

MARX ON CAPITALIST GLOBALIZATION

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In this paper we discuss the constant development and modification of Marx's conception of capitalist globalization. From 1846, Marx becomes aware that the capitalist economy forms itself as a global system through the formation and expansion of the global market. Rightly, he never changes this idea throughout his life.

For example, he writes in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: "Through exploitation of the world market, the bourgeoisie has made the production and the consumption of all countries cosmopolitan." (4-466).¹

This argument becomes further elaborated in *Das Kapital*: "Hand in hand with the concentration of capital, ... the process to entangle all nations in the network of the world market and, consequently, the international character of capitalist regime develops." (23-790).

However, what he understands by the global capitalist system in its historical process constantly develops according to the advancement of his economic research, and never comes to a definite theoretical formulation. Until the end of his life he made efforts to comprehend an extremely complicated process of capitalist globalization.

At first, when Marx and Engels wrote *the Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848, he had the following perspective on the aftermath of capitalist globalization: "Along with the developing bourgeoisie, freedom of trade and the world market, ... the national splits and confrontations of people are increasingly disappearing." (4-479).

Through the creation of big industries and the world market, the bourgeoisie dissolves all traditional social relations such as patriarchal or feudal systems and, consequently, splits the whole world into two main classes: the capitalist and the working class. The contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production will not be settled until the abolition of the private property system by the working class coming to power and the foundation of a co-operative society, which is called an "association". According to the global character of capitalist markets, this change can be accomplished in the form of a global revolution. It is the working class in England, the homeland of capitalism, that is expected to play a leading part in this global revolution. The ethnic movements for liberation in colonies and subordinate countries essentially depend upon the political movements of the working class in the most developed capitalist countries.

Led by such perspectives, Marx addresses the audience at the international meeting in London commemorating the seventeenth anniversary of the Polish Revolution of 1830: "Among all countries, England is the one where the confrontation between the proletariat and

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¹ The quotation from Marx refers to Marx/Engels Werke, Dietz Verlag, Berlin (abbreviation: Werke). The number in the round brackets refers to the volume and the page of Werke quoted.

the bourgeoisie develops to the highest degree. Consequently, the victory of the English proletariat over the English bourgeoisie is decisive for the victory of all oppressed people over their oppressor. Therefore, it is not in Poland but in England that Poland must be liberated.” (4-417).

This stance of Marx on the liberation movements in underdeveloped peripheral regions of the world could, rightly, be characterized as eurocentrism in the liberation movements of the world’s working class. Even in the 1850s, in exile in London after the failure of the 1848 Revolution, Marx still adheres to the idea of “the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie” (4-464). This idea causes him to regard the fundamental confrontation of world history in terms of West European civilization versus East European or Asian barbarism. In 1853, he contributes a series of essays on India to *New York Daily Tribune*. In these essays he acknowledges the English rule over India in the name of introducing and fostering civilization: “The English interference in India blew up the economic bases of these half-barbarian and half-civilized small communities and, as a result, broke up these communities. Consequently, it caused the biggest and, to tell the truth, the sole social revolution which Asia ever saw. ... Whatever crime England might have committed, it became an unconscious instrument of history by causing this revolution.” (9-132, 133). “England must carry out double missions: a destructive and a renovating mission, namely to annihilate the old Asian social order and to create material foundations for a Western social order in Asia.” (9-221). These radical changes caused by capitalist expansion are termed “civilizing effects of capital (*die zivilisierenden Wirkungen des Kapitals*)” by Marx.

In the 1860s, however, his advancing research on the capitalist economy and his experience in his commitment to the International Workingmen’s Association make him adjust his former eurocentric arguments. His self-criticism never ceases until his death in 1883.

Now, we discuss how he changes his arguments on the globalization process caused by capitalism and its effect on the international movements of the working class and oppressed people.

In the 1860s, Marx is deeply committed to the so-called “Irish Problem”. His intensive study of the history of Ireland since the English colonization leads him to radically change his understanding of capitalist colonization. He gradually eradicates his former belief in the “civilizing effects” of the capitalist world system.

On 16 December 1867, Marx delivers a lecture on the Irish Problem for the German Association for Education of Workers in London (*Der Deutsche Bildungsverein für Arbeiter in London*). Taking the whole colonization history since the reign of Elizabeth I into consideration, he acknowledges the dissolution of Irish industry and the impoverishment of Irish agricultural productivity by English capitalism: “Each time when Ireland reached a sufficiently high level to take steps towards industrialization, this country was knocked down and forced to retreat into a mere agricultural country” (16-451). Thus, Marx becomes aware that English capitalism has destroyed industrial production, wasted agricultural production in its colony and imposed on the Irish people such impoverishment as to cause massive emigration and an absolute decrease in population, in other words, English capitalism has made its colonies and subordinate countries underdeveloped.

