



Research Paper

## The Contemporary Enlightenment of *guns, germs and steel: the fate of human society*

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**ABSTRACT:** In his book *guns, germs and steel: the fate of human society*, Professor Jared Diamond explores the origin of human inequality from the perspective of different continental environments. In different stages of history, the reasons for the gap in the comprehensive development level of different regions in the world are different. By clarifying the causes of human inequality, we can draw inspiration to deal with the current situation of the world and make due contributions to the development of the world community.

**KEY WORDS:** geographical factors; scientific and technological development; capital accumulation

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### I. THE BUDDING OF HUMAN INEQUALITY

Knowing the causes of human inequality, Professor Diamond believes that the answer needs to be found from the source of human existence. Before the disparity, people around the world lived in much the same way. Rousseau, in *On the Origins and Foundations of Human Inequality*, points out that humans of this period were: “Lonely, idle, and often dangerous barbarians... Always sleep when you're not thinking.”<sup>[1]</sup> The barbarians are basically in a state of isolation, and the level of development between the regions is almost non-existent in a natural state, during which time the regions are in a state of peace. With the change of the geographical environment in which human beings are living, the gap between the level of development of various regions is beginning to emerge. Professor Diamond believes that in the primitive period, agriculture, animal husbandry is very important to the development of human inequality, because of geographical location, living environment differences, often the most high-yielding ethnic groups are most vulnerable to high-yield farmers, thus accelerating the progress of their own people.

As early as 1845, Marx pointed out in his book, “In order to live, the first need to eat, drink and wear and other things. Thus the first historical activity is the production of information to meet these needs, i.e. the production of material life itself.”<sup>[2]</sup> From the perspective of labor, this paper discusses the premise of the historical development of human society, namely, the material life of production itself, and how the gap between the level of development between regions evolves in the course of labor. In his writings, Professor Diamond thinks the factors that arise from the inequality of modern human society in terms of the changing geographical environment. Diamond believes that prehistoric people spread across continents were still small, mobile groups, collected by women and hunted by men. It was not until the Stone Age that the first farmers in the Middle East, who settled near water sources and began to grow and store food, showed that humans began to break the normal environmental cycle, choose individual plants to grow, and began to control and domesticate nature. However, the landscape varies from region to region, so the types of crops suitable for cultivation vary, as do the time and worker required to grow them, as well as the nutrients obtained from the crops, and the physical fitness of people in different regions gradually varies. Thus, the gap between the level of development of various regions of human society began to appear.

In prehistoric (13,000 years ago), in the Middle East, for example, the local people made a living from hunting, when people were only small groups of mobility, collected by women, hunted by men, and people around the world survived in a similar state. With the change of climate, wild animals decrease and the area of wild grain growth gradually expands, so that human beings can get more grain in a short period of time. During the Stone Age (11,500 years ago), the Middle East was home to the world's first farmers, who settled near water

sources and began to grow and store food, a behavior that showed that humans began to break the normal environmental cycle, choose individual plants to grow, and began to control and domesticate nature. However, different regions have different landscapes, so the types of crops suitable for cultivation vary, as do the time and worker required to grow, as well as the nutrients obtained from the crops. For example: the Middle East is suitable for barley, wheat growth, rice cultivation in ancient China, the Americas is pumpkins, corn and beans, but not all regions are suitable for agricultural cultivation, in the highlands of New Guinea, for example, where only taro can grow, geographical differences lead to regional differentiation in agricultural cultivation species, local residents from agricultural products, the content of nutrients also appear great differences, therefore, the physical quality of people in different regions are gradually different.

The transition from hunting to agriculture was a decisive turning point in the unequal development of human society, but people who made a living from hunting alone could not get enough food, but people who planted and stored food were able to do so, so the gap between the levels of development in various regions of human society began to appear.

With the repeated contact between man and animal, as well as between man and man, man acquires new knowledge, learns how to take down ferocious beasts, and the ability of human self-improvement is gradually revealed. 9000 years ago, for the first time in the Middle East, the process of animal domestication occurred in ethnic gathering places, humans began to control the activities of animals, feeding, breeding, animals began to provide humans with regular nutritional supplements of meat, eggs and milk.

