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The Theoretical Context, Connotative Implications and Practical Influences of New Quality Productivity

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Abstract: *New quality productivity is an inheritance and development of Marxist theory of productivity, as well as the result of deepening understanding and practice of the laws of productivity in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. New quality productive forces have rich connotations and can be grasped from three aspects: the transformation of scientific and technological productive forces, the systematic reconstruction of the mode of production, and the adjustment of production relations. China's new quality productivity has developed rapidly, giving rise to a batch of new technologies, new industries, new business forms and new models. The "four-new economy" has presented new features.*

Keywords: *Productivity; New quality productivity; High-quality development*

1. Introduction

In September 2023, Chinese leaders first introduced the novel concept of “new quality productive forces”, emphasizing the active cultivation of strategic emerging industries such as new energy, new materials, advanced manufacturing, and electronic information, as well as future industries, to accelerate the formation of new-quality productivity and enhance new drivers of development. New quality productivity represents the direction of future productivity development, conforms to the requirements of high-quality economic development, and is an important engine for promoting high-quality economic development.

2. The Theoretical Context in Which New Quality Productivity is Proposed

Productivity is the fundamental driving force for the development of human society and the ultimate cause of all social changes and political transformations. In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels pointed out: "The decisive factor in history is ultimately the production and reproduction of direct life." [1]Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the CPChas always adhered to the combination of Marxist theory of productive forces with China's specific national conditions, and has continuously deepened and advanced the understanding and practice of the laws of productive forces around the main line of liberating and developing productive forces.

During the period of socialist planned economy, the People's Republic of China established a production relationship of public ownership through socialist transformation, fully stimulating the subjective initiative of the workers, which became the key to promoting the development of productive forces. Drawing on the development model of the Soviet Union, the new China took heavy industry as the foundation for national strength and proposed a development strategy with agriculture as the foundation and industry as the leading force, directing limited resources to the construction of energy, transportation and other sectors, and promoting the development of science and technology in key fields such as nuclear energy and aerospace. The state-led industrialization achieved "catch-up", promoting a leap in productive forces at a specific stage and leaving experience and lessons for later reforms.

After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC, the individual economy, the foreign capital economy, the joint venture economy, etc. have become beneficial supplements to the socialist public ownership economy. From the 14th National Congress of the CPC's proposition that "the market should play a fundamental role in the allocation of resources under the macro-control of socialist countries"[2] to the 18th National Congress 'proposition that "the market should play a fundamental role in the allocation of resources to a greater extent and in a wider range"[3] to the third Plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC's proposition: "Let the market play

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a decisive role in the allocation of resources,"[4] This indicates that socialist China's understanding and control over the general law of market-determined resource allocation have been continuously enhanced. It emphasizes the decisive role of the market in resource allocation and the better play of the government's role, promoting a better combination of an effective market and a proactive government, and further liberating and developing social productive forces.

Entering a new era, the great economic practice has placed China's productive forces at a new historical starting point. The new development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, openness and shared benefits inherently require a transformation of social productive forces from high-speed growth to high-quality development.The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPCproposed "promoting quality, efficiency and power transformation in economic development"[5]."At present, there are various forms of capital in China, including state-owned capital, collective capital, private capital, foreign capital and mixed capital, and it shows obvious characteristics such as a significant increase in scale, more diverse subjects, faster operation speed and a large inflow of international capital"[6] ,and the healthy development of capital is regulated and guided by law. It can be said that on the basis of the public ownership economy, all kinds of factors of production have jointly made positive contributions to the prosperity and development of the socialist market economy. The "Opinions of the Central Committee of the CPCand The State Council on Accelerating the Improvement of the Socialist Market Economy System in the New Era" proposed: "Improve the mechanism in which the contribution of production factors such as labor, capital, land, knowledge, technology, management and data is evaluated by the market and remuneration is determined based on contribution"[7], explicitly including data in the category of production factors for the first time. The Chinese government further emphasizes the need to pioneer new frontiers and competitive sectors, continuously shaping new drivers of growth and competitive advantages, and the 2023 Central Economic Work Conference proposed to promote industrial innovation through scientific and technological innovation, especially to give birth to new industries, new models and new drivers of development through disruptive and frontier technologies, and to develop new quality productive forces. The 2024 government work report of The State Council explicitly lists the vigorous promotion of the construction of a modern industrial system and the accelerated development of new quality productive forces as a key task. The concept of new quality productivity is not only a practical need to promote Chinese-style modernization and achieve high-quality economic development in the new era, but also an inheritance and innovation of Marxist theory of productivity based on the new stage of development.