Besides, the recognition of the negative role played by English capitalism leads Marx to change his perspective on the global revolution carried out by the working class. He pays much more critical attention to the fact that English workers support the rule of England over

Ireland and hate the Irish immigrant workers in England. He criticized the English workers: "As long as the English proletariat maintains the power of the English landlords in Ireland, it makes them invulnerable even in England" (16-416). Based on this criticism, he concludes: "It is the presupposition for liberation of the English working class to transform the present forced union, namely enslavement, of Ireland into an equal and free confederation if it is possible, or to force complete separation from England, if necessary." (16-417).

What characterizes Marx's departure from his past concept of global capitalism consists of following perspectives: the developed capitalist countries make their colonies and subordinate countries "underdeveloped"; the working class in the developed countries as a member of the "nation" of the dominant nation states begins to share the same "national interests" with the capitalist class; the class struggle in the global capitalist system takes the form of struggle of nations; in this era the liberation of people from colonial dependency is the *sine qua non* condition for the liberation of the working class in developed capitalist countries.

At the same time, his changed notion of colonies is accompanied by a correlate change in Marx's notion on the historical development of European capitalism. He makes an increasingly deeper analysis of the modernization process in Germany and East European countries. As a result, he discovers that the transition to capitalism in those regions is completely different in type to the paths to capitalism taken by England or France.

The path to capitalism in Western Europe is characterized by a "revolutionary transition from below": the independent commodity producers, at first, came to economic power in competition with feudal landlords, and, after that, rose to political power through bourgeois revolution; in sum, the bourgeois class took the initiative in this transition. On the contrary, in Germany and East European countries the transition to capitalism predominantly takes place from above. Here, the feudal landlords reorganize and intensify serfdom and other feudal relations of production instead of getting rid of them, while they themselves enter into capitalist enterprises. The absolutist states create the capitalist relations of production as well as the capitalist productive powers through their fiscal policies and other instruments of power. Especially in Germany, the transition to capitalism is performed by the Junker class, which buries the bourgeois revolution in this country. Consequently, even in the political area a rather strange transition from an absolutistic state to a "Bonapartist monarchy" (Engels), one of the modern state forms, is carried out without the bourgeoisie exercising its power. Marx acknowledges that expanding capitalism, even in Europe, reveals extremely great regional diversity.

Furthermore, Marx makes a considerable effort to do away with his former belief in the civilizing effects of capital, to which he adheres until the 1850s. In the third volume of *Das Kapital*, he corrects his arguments on the civilizing impact of the English rule upon India: "In India, the Englishmen applied as rulers and landlords both their direct political and economic power to blasting these small economic communities. ... Even here, they only very gradually succeed in dismantling the communities. Much less they do in China, because they can not resort to direct political power. In China, the great economy and saving of time derived from the direct combination of agriculture with manufacture offers the most persistent resistance to the products made by big industry." (25-346).²

² In the third draft to his letter to Sassulitsch, his final attempt to revise his former theory, Marx openly acknowledges that the English rule has made India underdeveloped: "There [in East India], the compulsory abolition of common property in land was only an act of English vandalism which forced the natives not to go forward but backward." (19-402).

The limits of the effect of expanding capitalism on non-capitalist societies are described as follows: “The trade more or less dissolves the existent organizations of production which, in all their manifold forms, mainly comply with the value of use. However, it first depends upon the steadfastness and the inner structure of the old mode of production, to what extent the trade dissolves the latter. And it does not depend upon the trade but the character of the old mode of production, what this process of dissolution results in, namely which new mode of production replaces the old one.” (25-344).

Consequently, Marx increasingly persuades himself that without detailed concrete research into the inner structure of any particular region of the world, we can under no circumstances understand which new socio-economic relations result from the dissolving effects of expanding capitalism on traditional indigenous communities in non-European regions and, on the other hand, from persistent resistance to capitalist penetration offered by traditional communities.

Finally, in his later years he keenly becomes aware that the historical formation of the capitalist mode of production, which he describes in detail in *Das Kapital*, can solely apply to West European history.