The domestication of animals not only provides a large number of meat, eggs, milk and other nutrients, but also frees human beings from agricultural labor, thus having time to engage in the production of other things, greatly improving productivity. As with agricultural cultivation, not all continents have animals suitable for domestication, as animals suitable for domestication need to meet many conditions. According to the survey, in 10,000 years, only 14 of the 148 species of land-based herbivores have been successfully domesticated, and 13 of them are from Europe, Asia, North Africa, the four animals most affected by the development of human production: cattle, pigs, sheep, goats are native to the Middle East, which is the world's best crop areas, animal production areas, known as the "new moon fertile soil."<sup>[3]</sup>

Areas at the same latitude on Earth will have similar geographical environment (temperature, vegetation, climate, etc.), because the "new moon fertile soil" is connected to Eurasia, the latitude is flat, the geographical environment is similar, easy for human migration, expansion of agriculture. Therefore, when the "new moon fertile soil" of plants and animals with the migration of human beings along the latitude line to Europe, India, Asia, Egypt, Africa and other regions, there was the first collision and explosion of civilization in human history, the development of human society gradually entered a new stage - feudal era.

## **II. A PERIOD OF HEIGHTENED HUMAN INEQUALITY**

When mankind entered the feudal society, the dominant position of geographical factors in social development gradually weakened, the importance of science and technology culture began to show, during this period, the European nation used guns, germs, steel gradually conquered the Americas, Africa, Australia and most of Asia, reshaping the world pattern.<sup>[3]</sup>

Because people are social beings, they can always exist in a certain society, so when there are large gathering communities all over the world, towns come into being. In the 13th century, Europe's livestock came mainly from the fertile soil of the new moon, and these animals not only provided the local population with the nutrients they needed for their bodies, but also changed the capacity of the land, promoted communication and development between towns, and created larger and more complex societies. Because of the domestication of animals, human beings now have enough leisure time to engage in professional and technical skills, writing invention, formation and management of the army and other work. At this time, the natural division of labor, originally hidden in the family, gradually evolved into an early social division of labor, the emergence of agriculture and handicrafts, business separation, the gap between urban and rural areas, the gap between the economic level of countries once again widened.

The growth of population also makes the competition between agriculture, handicrafts and commerce increasingly fierce, and, because of the landscape of the mountain and river peninsula, the European continent is scattered between many city-states and kingdoms and city-states in a long-term state of confrontation, war, compared with the ancient China of the Asian continent, it is difficult to become a unified country. When ancient Chinese gunpowder was passed into Europe, under the guarantee of strong land production capacity and abundant material resources, combined with the needs of the country's military development, the progress of Europe's metal production capacity, after thousands of years of development and improvement, the European continent finally appeared a new force to conquer the world - guns.

But while Europe invented guns, powered ships, steel swords and abundant material reserves, the inhabitants of South Africa, Latin America and Australia of their time were still trapped in farming to nurture themselves, unable to develop advanced production tools and thus unable to produce experts and workers who

forged steel or metal tools. Thus, in 1492 the Europeans began their expedition towards the world, using powerful ships, guns and armies to brutally massacre and pillage blacks, Indians and indigenous peoples in Africa, Latin America and Australia, and to colonize and control those countries through their own technology.

In addition, germs are also an important weapon for Europe to conquer and control the world. Most of the world's infectious diseases, such as smallpox, tuberculosis, measles, cholera, etc., originate from human-raised livestock. But in the hundreds of years of human struggle with germs, there are always people who survive and reproduce, so the European nation gradually produced certain antibodies and immunity, and produced therapeutic drugs, and these animals of viral bacteria also slowly evolved into human germs.

In the 15th century, the European nation, because of its greed for gold, wealth and territory, opened up the exploration and conquest of other continents with its own powerful material strength. Indigenous peoples on other continents have never been exposed to the germs carried by the European peoples, so when the invaders attacked, the germs became a sharp edge to the extinction of the indigenous peoples of the New World. In 1520, the flux virus followed the Spanish to the American continent. In 1532, when Spain conquered the American continent with guns and armies, the germs it carried were also transmitted to the First Inca, who directly killed 95% of native Americans, and the invaders brought the gold they had seized back to Spain, making it one of the richest countries in the world.