3. The Implications of The Concept of New Quality Productive Forces

Marx's theory of productive forces holds that productive forces are the ability of human beings to transform nature and obtain material resources, reflecting the relationship between human beings and nature, and are mainly composed of laborers, means of labor, objects of labor. In Das Kapital, Marx mentioned that the development of productive forces is inseparable from the combined effect of indirect elements such as science and technology and labor cooperation. "New quality productivity" follows the concept of productivity in Marxist classic theory, but enriches and develops its inherent laws and mechanisms of action.New quality productivity is an advanced quality of productivity that is characterized by high technology, high efficiency and high quality and conforms to the new development concept, with innovation taking the leading role, breaking away from the traditional economic growth mode and productivity development path.New quality productivity is more characterized by revolutionary technological breakthroughs, innovative allocation of factors of production, and deep industrial transformation. Its basic connotation is the leap of workers, means of labor, objects of labor and their optimal combinations, as well as the significant improvement of total factor productivity and production quality.

When comparing traditional productivity with new productivity, it is not difficult to find that there are obviousdifferences between the two in five aspects: core elements, driving forces, organizational forms, growth models and spatial logic[8] . First, in terms of core elements, traditional productive forces take ordinary workers, skilled workers, etc. as the main body of the labor force, while also giving full play to the role of production factors such as land and capital. In contrast, new-type productive forces take knowledge-based, innovative, and highly skilled talents as the main body of the labor force. At the same time, they more prominently highlight the role of production factors such as data, algorithms, computing power, and digital technologies. [9]Second, in terms of driving forces, the development of traditional productive forces is mostly driven by large-scale input of labor, while that of new productive forces is more driven by technological innovation and knowledge spillover. Third, in terms of

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organizational form, the traditional productivity model places more emphasis on the hierarchical structure of enterprises, while the new productivity model places more emphasis on system construction and networked collaboration. Fourth, in terms of growth models, traditional productivity is characterized by an increase in investment scale, while new productivity is characterized by an improvement in total factor productivity. Fifth, in terms of spatial logic, the development of traditional productivity is mainly achieved through tangible geographical aggregation, while the model of new productivity places more emphasis on the integration of the virtual and the physical.

New productivity emphasizes breakthroughs in science and technology, especially disruptive technologies, and the dialectical movement that leads to industrial transformation and upgrading as well as the adjustment of production relations. Thus, new quality productivity can be grasped from three dimensions. The first is the transformation of scientific and technological productivity, with key common technologies, frontier leading technologies, modern engineering technologies, disruptive technologies as the breakthrough points to achieve revolutionary changes in science and technology. For example, in basic research, macroscopically focus on the origin of the universe, dark matter, dark energy, etc., and microscopically focus on elementary particles, quantum, genes, etc. for frontier breakthroughs; In terms of innovation-driven development, we will foster original and disruptive innovations in artificial intelligence and beyond. The second is the systematic reconfiguration of production methods. New technologies and achievements such as high-speed rail, photovoltaics, and new energy vehicles have provided new impetus for the development of new quality productive forces, promoting the systematic transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and industrial chains. The reconstruction of production methods requires strengthening the integration of scientific and technological innovation and industrial innovation in light of specific resource endowments, industrial foundations, and research conditions, with a focus on promoting new industrialization, the combined development of the digital economy and the real economy, and the application of green technologies, to increase the transformation and application of scientific and technological achievements and promote development based on local conditions. The third is the adjustment of production relations, Marx and Engels said in the German ideology: "A certain mode of production or a certain industrial stage is always associated with a certain common mode of activity or a certain social stage"[10], and the development of new productive forces requires a new type of production relations that are in line with it, manifested in the integration of scientific and technological innovation resources, the advanced planning of emerging industries, the construction of a high-standard market system, the high-level opening up to the outside world, the allocation of all factors of production, etc. Resolve the inherent contradictions between productive forces and production relations in a timely manner and promote higher levels of development of productive forces.

