

**Marx and the Irish Question:  
On the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation in *Capital*.**

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Dependency theory and traditional Marxian theory have presupposed the “outside” of the mode of capitalist production. However, in this age of globalization, this outside has almost disappeared. Therefore, it is increasingly necessary to explore colonialism and “ethnicity or nationality” from the perspective of *Capital*. The purpose of this paper is thus to examine Marx’s conception of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism in Ireland in the nineteenth century.

The Irish Question urged Marx to reflect on his own perspective of world history and the revolution in capitalist societies, which he had held since the 1840s and 1850s. He emphasized in his Irish studies after 1867 that the “form definition” of the mode of capitalist production made colonialism harsher and more destructive. Therefore, he grasped the qualitative transition after 1846 from feudal colonialism into “capitalist colonialism,” namely the radical penetration of reification, by considering Irish colonial history.

This Irish study was greatly adopted in *Capital*, especially in the 1872-75 French edition. While Marx “theoretically” recognized in his accumulation theory that capitalism rapidly spread into Ireland after 1846, he “practically” grasped that “cultivating peasants” or “smallholders” persisted in Ireland, by paying attention to the difference between capitalism in England and that in Ireland.

As a result, Marx came to the practical conclusion that Irish people could control capitalist colonialism by protective tariffs and then breed smallholders, who resisted reification by reforming land property. Therefore, he greatly appreciated the Irish national movement, which opposed the appropriation of land and tried to keep tenant rights and small management, where “the original property” persisted under the notion of the “right to live.” In other words, Marx’s critique of capitalism grasped that the reestablishment of substantial landownership by Irish people had a negative “socialist” meaning.