By virtue of their geographical location and history of development, Europeans have spread around the world, making indigenous peoples of non-bacterially resistant continents victims of devastating infections, thus becoming accidental winners of the old world, who have revolutionized the relationship between the old world and the new world. As Marx said: the primitive accumulation of capital through the most despicable plunder to open up a new, civilized class society. The so-called primitive accumulation is only a historical process of the separation of producers and means of production. This process is thus manifested as 'primitive' because it forms a pre-history of capital and the mode of production that is appropriate to it.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **III. A PERIOD OF WORSENING HUMAN INEQUALITY**

Professor Diamond, starting with the geographical environment of the continent, thinks the root causes and development processes of human inequality. But Professor Diamond's theory applies only to the society before the establishment of the capitalist modern state, and when the capitalist mode of production was established and developed, financial capital gradually became the main factor in the unequal development of mankind.

The original accumulation of capitalist countries, taking Britain as an example, can be traced back to the 14th and 15th centuries of the "circle movement" period, during which land, monetary capital gathered in the hands of a few people or capitalists, and the former farmers, small producers because of the deprivation of their means of production and gradually become hired workers, the confrontation between productive and non-productive began to form.

"The bourgeoisie has created more productivity in its less than a hundred years of class rule than it has in all the past eras. Conquest of natural forces, the use of machines, the application of chemistry in industry and agriculture, the movement of ships, the passage of railways, the use of telegraphs, the reclamation of the entire continent, the navigation of rivers, as if the use of magic called out a large number of people from the ground - which century in the past would have imagined such productivity in social worker?"<sup>[5]</sup> From the end of the 15th century to the beginning of the 17th century, the British bourgeoisie relied on science and technology and military strength to develop overseas trade, gradually completed the original accumulation of capital, and created an era of gradual industrialization and urbanization. In addition, the industrial revolution and the application of coal also made Britain the world's richest and most powerful country and the ruler of the largest empire in history.

"The bourgeoisie, thanks to the rapid improvement of all production tools, and the extreme convenience of transportation, has brought all nations and even the most savage peoples into civilization... In a word, it creates a world for itself according to its own appearance."<sup>[6]</sup> In the mid-18th century, Britain defeated Spain in the "seven-year war", gained the resources of Spanish colonization abroad, and then seized a great deal of wealth from all over the world through colonial plunder and the slave trade, destroyed the civilization of many countries in Africa, America, Asia and many other regions in a violent and cruel manner, and rebuilt colonial power in accordance with its own development needs. According to incomplete statistics, in the 18th century alone Britain transported nearly 2.5 million slaves across the Atlantic Ocean, which seriously hampered the normal development process in those countries, which had a huge impact on their production and deepened inequalities in human society.

During the Industrial Revolution, as Eric Hobsbawm said, "Britain's cotton textile industry took off like a glider, driven by the colonial trade on which it relied". In terms of raw material sources, "from the 1890s, the British cotton textile industry in the southern states of the United States found a source of raw materials supply base, until the 1860s, the fate of the British cotton textile industry has been linked to them."<sup>[7]</sup>

The use of force by advanced countries to conquer and other super-economic means to force backward areas to be subordinated, resulting in backward countries and regions from the original “rudimentary” or “non-development” state was forcibly distorted to “underdeveloped”,<sup>[8]</sup> thus deepening inequality. In response, the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, adopted at the Sixth Special United Nations General Assembly, pointed out that “the difference between developed and developing countries is the result of the fact that most developing countries have not yet become independent States”.<sup>[9]</sup>

“Britain and other bourgeois advanced countries use state power, that is, centralized and organized social violence, to vigorously promote the transformation from feudal mode of production to capitalist mode of production, shorten the excessive time.”<sup>[4][8]19</sup> With the exploitation and the suffering of millions of slaves, the influx of wealth into London increased, and then evolved into a new revolution - the financial revolution, capitalism to the imperialist stage, hegemonic countries to other countries to plunder “using the institutional pressure of the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization to force the world to open markets.”<sup>[10]</sup> For example, the use of military alliances such as the United Nations or NATO to sustain the so-called “collective security system”, the establishment of an open international order for the rapid accumulation of capital, the creation of the Bretton Woods system and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to ensure their own financial hegemony.