In her letter to Marx of 16 February 1881, Vera Iwanowna Sassulitsch (1851-1919), a Russian populist revolutionary and a member of the Group for Labor Liberation, asked Marx two questions: firstly, about the possible destiny of the Russian rural community and, secondly, about the so-called theory of historical necessity that all countries in the world experience all phases of capitalist production.

In his famous letter of 8 March 1881, Marx replies to her questions: “The historical inevitability of this movement [= the formation of capitalist production] is obviously restricted to West European countries. ... The analysis given in *Das Kapital* offers demonstration neither for nor against the possible survival of the rural community [Dorfgemeinde]” (19-242, 243). Marx writes this letter to liberate Russian socialists from the misuse of his own theory claiming the unconditional applicability of his analysis of capitalism.

We should notice that Marx in his final years is often obliged to dispute with Marxists who believe in the general applicability of Marx’s theory on capitalism to all areas of the world. In 1877, Marx writes a letter to the editor of the “Otetschestwennyje Sapiski” (The Homeland’s Miscellany): “The chapter [of *Das Kapital*] about the original accumulation should describe no more than the course in which in Western Europe the capitalist economic order originated from the bosom of the feudal economic order. ... My critic [Nikolai Konstantinowitsch Michailowski 1842-1904] must thoroughly transform my historical sketch of the formation of capitalism in Western Europe into an historic-philosophical theory on a general course of development which is fatefully prescribed to all people, in whatever historical circumstances they might be placed. ... However, I ask him to forgive me for saying that such comment does too much honor as well as too much insult to me” (19-108, 111).

In sum, the last task for Marx is to overcome the eurocentrism in socialist movements and sciences.

Modern capitalism has involved all nations and ethnic groups in the global capitalist market and, as a result, created “world history” for the first time in human history. However, owing to great regional diversity in encounters and involvement of traditional societies with Western capitalism, the historical features of capitalist development in all regions of the world

are too complicated to set up a uniform typology or laws of convergence.³

What characterizes Marxism in the twentieth century is that in Western Europe Marxism is gradually separated from the socialist movements of the working class and reduced to an intellectual Marxism, which is called Western Marxism. On the other hand, Marxism finds its most devoted supporters beyond the boundaries of Western Europe. However, Marxism in the non-European areas including the Soviet Marxism deviates in its theoretical construction from the authentic Marx. Most of Western intellectual Marxists argue that the authentic socialism which Marx describes presupposes the highest development of the capitalist productivity on the one hand and the maturity of civil society and democracy on the other hand, in other words true socialism is only possible in the West European civilization. From this stance they often denunciate all non-European forms of the 20th century Marxism because their theory and practice have deviated too (much) from Marx's original texts and too are contaminated with an uncivilized, backward and indigenous tradition. Thus, they try to monopolize the authentic Marxism in terms of West European Civilization. Western Marxism represents eurocentrism in the history of Marxism. Representatives of Western Marxism disregard the fact that the final attempt of Marx to revise his former theory was to overcome eurocentrism in the socialist theory and movements.

As we see in Marx's criticism of the English working class supporting the English rule over Ireland, Marx gradually becomes aware that, along with the imperialistic expansion of colonies and other forms of regional subjugation, the working class in most developed capitalist countries share the same national interest with the capitalist class. As a result, the struggle between the working and capitalist classes gradually shifts its front from the center of capitalism to its peripheries where the capitalist exploitation and oppression take its most unconcealed and the most inhumane forms. As we see in Marx's letter to Sassulitsch and its drafts, he commits the development of Marxist theory in the non-West-European areas to the native socialist intellectuals. Marx anticipates that the non-Western Marxism would take a completely different form to what he himself writes in terms of Western capitalist development.

Furthermore, most of Western Marxist intellectuals have not much interest in the working class and other working people even in their home countries because these people are completely tamed by the capitalist mass production and mass consumption and lose the last drop of any critical stance against capitalism. Marxist intellectuals are increasingly distanced from any political movements of the people and try to purify Marxist theory into an intellectual Marxism which is supposed to be authentic to Marx. However, the Marxist theory which is only supported by intellectuals is itself a self-contradiction. Because, as we discuss in detail in Tairako (2002), Marx's philosophy is the first earnest attempt in the history of European philosophy to overcome any form of philosophy which isolates itself from the daily practice of ordinary people and privileges intellectuals to cynically look down on the ordinary working people.

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³ The author attempted to analyze the modernization process in Japan from this aspect in Tairako (1992).

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