4. The Practical Impact of New Quality Productivity Development

The "Report on High-Quality Development of China's Economy (2025)" [11] shows that since the introduction of the new development concepts, the leading and driving role of innovative development has been prominent. The index of high-quality development of China's economy has grown from 32.43 to 40.52, increasing by 24.9% over the past ten years. The five secondary indices of innovative development, coordinated development, green development, open development, and shared development have respectively increased by 85.09%, 23.73%, 18.26%, 7.64%, and 9.19%. According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China [12], the development of new quality productivity is in good shape. In 2025, the added value of large-scale equipment manufacturing increased by 9.2%, 3.3 percentage points faster than that of large-scale industries; the added value of high-tech manufacturing increased by 9.4%, 3.5 percentage points faster than that of large-scale industries; the added value of large-scale digital product manufacturing increased by 9.3% year-on-year; the proportion of domestic new energy vehicle sales exceeded 50%, with an average of 45,000 new energy vehicles coming off the production line every day. The development of new quality productivity shows two distinct features: first, the iterative upgrading of traditional industries and the clustering of emerging industries, with industrial chains and value chains moving towards high-end and advanced manufacturing; second, digital and intelligent innovations represented by artificial intelligence and the digital economy have become key drivers of development. According to data from the World Intellectual Property Organization [13], in 2025, China's innovation index ranking entered the global top ten for the first time, and a number of major scientific research achievements have been made in frontier fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum technology, and brain-computer interfaces. New quality productivity is continuously growing and strengthening.

The development of new quality productive forces has given rise to increasingly diverse ways of

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production, employment and life. The "four new economy" with technological innovation, application innovation and model innovation at its core is a typical example of new quality productive forces. According to statistics from the State Administration for Market Regulation, in 2024, the number of registered enterprises in China reached 61.226 million, and the number of newly established enterprises in the economic fields of new technologies, new industries, new business forms and new models accounted for about 40 percent of the total number of newly established enterprises. [14]Among them, "modern technology services and innovation and entrepreneurship services", "modern productive service activities" and "new types of living service activities" account for a relatively high proportion. In recent years, the growth rate of enterprises in the "four new economy" has been higher than the overall growth rate of enterprises during the same period, becoming a new growth point of the market economy and reflecting the accelerated transformation of new and old drivers of China's economic development.

The number of practitioners in the "four new economy" sector has continued to expand, and digital economy, intelligent manufacturing, green economy and other fields have developed rapidly, providing a large number of jobs. According to relevant statistics, the number of flexible workers in China has exceeded 200 million, and a considerable number of them are engaged in work related to the "four new economy". [15]The "four new economy" sector has four characteristics. First, the ability requirements are clear. The new technology and new industry fields have higher requirements for the professional skills of practitioners. For example, artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain and other fields require a strong technical background, while the new business form and new model fields pay more attention to innovation ability, cross-border integration ability and market acumen. Second, employment forms are flexible. New forms such as the platform economy and the sharing economy have created a large number of flexible jobs. New models such as ride-hailing drivers, food delivery workers, freelancers, remote work, and flexible working hours have gradually become popular, changing traditional employment forms. At the same time, it is worth noting that labor rights such as social security and work injury compensation for some flexible workers in the "four new" economy have not been fully implemented, and there are certain legal and policy gaps. Some platform companies manage workers through algorithms, causing practitioners to face high-intensity work pressure and uncertainty. Third, innovation and entrepreneurship are active. The state has introduced a series of policies to support the development of the "four new" economy, such as the "14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Digital Economy" and the "Opinions on Supporting the Healthy Development of New Business Forms and Models to Activate the Consumer Market and Drive Employment Expansion", and the government encourages more people to participate in the "Four new" economy through policy support such as tax and fee cuts and business incubation. Many practitioners have realized their personal value through innovation and entrepreneurship. Fourth, there is a significant income disparity. High-skilled workers such as algorithm engineers and data scientists have relatively high income levels. Workers need to constantly learn new knowledge and master new skills, while low-skilled workers such as delivery workers and couriers have relatively low income. The income gap reflects to some extent the demand for high-quality labor.

5. Conclusion

The formation and development of new-quality productive forces is a long-term process, closely related to the development of social productive forces and the transformation of social systems. Through the practical exploration of socialist planned economy, the socialist market economy since the reform and opening up, and the full flow of various production factors in the new era, the proposal and development of the concept of new-quality productive forces have their inherent historical logic, theoretical logic, and practical logic. At the same time, new-quality productive forces represent the direction of advanced productive forces. Their connotations and implications still need to be continuously enriched and developed in practice. The historical evolution of laborers, means of labor, and objects of labor and their optimal combinations, as well as the advanced productive forces' quality states thus generated, still need to be further analyzed on the basis of Marxist theory of productive forces, providing theoretical basis and practical paths for high-quality development in the new era and new journey.

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