After World War II, the world pattern appeared in the developed countries and developing countries of the two camps, developed countries such as: Britain, the United States, Germany, Japan and so on through the early colonial plunder of capitalism to complete the original capital accumulation, developing countries in the oppression of life, capitalist production methods continue to accumulate surplus value. At the same time, with the gradual acceleration of the trend of economic globalization, the mode of world economic development is entering a new stage, from financial hegemony to data and information resources manipulation profit transition. The development of the information technology revolution has provided great convenience for global production and sales, accelerated the industrial division of labor and re-structured the layout of the world, but there are significant gaps in the way different countries obtain information and data resources, and developed countries (e.g., the United States, Germany, Britain, Japan, etc.) have transferred labor-intensive industries to developing countries (e.g., China, India, Thailand, etc.) through industrial upgrading. High-tech industries such as data and information production provide adequate guarantees of talent, technology and capital, but developing countries are trapped in labor-intensive industrial production, lack of funds so the technology and market dependence on developed countries is gradually strengthened, the relationship between the two is more inclined to the vicious cycle of developing countries, resulting in developed countries through the gradual monopoly of high-tech products research and development and production capacity to grab high profits, developing countries in the lowest part of the production chain, grasp less high-tech, Data information resources are growing more slowly. Inequality in financial hegemony, deprivation accumulation and access to data support has further exacerbated inequalities in human society, and the gap between the level of economic development in developed and developing countries has widened.

#### IV. CONTEMPORARY ENLIGHTENMENT

Through the analysis of the reasons for the disparity in the level of development in various regions of the world, it can be found that the development of human society is not only caused by individual factors such as geography, science and technology, capital and so on. Any society, any mode of production, any particular production relationship can produce its own unique social development situation. In *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Destiny of Human Society*, Professor Diamond explains the reasons for the different levels of human social development from the perspective of geographical environment, and points out that the people of the early regions of human society harvest different products from the geographical environment, which accumulates different material production materials for the formation and development of the later countries in various regions, and then some European countries in history use guns, steel, etc. for colonial expansion, exploitation and oppression, and slave trafficking. As a result, there is a growing gap in the level of development in various regions of the world, with rich countries getting richer and poorer countries getting poorer.

The author thinks that the promotion of social development by geographical factors is low in the production level, and the early stage of human society, which depends solely on nature for its living, has a determining effect. However, with the development of society, the progress of human scientific and technological knowledge, especially in the period after the outbreak of the industrial revolution, the level of productivity development gradually replaced the dominant position of geographical environment. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx emphasizes the decision-making role of productive forces in the development of social history, “With the change of the mode of production, the way of making a living, people will change all their social relations. Hand-pushing produces a feudal society, steam grinding produces a society of industrial capitalists.”<sup>[11]</sup> The exploitation and oppression of developed capitalist countries on the development of China’s countries are not overnight, and the geographical, historical and political and economic factors of developed and

developing countries together constitute the present situation with different levels of development in contemporary regions around the world, and we should view this situation dialectically and rationally. As Engels put it: "Can you abolish private ownership all at once? No, no, just as existing productivity cannot be extended to the extent necessary to build a public economy at once. Thus, the proletariat revolution, which is expected to emerge, can only be gradually transformed and abolished only after the creation of the large quantities of means of production necessary for the abolition of private ownership."<sup>[11]366-367</sup>

To alleviate or even eliminate the inequality of human society, we need to make productivity reach a high level, with a great wealth of social products, only the world's productivity level is highly developed, social production relations can gradually improve and mature, the development gap between countries can be completely eliminated, and ultimately achieve common prosperity. To accomplish this, human society may be able to draw on the positive power of capital. Exchange, money and capital are the three main joint points in the development of human history. Before no money, human beings had only greed and no desire to get rich, and when labor became a commodity, that is, capital was born, the source of capitalism's wealth was truly opened. When capital makes the exchange instead of violence ordinary, the movement of capital forms the law of market economy. Simmel once accurately described the relationship between the three: "Exchange ... It is the first means of combining justice with change of property rights" and "money balances everything in all its forms,.. Money is colorless and neutral, so it lives as the common denominator of all values and becomes the most powerful mediator", "the grievances of past violence are replaced by fair trade, which Simmel believes is perhaps the highest and most respected outcome of the historical process."<sup>[12]</sup> All factors of production are integrated into production by capital and become a source of value creation, which is a special kind of labor, a source of social productivity, and therefore a source of value creation, in addition to capital is also productive, and the wealth it brings also provides conditions for the overall development of human beings." To sum up, capital is not nothing, but also has a positive effect, as long as reasonable use can also play a huge energy.

Therefore, we should dialectically and rationally look at the differences in the level of development of various regions and the causes of differences, comprehensively analyze the history of development after the independence of backward countries, dig deep into the lessons, only the medicine can better find appropriate mitigation and even solve the differences of the strategy.

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