "community". Marx said in his *Outline on Feuerbach*: "All social life is essentially practical." Therefore, some scholars considered Marx's community as "community of practice", that is, material production activities with social nature are social ties and intermediaries that connect different individuals in a community. According to Marxism, human's practical activities are the ties that connect human beings together, "community society" can only be realized through social practical activities. Stalin believed: "Nation is a stable community formed by people in history with community language, community region, community economy life and common psychological quality expressed in common culture."<sup>1</sup> According to Marxism, a nation is a community of practice and a stable community formed by people in the development of social practice.

## **4. Similarities and Connections between Nation and State**

The nation and the state are both developed from primitive social tribes, and are social and historical products accompanying the same period. They are accompanied and interdependent in the process of formation and development. After the formation, they interact and have close relations. Especially in modern times, the state has become an important carrier for the survival and development of the nation, and there are certain similarities.

First, The nation and the state belong to the society and history category. Marx believed that the state is the product of social development. "The family and civil society turn themselves into the state, they are the motive force", "Political state cannot exist without the natural foundation of the family and the artificial foundation of civil society, they are the necessary conditions of the state". The separation of civil society and political state also reflects the necessity of social and historical development, which is also an important point of view of Marxist society in

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<sup>1</sup> Wu Shimin. New Edition of Chinese Ethnic Theory[M]. Central University for Nationalities Press, 2008:25.

determining the state. Nation and state are both objective existence of a society, which are both of history category. The state divides its nationals according to regions and the nation is based on regional relations. The nation must have a common language, especially when the nation is formed. The nation is based on the residential region where people who have a common language, common psychological quality and common economy life. The state does not need to have a common language, but can have several languages, that is to say, the state is not necessarily based on a residential region with common language, common psychological quality and common economy life. The nation is a stable people community which is formed in a certain period of historical development. Generally speaking, nations have common characteristics in historical origin, mode of production, language, culture, customs and psychological identity. Religion plays an important role in the formation and development process of some nations.

Second, both the nation and the state follow the basic laws of historical materialism. According to the understanding of historical materialism, the generation of nation and state is the result of social basic contradiction movement. The nation and the state are the products of the social division of labor, the continuous development of productivity, the disappearance of primitive society and the disintegration of clans and tribes with their own laws of generation, development and extinction. The extinction of the nation is even longer than that of the class and the state. Through understanding people's social living conditions and social contradictory movements in primitive society, Marxist classical writers believed that the state is based on social material life, and the state originates from the contradictory movements of social material life. From the contradictory movement between productivity and productive relations, that is, from the economy foundation of the society, it is believed that the private ownership plays a key role in the generation and development of the state. With the development of productivity, the generation of private ownership, the development of product exchange, the ancient productivity and productive relations have not adapted to the society structure at that time, and nation have also emerged as a result of this change in economic basis. The development and results of social production have promoted the formation of the nation.

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